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Coming March 24-26, 2004

Florida's 2004 Disabilities Symposium
Palm Coast Golf Resort

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"A critical part of creating successful literacy programs is altering the way program leaders and practitioners think about change. Because all aspects of society can have an impact on the life of an adult, the mission for change is broad. Several interfacing systems, rather than one system, should be the target for needed change i.e., the social, educational, economic, judicial, and political support structures that affect individuals with learning disabilities. Gradually, practitioners can begin to move out of their own programs and begin the work of shaping other parts of the system that affect adults with LD."

(Bridges to Practice, Guidebook 4)

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Practitioners' Points

Volume 4, Issue 1

LD/Dyslexia and Employment - Fated to Fail?

By
An Adult with LD

The following article was submitted by one of our readers who himself has LD. The writer brings up several important points that should be considered in light of the staggering statistics reported by Bridges to Practice on the unemployment rate of adults with LD—that is, 48% of LD learners are unemployed or not in the workforce. We are pleased to share this 'first person' view and the article with you.
M. Eisenberg, Editor



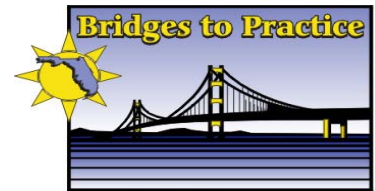
I had a brainstorm the other day, about of all things Oedipus and learning disabilities. The Greek story of Oedipus and his personal struggle to deal with a "fated" outcome seems to run parallel to the lives of many, if not most persons with LD.

Despite all that Oedipus did to avoid his fate, tragic failure awaited him.

Can the same be said for most persons with learning disabilities/dyslexia? We actually know little about the fate of persons with LD. In studies, what has been mostly missing from previous research is an evaluation of the issues from an "adult's perspective." Most studies about adults with LD have focused on reading skills and how to address and remediate one impact of the disability (i.e. poor reading skills), and has mainly been conducted with persons less than three years out of school. However, this approach is assuming that:

- reading skill deficits are the only, or the major impact on the lives of people with dyslexia;
- reading interventions can really work for adults with dyslexia, considering the complexity of adult lives; and
- the interventions are the same for a 20-year old as for a 45-year old with perhaps a teenager of his own.

In other words, most studies on adults with dyslexia in the past and currently are focused on child issues (failure to read) and child solutions (learning to read), and conducted on almost children (late teens, early twenties) for a select elite



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group. But what we do see is often not good. When we really look at the "failure" rates of persons with dyslexia in school and in post-academic settings, including adult literacy and training programs, even among those who have been identified and have received services, we are faced with the conclusion that what has been happening in schools and other programs has mostly not worked in preparing people with dyslexia, for adult life and the world of employment.



If we see failure as fact, (supported by such data as far higher drop-out rates and reading failure rates among persons with LD (*Education Reform for Students with Disabilities*. NY State Dept. of Education, June 2002), then the question arises:

•Is the failure the result of flawed approaches of schools and teachers, or are most people with dyslexia not really able to compete in the workplace and education, due to the impact of their disability?

Are persons with learning disabilities/dyslexia, like Oedipus, "fated" to not succeed?

Are the impacts of the disability such that they will never become successful in the new economic world order that requires:

- Rapid manipulation of data and knowledge—not a strong skill among many with dyslexia, but critical to the employment success of all persons;
- Sharp interpersonal skills (again, not a hallmark of persons with dyslexia), but considered 80% responsible for "getting and keeping a job?" (*Social Skills Issue*. Linkages, Vol. 2, No. 2, National Center on Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities, Washington, DC, Spring 1995.)

The key to this recovery is Oedipus having gained "deeper knowledge of who he is."



(Continued on page 2)

"This is a very exciting time to be involved in the learning disabilities field. We're just beginning to see some successes. Now the challenge is to redirect some of our resources to help people with disabilities and work with their abilities. Adults with LD have many rights but have not been able to benefit from those rights because they don't know what they are or how to access them. Most need self-advocacy training. It's an investment that will ease tensions and failures in school, take some of the burden away from our law enforcement and correctional systems, and pay off in lots of other ways. When each of us can make full use of our abilities, everyone will be better off." (LEGACY OF THE BLUE HERON, Living with Learning Disabilities, Harry Sylvester, 2002.)

LD/Dyslexia and Employment - Fated to Fail? (continued)

The path to self knowledge for people with dyslexia involves their knowing and understanding their disability. Based on the writings of adults with dyslexia, knowledge of one's true nature is perhaps the key that might prevent the chaos and feeling of learned helplessness and "fated" failure that they experience.

What is Needed?

In late 1997, the U.S. Dept. of Education, the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) and the State of Maryland Dept. of Education, convened a national expert panel to discuss the elements needed in an "ideal system" for persons with LD involved in adult basic education programs. The report developed by this meeting listed several ingredients for a successful approach to this population. (Maryland Department of Education, et. al., *Vision for An Ideal System-Improving Services for Adults with LD*, Baltimore, MD. 1998). Programs need to be:

Consumer-Friendly: Culturally appropriate; adult centered; adult driven; and sensitive to the complexity of adult lives

Accountable: Outcome-based

Disability Sensitive: Supportive of self-advocacy; and of reasonable accommodations

Well Funded: Adequately staffed; providing support services such as:

- transportation
- child care
- educational supplies
- diagnostic testing



In addition, the report stated that **SELF-ADVOCACY** skills were among the **most critical skills** necessary for the adult in systems of all kinds, whether education, training, employment, or financial assistance.

- In order to be well-served, adult learners with LD must be equipped with knowledge about their disabilities and manifestations, and have the documentation to show that they have the disability.
- They need to understand the laws and regulations concerning reasonable accommodations, and their right to these accommodations in the workplace and higher education.
- Adult learners need to know how to ask for what they want and to use accommodations as part of a general adult education process.
- These accommodations, and the ability to discuss them, can be the key to success in transitioning through various phases of the learning experience.

These concepts of self-advocacy were seen by the national experts as the key to employment and education success for this population. The ability of people to explain to their employer what their limitations are, how they can be successfully accommodated, and what if any costs are involved, shows the potential employee to be knowledgeable, skilled, and self-aware.

The use of this model helps "shift the power relationships" between the person with learning disabilities and programs and work. For example, if an individual comes into the workplace and says, "I learn differently," the employer is **not legally required** to provide any kind of accommodation. The individual coming in saying, "I have a disability," creates a situation **requiring** the employer to provide reasonable accommodations that would allow the employee with a disability to perform his/her job and to compete on a level playing field.

In addition, the approach to disabilities law concerning the workplace is almost 180 degrees opposite the special education approach:

- In special education, as a child, you get attention and services if you **cannot** do the task based on the disability.
- In work and higher education, as adults, you get protection from discrimination if you **can** do the task (with or without accommodations) despite the impact of the disability.

When children transition from special education to work or higher education, they are often shocked to learn that things are not made easier for them due to their disability. The schools have not prepared the student with learning disabilities/dyslexia or their parents adequately with knowledge of the laws of protection and also the ways and means of effective accommodation.

In addition, the schools (and some parents) focus attention on the deficit, such as being unable to read, and focus very little on development of skills of the child through other means such as learning to use books on tape, etc. This historical approach has led to the individual with dyslexia unprepared for employment situations.

Now we begin to see why dyslexic youth may seem "fated" to fail in employment. The schools and the job training systems are preparing them to enter the workforce in ways that are nearly the opposite of what appears to be a successful model for persons with disabilities:



• Students just coming into the workforce are unaware what LD really is, have not been trained in critical skills and knowledge other than in reading, know only special education laws and have almost no knowledge of other civil rights laws for persons with disabilities, are unable to ask for the appropriate accommodations, and are not in possession of documentation proving their disability.

• The model of workforce success is based on a person who is **self-aware**, with the critical **skills and knowledge** needed for the job, who **understands the laws** on disabilities and is **able to advocate** for the right to accommodations, and who **possesses the proper documentation** to show that he has a disability.

This model of success will enable LD consumers to keep pace with our competitive economy and benefit from governmental programs aimed at improving adult employment or literacy training.

National Center for Learning Disabilities
The power to hope, to learn, and to succeed

LD News

"Life Success for Children with Learning Disabilities: A Parent Guide"

By

Marshall H. Raskind, Ph.D., Roberta J. Goldberg, Ph.D., Eleanor L. Higgins, Ph.D., and Kenneth L. Herman, Ph.D.
Pasadena, CA: Frostig Center, 2003

The above researchers traced the lives of individuals with learning disabilities in an attempt to identify factors that predicted successful life outcomes. The guide was developed as part of a larger ongoing study conducted by Dr. Marshall H. Raskind and Dr. Roberta J. Goldberg, co-principal investigators, along with research associates Dr. Eleanor L. Higgins and Dr. Kenneth L. Herman. See the complete on-line version at <http://www.frostig.org/LDSuccess/pdf/LifeSuccessParentGuide.pdf>.

Note, it is with the permission of **LDSuccess.org**, that we have included their introduction to the on-line manual.

(<http://www.ldsuccess.org/sltr/0903newsltr/0903feature3.cfm>)

INTRODUCTION

"I never thought I would get very far in life. But look at me now. I didn't do too bad, did I?"

This comment was made by Vanessa, a 35-year-old family therapist with a learning disability. As an adult, Vanessa has a satisfying career, enjoys a network of caring friends, and is proud of her accomplishments. One might say that Vanessa is "*successful*." However, it wasn't always that way. As a result of her learning disability, the road to adulthood was paved with years of academic difficulties, problems with social relations, and low self-esteem.

Vanessa's parents also struggled with her learning disability ever since she was first diagnosed in the second grade. They were devastated to discover that their daughter might encounter considerable difficulties learning to read and write and develop the social and emotional problems often associated with learning disabilities in childhood and adolescence. They navigated through the pain of Vanessa's school failure, the search for the right professionals to conduct assessments and provide instructional and psychological support, endless school meetings to clarify services, and the most difficult task of all—helping Vanessa grow up with a positive self-image in spite of her learning disability. In this process, like the millions of other parents raising children with learning disabilities, Vanessa's parents became acutely aware that her learning disability would not go away, but was a life-long condition that would continue to affect many spheres of her life.

"Life Success for Children with Learning Disabilities: A Parent Guide (continued)

Even as an adult, Vanessa faces challenges in reading and writing, and at times feeling good about herself. Yet despite these struggles, she has managed to achieve outward success and lives a personally satisfying and rewarding life. How did this happen? Why do some people with learning disabilities succeed like Vanessa, while others find little reward personally, socially, or financially? Why do some individuals find success, while success eludes others?

The purpose of the guide is to provide answers to these and related questions for parents raising children with learning disabilities. The information presented within the manual is based upon a 20-year study tracing the lives of individuals with learning disabilities from childhood into adulthood in an attempt to identify individual characteristics and life experiences that lead to successful life outcomes. The guide also draws upon the work of other researchers who have identified factors that contribute to "success." It is our hope that the information contained in the manual will help parents as they work with their children to reach their full potential and become competent, content, and independent adults who live satisfying lives.

TEACHING "LIFE SUCCESS" TO STUDENTS WITH LD: LESSONS LEARNED FROM A 20-YEAR STUDY

In this article, M.H. Raskind, R.J. Goldberg, E. L. Higgins, and K.L. Herman discuss the various factors in the lives of their students that led some to "success and others to failure." (*Intervention in School and Clinic*, Vol. 37, No. 4, March 2002, pg. 201-208.) These six "success attributes" include:

- self-awareness
- proactivity
- perseverance
- goal-setting
- the presence and use of effective support systems, and
- emotional stability.

FOSTERING SUCCESSFUL ATTRIBUTES

The results of this 20-year study indicate that such attributes were more predictive of success than were academic skills. "This is not to suggest that efforts to enhance the academic abilities of individuals with LD should cease, but rather that the relative emphasis of each approach should be re-evaluated. It would appear that the development of success attributes in persons with LD should be given at least as much attention as efforts to improve academic skills."

1. SELF-AWARENESS

The successful individuals often referred to themselves as "learning disabled," were very open about their difficulties, and saw their disabilities as only one aspect of themselves.

"You know, everybody comes with a package. And yeah, there are things that I am not so good at. Some of my limitations are reading and writing. But boy, when it comes to putting things together and understanding how things go together, reading plans, I'm really good at reading plans. I'm really good at chasing down problems. I'm a good diagnoser, so those are some talents, some skills that I was born with. I carved a different path, and my whole life has been that way."
An Adult LD Learner

2. PROACTIVITY

These individuals were actively engaged in their communities. They tended to socialize, participate and take an active role in their families, neighborhoods, and friendship groups. They felt that they had power over their destinies. They made decisions and acted on them. Furthermore, they faced whatever consequences came as a result of making those decisions. They learned the importance of taking responsibility for one's action, no matter the outcome.

"I feel responsible for my success, #1, myself."
An Adult LD Learner

3. PERSEVERANCE

Despite the difficulties faced, successful individuals kept pursuing their goals. Their attitude was that difficult situations would be learning experiences from which they would persevere and improve their character.

"I am most proud of my ability to keep going. I have learned to keep going no matter what people said. No matter if it was inspired by anger, or revenge or whatever, still it's ability to keep plodding along."
An Adult LD Learner

4. GOAL SETTING

The adults in the successful group made reference to past and future goals. Goal planning took place early on in their lives. It helped them to develop a step by step approach to achieving goals. Goals set by this group were realistic and attainable.

"I have a plan if I want to become a teacher. I have a plan if I want to be an engineer."
An Adult LD Learner

5. PRESENCE AND USE OF EFFECTIVE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Frequent support, guidance, and encouragement were received by those persons in the successful group. They both actively sought support as well as attracted and drew support to them.

"Whenever I have to write something, it's been this way since day one, when you write something for work, very professional, you have to make sure that you don't make any spelling errors, look good, you can't ramble on, you can't write a stream of consciousness, which is what I need to do. No matter what I write, I take it to someone like my girlfriend or my mother, and they can always clean it up and make it look better. It has always been that way."
An Adult LD Learner

6. EMOTIONAL STABILITY

In their study, it appeared that successful participants had developed an effective means of coping with stress and frustration. None were diagnosed with psychological problems. They were able to maintain a positive, optimistic, and hopeful outlook when faced with difficult situations. They maintained positive peer relationships and drew on social support systems in time of need.

"If you want your life to go in one direction, then life throws you a curve. It turns out the curve is not so bad."
An Adult LD Learner

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES TO FOSTER SUCCESS ATTRIBUTES

General Activities for Fostering Self-Awareness

- Work with students to develop and discuss lists of their individual strengths, weaknesses, and special talents.
- Have students choose potential careers that best match their abilities and discuss.

General Activities for Fostering Proactivity

- Present students with case examples of people facing problems in various contexts, and have them discuss or role-play action-oriented strategies for resolving these conflicts.
- Have students write down important decisions they made, the strategies they used to make the decisions, the outcomes, and evaluations of their decisions.

General Activities for Fostering Perseverance

- Share inspirational stories (e.g., tell, have students read, watch movies) of people who have persevered in the face of adversity.
- Have students share their own stories (e.g., tell, write, draw) about times when they have or have not persisted and the consequent outcomes.

General Activities for Developing Goal-Setting Abilities

- Have students set a long-term career goal and discuss the step-by-step process to reach this goal.

- Present fictional examples of individuals with specific aspirations, and based on their strengths, weaknesses, and special talents, discuss whether their goals appear realistic.

General Activities for Developing and Using Support Systems

- Have students research and report on federal laws related to individuals with learning disabilities in educational and employment settings.
- Have students research technology that will be helpful in compensating for their difficulties.

General Activities for Fostering Emotional Stability

- Have students discuss "warning signs" of stress and how to employ coping strategies or access help if it reaches a critical point.
- Teach students basic relaxation techniques/ stress reduction techniques (e.g., deep breathing, muscle relaxation).

This research challenges both children and adult literacy providers to reevaluate how we "do business," even while incorporating *Bridges to Practice* research techniques. To ignore integrating these activities that may promote these "success factors," would be setting up our students for failure rather than helping them live full and satisfying lives - to be a success!

By

Robin L. Schwarz, Lesley University



Do learning disabilities impact persons in the same way in another language and another culture as they impact native English speakers? If not, how does the impact differ? What kind of testing or other approaches are being used in other countries to detect LD and help those who have it?

These were just some of my questions as I set off for Budapest, Hungary in early October for the first all-Europe Conference on Dyslexia (Note: In the U.S., the term 'Learning Disabilities' refers to a range of neurologically-based problems in learning; outside of the U.S., however, focus is almost exclusively on reading problems, or dyslexia. When the term 'dyslexia' is used in conference titles or research, it does not refer to the whole range of problems but strictly to reading difficulties which are neurological in origin.) Though individual countries in Europe have each had their own dyslexia associations for some time, this was the first all-Europe conference since The European Dyslexia Association (EDA) was founded in 1987. For this conference, about 300 people gathered from all over Europe—and a few of us from the U.S.—to share knowledge and learn from each other.

Obviously, the biggest challenge for the conference was making the sessions available in the three languages used at the conference, Hungarian, German, and English. Sessions held in the main hall were translated into whichever two languages the presenter was NOT using. Smaller sessions were available only in the language of the presenter, unless co-presenters chose to do the presentation twice in two languages. There were quite a few moments where I had some insight into what it must feel like to have dyslexia! Hungarian is a non-Indo-European language and difficult to get the hang of and I have only a smattering of German. Not only that, but those translating into English were clearly not prepared for the technical or scientific aspects of some presentations. Still, despite being confused now and then, I did learn quite a lot.



The answer to the first question, "Do learning disabilities impact persons in the same way in another language and culture?" is both "yes" and "no." There is very wide agreement among researchers that the neurological problem that causes dyslexia occurs in the population relatively uniformly across languages and cultures. However, one of the key goals of the conference was to make it clear that dyslexia affects a person's ability to learn to read differently in different languages. This, as we know from worldwide



research, has mostly to do with the "transparency" of the orthography, or writing system of a language—how closely what is written represents what is said and vice versa. This means a person can be very dyslexic in English and the same person will hardly have any signs of dyslexia in Hungarian. However, one thing that IS the same is the devastating impact dyslexia has on the lives of those who have significant trouble learning to read.

Europe has many dyslexia associations, but there is still little general awareness of dyslexia among educators or the public. Consequently, few countries have national policies or laws providing for identification, specialized teaching and/or accommodation of learners with dyslexia at any level of education. When these learners cannot succeed, they must drop out of school in most countries. A few countries are shining exceptions to this situation, especially Sweden, where dyslexics are routinely screened for and accommodated in every kind of educational setting. Other countries are developing training for mainstream teachers so they will be able to teach dyslexics more effectively.



With dyslexia as the main focus of the conference, discussion and research around identification concentrated almost entirely on ways to measure phonological processing skills, which are seen as the core of reading. Researchers reported on studies about the persistence of phonological processing problems, ways to be certain that this is the core issue of dyslexia and ways to address weak phonological skills in learners who don't read. Because dyslexia affects learners differently in different languages, identification is being developed in individual languages—Hungarians devising a test in Hungarian, Swedes in Swedish. No universal test has emerged, though some researchers feel it is a possibility.

The genetic nature of dyslexia was of great interest to a number of researchers from different countries. This conference happened just after Finnish researchers announced they had located the gene on which dyslexia is found. There was disagreement, however, as there is in the U.S., as to whether the difference in the brain must always result in pure dyslexia, or whether other kinds of learning problems are part of a spectrum of problems that can appear in different generations in families. In any case, one set of Swedish researchers now define dyslexia as an inherited phonological processing problem.



Another interesting debate was over the "real" nature of dyslexia. Some people think dyslexia is a "medical problem" — something wrong in the brain that must be found, named and cured; others see it as a "social problem" — a difference in functioning that is not well tolerated

by the society around the persons who have the difference.

Supporters of the medical model continue to do research to identify the location of the problem in the brain and to find "scientific" means of curing it. The "social problem" camp believes that the context, such as school or work, can make the person more or less dysfunctional. Therefore, they believe, if the person is matched better to the context or situation through counseling and targeted teaching of skills and if society is better able to accommodate these persons through raised awareness and policies for accommodation, the problems for the persons will be lessened overall.



Given the reality of how long it usually takes for adult dyslexics to learn to read, at the conference, adult advocates most strongly supported the social model. The U.S. is moving towards the medical model at the moment, but we should hope that the research and experience developed on both sides of the Atlantic can lead us to the most effective ways to support adults.



LET'S "TAKE A COURSE OF ACTION!"

On behalf of Bridges to Practice: Florida's Focus on Adults with Disabilities, I invite you to "Take a Course of Action!" and attend Florida's 2004 Adults with Disabilities Symposium, March 24-26, 2004, to be held at the Palm Coast Golf Resort in Palm Coast, Florida.

Attend this symposium and you will have the opportunity to maximize your learning experiences throughout the three days of the event by participating in an incredible agenda of educational and networking experiences. Speakers will present 'Targeted Training' in all disabilities areas while focusing on education, rehabilitation, social skills training, advocacy, federal law/legal rights, testing accommodations, assistive technology, needs of the TANF population, and success attributes—just to name a few!

In addition to all of the educational opportunities, plan to relax by strolling on paved hiking trails among the oak, pine and palm forests along the shore of the Intracoastal Waterway. Or, play a game of tennis or a round of golf on one of five championship golf courses. Located between historic St. Augustine and the sun, sand, and surf of action packed Daytona Beach, the resort is just a few scenic miles from Interstate 95 and 30 minutes from Daytona Beach International Airport.

Let's "Take a Course of Action!" Together!
Dr. Rochelle Kenyon, Chairperson
Florida's 2004
Adults with Disabilities Symposium

Please Note:
Vol. 3, Issue 4 of Practitioners' Points featured an article by Dr. Thomas Sticht. We wish to sincerely apologize for misspelling Dr. Sticht's last name.

M. Eisenberg, Editor