

Inside this Issue

- 1 What Science Has Taught Us About the Skills Needed to be a Good Reader
- 2 Functionality: Tools for Success for People with LD
- 3 Literacy Council of Sarasota Improves Volunteer Tutoring Services for Adults with LD
- 3 Skills Needed to Be a Good Reader (Continued)
- 4 Providing Time/ Multi-sensory Learning Experiences to ESL Learners with LD

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
CONTACT:

Dr. Rochelle Kenyon,
Project Director
6315 Capstan Court
Rockledge, FL 32955-5765
Telephone: (321) 637-1319
Fax: (321) 637-1920
Email: RKenyon721@aol.com
or

To contribute an article or
information to
Practitioners' Points, send to:
Meryl Eisenberg, Editor
Fax: (954) 533-3778
Email: meryl0709@attbi.com

Visit our Bridges website:
www.floridatechnet.org/bridges
for all previous issues of
Practitioners' Points, our new
"Assistive Technology Guide,"
and
Future Bridges Training Dates

"Because phonemic awareness is a major obstacle to learning to read for individuals with LD, one must provide a highly structured program that directly teaches application of phonologic rules to print. Powerful interventions that have been identified for reading disabilities consist of a combination of explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and sound-symbol relationships (phonics), and direct and integrated instruction in text rereading and comprehension."

(Bridges to Practice Guidebook 4)

**PRACTITIONERS' POINTS IS A
PUBLICATION OF FLORIDA HUMAN
RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT, INC.**

Practitioners' Points

Volume 3, Issue 2

What Science Has Taught Us About the Skills Needed to be a Good Reader

By

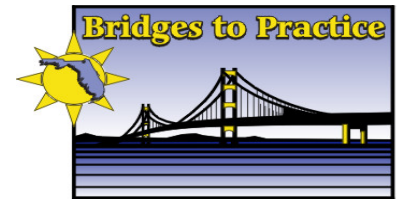
Joseph K. Torgesen, Ph.D.

Dr. Joseph Torgesen is a Distinguished Research Professor in the Psychology Department at Florida State University. He is also the Director of the Florida Center for Reading Research established by Governor Bush in April, 2002.

As adult educators, you are frequently faced with the task of helping adults acquire useful, functional reading skills. This is not an easy task, because many adults have limited time available, limited patience with their rate of learning, and limited energy after dealing with other circumstances in their lives. When you consider that children typically take three or four years of instruction and practice in reading to acquire enough skills to begin reading for enjoyment and learning, it is amazing that many adults accomplish this in considerably less time. However, most adults don't start from zero in their reading skills, so your task is to start where they are and help them move to the next higher level.

Science has discovered that, to become a good reader in English, each individual must have some awareness of the phonemic segments in words, must acquire some skill in phonemic decoding, must become reasonably fluent in reading text, must have sufficient vocabulary to understand the meaning of most of the words they read, and must learn to think while they read so they can comprehend meaning. This applies both to individuals with dyslexia, or reading disabilities, as well as to adults who cannot read well for other reasons.

There is no reason, and no evidence, to believe that there are any real shortcuts to this process. Phonemic awareness and phonics skills are essential so that readers can be reasonably accurate in identifying new words they have never before encountered in text. When someone reads a word accurately a number of times,



Florida's Focus on
Adults with Learning Disabilities

the brain forms a memory representation for that word that allows it to be recognized instantly. As adults form more and more memory representations for words, they begin to read more and more words automatically, and they become more fluent readers. Another bonus of being able to recognize words automatically (by sight) is that the reader has more energy left over to concentrate on thinking about the meaning of what is being read.

To be effective in helping adults acquire better reading skills, one must understand what knowledge and skills they already possess. If they cannot "sound out" even single syllable words, then teach them the way letters represent sounds in words, and give them practice in applying this knowledge while they read so they can learn to "sound-out" words they cannot read from memory. If they don't acquire reasonable facility with this skill, they will not be able to read challenging text independently. If they can reliably sound out single syllable words, but balk at multi-syllable words, they need strategies to break down these more difficult words into manageable units. At the same time instructors are working on multi-syllable word strategies, adults also need help on increasing the number of words they can recognize by sight. One efficient way to do this is to have them read and reread

(Continued on page 3)

"A student's failure to learn means that we have not yet found the way to teach him. The teacher must keep on exploring, doing the necessary detective work, until the way is found. Adult students with learning disabilities need to take an active part in this pursuit as co-investigators in search of their own learning styles and coworkers on the solution." (Strategies and Insights from the Learning Disabled, SUCCEEDING AGAINST THE ODDS, SALLY L. SMITH, 1991.)

FUNCTIONALITY—TOOLS FOR SUCCESS FOR PEOPLE WITH LD A Personal Prospective

By
Glenn Young

Glenn Young has been a national board member of Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) of America for six years and for the past 11 years has worked for the US Government. Glenn is representing his own views and not the views of the LDA, the US Government, or any other organization.

As an adult with LD who went through a process to gain literacy skills, I think it needs to be made clear that proper literacy instruction may be only part of the whole approach needed to address the impact of LD on individuals and, enable us to become functional. **And, that is what we need to remember, for adults with LD, that the key issue is *functionality*, whether it is applied to school, work, home, or the community.**

The three tools that I consider necessary for this functionality are **1) Proper Literacy Intervention to strengthen reading skills to its potential, 2) Access to and Appropriate use of Reasonable Accommodations, and 3) Developing Self-Awareness as a person with a disability.** The key link to all three parts is proper diagnosis of the learning disability. The process of LD diagnosis can be the vehicle that steers people with LD away from believing in themselves to be "lazy, stupid, and crazy," and toward just believing in themselves.

1. LITERACY INSTRUCTION: I was not diagnosed with LD until the age of thirty. At that point, I was at best semi-literate, working in marginal employment, running up and downstairs at sporting events selling beer. With proper diagnosis, professionals developed an intervention model that was designed to strengthen my areas of weakness. (Note that LD can impact people in different ways, requiring different approaches.) It was clear at the time, that the standard literacy intervention offered in adult basic education programs was not going to meet my needs for literacy instruction. My LD was so severe and unaddressed, that literacy training for me had to begin at the fundamental level of identification of sounds. When I first learned to read, other than sight read, I could not distinguish between any of the short vowel sounds. I had to learn how to hear the sounds represented by short /e/ and /i/ as separate and distinct sounds. I then had to learn the relationship between the sounds I could now hear, and their

corresponding letters/symbols. I then moved on to the sounds of the consonants, and sounds represented by letter combinations (digraphs and diphthongs). It initially took six months of intensive tutoring, 2-3 hours a session/three days a week of intensive drills, and many more hours of homework using flashcards before I was asked to read or write. But when I was asked, I was ready. However, even after three years of literacy training, I was still unable to compete at the college level.

2. ACCOMMODATIONS: Even with training, I was still a labored reader, and my penmanship never reached acceptable levels. However, with the understanding that my reading and writing failure was disability-related, I became comfortable in using accommodations and auxiliary aids to counter the residual effects of my learning disabilities. I learned to use these tools, and also learned that it was more than okay to ask for them in the education and work setting. I entered college at 37, and earned an Associate's, Bachelor's, and Master's degree in three and a half years. I used computers and books on tape, note takers, extended time on tests, readers for exams, and waivers from certain class requirements (foreign language) to compensate for problems caused by my learning disability. Since I had proof of the disability through my diagnostic assessment, the college was required under law, specifically Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and other civil rights laws, to provide me and all persons with documented LD, with accommodations. (GED Tests and other adult testing are also covered under these laws.) Without these accommodations, I would never have graduated, never mind excelling in college. Without documentation, I was not entitled to the accommodations.

3. SELF-AWARENESS: The knowledge that I was LD liberated me on many levels other than academic. It allowed me to confront many of the emotional and interpersonal issues that surfaced as a result of years of academic, vocational, and personal failure. I had known I was different, but I never knew why. Finally, with new diagnostic information that showed I was a person with LD, I had an explanation of "why." With this new understanding, I could work on developing myself as a whole person, rather than a fearful and incomplete individual, always running away or hiding from my problems, or worse

yet, building walls around myself. I believe that it was this struggle for completeness, and the willingness to explain LD to others, along with the new literacy skills and accommodations I obtained, which truly enabled me to succeed in college and the workforce. Of course, I had to learn a great many social skills along with reading. However, I still think I am struggling today with those skills the most.

CONCLUSION – BUILD ON WHAT WE KNOW AND MOVE FORWARD:

In my personal struggle with LD, I was very fortunate to: 1) Find professionals who knew how to diagnose, and have medical insurance that covered the costs; 2) Find tutors who understood how to teach reading and writing for LD; 3) Find colleges that willingly provided accommodations (It is more common today), and finally, 4) Find people who could help me reframe my self-image, through understanding the life long impact of the disability. Again, it was this reframing which I feel helped me move from a dependent, desperate person to an independent person; from a person passively receiving instruction to becoming an active partner in my future education and career.

Today, LD is far more accepted in post-educational programs, colleges, and even in the workplace. More adult education teachers are equipped with the knowledge of how to recognize the symptoms of LD, and more have received training that is research-based on how to address the literacy impact of this disability. However, considering today's costs and availability of quality professionals, it is still very difficult for literacy consumers to get an appropriate diagnosis for LD in many parts of the country. I urge programs and literacy consumers to understand that, without quality diagnostics, addressing LD in reading, and in other aspects of adult life, will continue to be a guessing game. Without diagnostics, the consumer is without civil rights protection and the rights to accommodations in college, work, or even on the GED Tests.

We need to work together to develop resources for a diagnosis that will enable adults with LD to obtain knowledge of their disability; and programs access to the information. By doing so, we can begin to build on the experiences of persons like myself, who were able to use these tools: ***Literacy Instruction, Accommodations, and Self-Awareness***, to rebuild our lives to one that is far more functional than when we were illiterate and hiding in shame.

THE LITERACY COUNCIL OF
SARASOTA WINS THE ABLE TRUST AWARD
TO IMPROVE TUTORING
SERVICES FOR ADULTS WITH LD

By
Maria Spelleri, Project Consultant

In August 2002, The Literacy Council of Sarasota became the lucky recipient of \$11,749 in grant funds from The Able Trust Foundation in Tallahassee, Florida to improve tutoring services to adults with LD. The Literacy Council serves between 45-66 learning disabled adults per year in



its Basic Literacy program with more than 50% of them possessing skills at or below a 3rd grade reading level. The Council's new policy is to treat all prospective clients as LD until screened otherwise and train all volunteers to work with these special learners. Traditionally, this group of learners has been hard to teach, retain, and motivate, and are a source of frustration for the Literacy Council's volunteer tutors. The Able Trust funds are being used to improve the program's services to learning disabled clients, while also better preparing and supporting those volunteers who tutor them.

The "Tutoring Services for the Learning Disabled" program has three main components: **1)** Reorganize the learner intake process, **2)** Select appropriate materials and supplies, and **3)** Develop tutor training and training materials.

During the initial phase of the learner intake process, the intake interview is expanded to include a "Learning Plan Appointment," or LPA. The off-site interviewer will use several techniques to explain and demonstrate the location of the Council, including landmarks, a simple map, and phone number to call for help.

Until now, a learner might never come to the Literacy Council offices during the course of his tutoring. By bringing the learner to the center, the agency hopes to make the client feel part of the Council's community of learners, as well as give staff the opportunity to demonstrate the computer lab and lending library, both of which have been sorely underused by the LD population.

The LPA will be a time to screen for LD, and discuss the learner's expectations and the Council's services. Using visual worksheets, the learner and advisor will work out the best times for tutoring, computer

lab work, and quiet study time. Together, they will list possible obstacles to success, as varied as child care problems, memory problems, and difficulty getting out of the house on time in the morning, and then brainstorm ways that the learner can overcome or compensate for them. During the LPA, the learner and advisor will also complete The Barsch Learning Style Inventory. The tutor rephrases each item as a full question to encourage learner responses. Once scored, the inventory will provide the learner/tutor with some general strategies for success, such as keeping organized, using a calendar, and improving management skills.



Perhaps the most important part of the LPA is devoted to goal setting. A series of "interactive worksheets" has been developed to help the learner think about goals, a specific goal statement, and to target short-term objectives based upon personal interest. It uses mental imagery and positive thinking to both end the LPA in an energized and positive manner, and begin the tutoring with a "can-do" attitude. All papers generated in the LPA are placed in the learner's file and passed on to the tutor who then will be more equipped to work with the learner.

Materials comprise the second component of the project. Books will be purchased for learners reading at the lowest literacy levels. Computer software will be obtained that uses synthesized speech along with text to interact with the learner. Teaching tools to be ordered include magnetic boards, letters, words, hand-writing kits, colored overlays, highlighters, portable cassette recorders/players, phonics "games," and books on tape.



The final component of the program is aimed at the tutors who serve the clients. All Basic Literacy tutors will receive training on how to work with people with learning disabilities in both pre-service and in-service training sessions. A guide is being prepared for tutors that will help them select materials and activities that complement their client's learning styles, and also provide effective strategies to be used with LD learners in their tutoring sessions. Tutors play an important role in learner retention so tutors will also learn motivational strategies to use with their learners.



NOTE: The Literacy Council of Sarasota, a Laubach Literacy affiliate, offers Adult Basic Literacy and ESL tutoring through an all-volunteer program. At present, there are no plans for distribution of these materials to the general public. For more information, contact: Maria Spelleri at mariasp@peoplepc.com.

The Able Trust was established by the Florida legislature to provide grant funds to Florida's non-for-profit agencies and Florida citizens with disabilities to enhance employment opportunities.



For more information, go to:
<http://www.abletrust.org>.



NEW! For information on Disability Grant Funds, go to:
<http://www.floridatechnet.org/bridges/grants>.

SKILLS NEEDED TO BE A GOOD READER
(Continued from page 1)

short passages several times, each time trying to read a little faster. This practice, called "repeated reading" is the best method to increase reading fluency.

Some adults may not know enough about the meanings of words. For them, the most direct way to increase their comprehension will be to learn the meanings of many of the words that occur in the texts they are reading. One useful strategy here is to show them how to determine the meaning of individual words by thinking about the overall meaning of what they are reading. Their vocabulary will grow faster if they work to infer the meanings of words while they read.



It may also be helpful to identify words they are likely to encounter in job-related reading and be sure they know the meanings of those words. Finally, it may be useful for

the instructor to model for the adult learner the kind of thinking that one normally does when reading in order to make sense out of what is read, and to practice this kind of thinking with them while they read text.

In general, the best kind of diagnosis for adults is a diagnosis of what they don't know and cannot do. From that, we can determine what we must teach them so they can become better readers. Individuals with dyslexia will have a particularly hard time acquiring phonemic awareness and phonemic decoding skills, but they must attain at least a functional level of skills in these areas in order to become good readers.

NOTE: Dr. Torgesen's testimony before the Committee on Education and the Workforce on November 13, 2001 described three requirements for reading instruction for "at risk" readers—Intensive, Explicit, and Supportive. All three are essential for the LD learner.

PROVIDING TIME AND MULTI-SENSORY
LEARNING EXPERIENCES TO
ESL LEARNERS WITH LD

By Robin L. Schwarz, M.Sp. Ed: LD

At the Lab School of Washington (DC), a school for learners of all ages who have LD, two features make it different from ordinary schools. The first is the amazingly multi-sensory atmosphere of the school. Vividly colored pieces of art-like student-made furniture are everywhere; large sculptures of fantastic animals decorate the grounds; hallways are brilliant with student collages, paintings, and puppets; the conference room boasts a huge mural made from carpet pieces of different textures; a few rooms are fully decorated "club" rooms, where students "live" a time of history: a prehistoric cave, a room in a castle, a board room for railroad barons. Their experiences are enhanced by wearing minimal costumes and using passwords for these clubs.



The second feature may not be so obvious until one asks a few questions. It is the fact that time has less of a role in this school than in a "regular" school. Students are not grouped by grade, but by age. They move through the curriculum as they are able and ready, not by a time table. They spend a full year attending history "clubs" in each of those decorated rooms, absorbing many aspects of the period of time the room represents.

These features exist because Sally L. Smith, founder and director of the Lab School, learned first-hand from working with her son (who has significant LD), that given time and a full-body learning experience, he could learn anything. She founded the school on that principle and the students who attend it are lucky they are able to learn math, or history, science or reading through any combination of multi-sensory activities that suit them and they can take as much time as necessary to learn. If Richard requires dance, furniture building, and cooking to help him understand subtraction facts and it takes six months to learn them, then that is what the school will provide.



While not every school can offer the ideal learning environment of the Lab School, every school can learn from the Lab School's success with students who have

LD. Multi-sensory teaching and learning is essential for these students, and extra time is not just something that is added for tests. It needs to be built into every aspect of learning, often in combination with multi-sensory activities.

At Landmark College, a school only for students with LD, foreign language teacher Eve Leons knows the value of multi-sensory teaching and of the critical need for extra time that persons with LD require to process and absorb information. She gives as an example a curriculum goal of the students learning the vocabulary of family relationships (whether in Spanish for foreign language, or English for ESL). After initially presenting the vocabulary with pictures, over many more weeks and months, Eve practices what this writer calls the "Three R's of Teaching Students with LD" - **Repeat, Review, Re-teach**. Every time she reviews, Eve targets a different learning channel: Flashcards provide visual, tactile, and auditory experience—or even large muscle (kinesthetic) learning if they are big flash cards that must be placed in pockets under matching pictures or words across the room. Bingo the next week also provides tactile, auditory, and visual experiences. Like flash cards, bingo can be made into a kinesthetic activity using large floor squares. Bingo words could be put on audio card readers so students can see and hear words without the aid of a teacher. Next, a video provides clear visual images along with auditory reinforcement.



Another time a song, illustrated with pictures, affords more auditory input with visual support—and maybe kinesthetic activity if it is "She'll be coming 'round the mountain" acted out! A family tree made of felt, onto which students can place pictures of their family, provides experience in all senses at once for the next week's activity as students tell about their families and place pictures on the tree. Yet, another week finds the students participating in a role play which stresses auditory and kinesthetic learning.

Another tactile, visual, and perhaps auditory learning experience with family vocabulary is through computer usage with commercial software programs. Finally, giving students a writing assignment provides the opportunity for pure tactile learning

along with the visual input of creating the words, and auditory input where brainstorming is done orally before writing. Eve includes one of these activities in her lessons every week over many months.

This extended series of activities fulfills the goal of making sure every student uses every learning channel on many occasions, and the second goal of providing them sufficient time to process and absorb all of the vocabulary. Persons with LD generally need far more time and many more exposures to material than the average student in order to retain it. Sometimes, this way of teaching is referred to as *spiraling*—where material is presented and then constantly reviewed and built on over a year.

It is not just the ESOL students with LD who profit from this approach. All ESOL learners will learn more thoroughly and retain learning much better when they can revisit information in many ways. Older learners and those with limited literacy in their first language are especially well supported by this kind of teaching.

Remember, that by themselves, computers actually provide a fairly limited sensory experience. However, when used as part of a larger plan of multi-sensory teaching, they can be very useful.



Teachers often object and say that this type of teaching is fine for children, but adults may be reluctant to participate in such activities. This can be a formidable obstacle which might be overcome by using less vigorous activities at first, then gradually integrating more kinesthetic ones. It is also helpful to explain the purpose of each activity very carefully to these reluctant learners and to help them evaluate whether they retain more information if it is taught that way. As with all things that run counter to their experiences, active learning will require time and frequent explanation for some students to accept. Gradually, they will begin to realize how beneficial it is and be more willing to participate, especially if their teacher believes in it deeply and incorporates it into every lesson in every class.

"Being learning disabled doesn't have to keep a person from chasing his dreams. It just means he chases them differently."
(SUCCEEDING AGAINST THE ODDS, S. SMITH, 1991.)