

CHECK THIS OUT **NEW!**



Q & A

Your right to know!

"When I found out that I had a learning disability I was relieved. I had known that my father had dyslexia that went untreated. I came to realize that having a learning disability was all right. It meant I wasn't stupid!"

What causes a learning disability? Is it biologically-based, due to the environment or is it inherited?

The evidence shows that those who have learning disabilities exhibit a subtle difference in the structure and function of their central nervous system. This difference affects the cognitive processes that are essential to learning. In the late 1970's and 1980's, brain research was based on post-mortem studies of brain sections. Newer techniques using MRI, a neuroimaging device, show that the frontal region of the brain of children with dyslexia is different from those without the disability. Work with brain electrical activity mapping (BEAM), which uses computers to map electrical brain waves, reveals that the electrical activity in the language-related areas of the brain of individuals with dyslexia is different from those who do not have dyslexia.

While a majority of this research has focused on children, the work of Karen Gross-Glen and colleagues in 1991 using positron emission tomography (PET) to measure the metabolic activity of the brain, observed twenty-five adults with dyslexia while they read and found significant differences in the frontal and occipital areas of the brain responsible for phonological processing. However, these techniques are being used for research only, not yet to diagnose an individual learning disability.

Numerous studies of families and twins in the past 30 years indicate that there is a 35-45% chance of one inheriting a learning disability. Despite this information however, researchers have still been unable to isolate a single gene that may account for the disability.



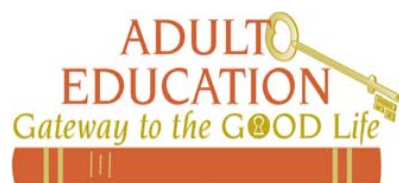
Factors such as instruction, school, curriculum and home environment influence learning. Intervention at a young age can increase cognitive and social growth and prevent later behavioral problems. Successful adults with learning disabilities stress the importance of three critical factors: the tasks required to learn, the learning setting and the support that is or is not provided by one's family, friends and teachers. Shapiro, J., & Rich, R. (1999). *Facing Learning Disabilities in the Adult Years*. 20-28. NY. Oxford Univ. Press.

Bridges to Practice training cites the U.S. Department of Labor statistics regarding the incidence of learning disabilities in both employment & training programs: 10-15% of the general population and 50-80% of ABE and literacy students (below 5-7th grade level). Is this also known to be true about students in ESOL classes?



Although research shows that the percentage of adults with learning disabilities in literacy programs may exceed the percentage in the population as a whole, with some estimates as high as 80%, there is a general sense that this may not be true of ESOL learners. Research is currently being done in this area.

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Unlike native speakers in adult education programs, many ESOL students have met success in their previous educational experience. They enroll in programs to learn to speak, read and write in a new language. Therefore, one should be careful when labeling this learner as LD.

Learners may show learning disabilities in a second language when they do not in their first. The learning disability may be so subtle in a first language that it is disguised by the individual's compensatory strategies. Familiarity with one's own language allows for the overall context to be understood even when specific words are not and easier words are substituted for more difficult words. These strategies may not be available to the learner in the new language (Ganschow & Sparks, 1993). Sometimes a learning disability does not present itself in the learner's first language because of the sound-symbol relationship which may be more predictable in their home language, e.g., Spanish, versus English.

Other reasons for lack of progress to be considered prior to referring an ESOL student for LD testing include: limited previous education, lack of effective study habits, interference of the learner's native language, an incompatible teaching style to the learner's ability or class expectations, stress or trauma that refugees and other immigrants have experienced, causing concentration and memory problems, social cultural factors, e.g., age, physical health, social identity and nutrition/diet, sporadic attendance and lack of practice outside the classroom. These behaviors will likely affect all learning whereas a learning disability will affect specific areas.

Prior to the interview or screening phase, one should determine the following: 1) Has the problem persisted over time? 2) Has the problem resisted normal instruction? 3) Does the learner show a pattern of both strengths and weaknesses in class? 4) What about outside the classroom? 5) Does the problem significantly interfere with learning or a life activity in some way? If the responses to these questions are yes, there is probably a learning problem that should be looked into more closely. Schwartz, R. & Terrill, L., 2000. *ESL Instruction & Adults with Learning Disabilities*. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: National Center for ESL Literacy Education. (EDO-LE-00-01)



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Visit our new website:
www.floridatechnet.org/bridges
for issues of Practitioners' Points
Next Bridges Training
June 19th-GED Symposium
Cape Canaveral

"Literacy programs may view the provision of services for adults with learning disabilities as a problem or as an impossible challenge, especially when faced with limited financial resources, limited or poorly designed professional development and a shortage of personnel. There is no shortage of caring on the part of practitioners to improve services for learners, provided they can identify the necessary resources and tools."
National Institute for Literacy

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Florida's Focus on Adults with Learning Disabilities

Over the past 8 months, Bridges to Practice trainers have met with adult education practitioners and literacy providers throughout Florida to increase awareness of issues related to adults with learning disabilities. Information has focused on a general understanding and characteristics of LD, learning style assessment, disability rights legislation, responsibilities of the service provider, the use of reasonable accommodations and screening for LD. The question of "Where can we refer someone for diagnostic testing?" is frequently asked at most workshops. Participants are asked to brainstorm responses that may include Vocational Rehabilitation, mental health centers, military or private insurance, university clinics and civic organizations. Vocational Rehabilitation is an important resource for adult education and literacy providers to look to for assistance in diagnosing students whose screening results may suggest the presence of a learning disability.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Learning Disabilities

Adults who have learning disabilities are the fastest growing disability category served by Vocational Rehabilitation Services. According to the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, the number of learning disabled adults accessing services rose from 1.3% in 1983 to an estimated 5% in 1994. Yet, adults with learning disabilities make up only a small percentage of those persons who had completed Individual Plans for Employment. Only 5% or 495 of the 9,782 persons with disabilities who were placed into gainful employment in 1999-2000 through Vocational Rehabilitation had a learning disability. (Vocational Rehabilitation 2000 Annual Report)

Thanks to Carl Miller, State Director, Vocational Rehabilitation Services for his assistance.

*"When I first started my job, the company put me into a training program. This was like a classroom, like going back to school with tests. I needed a certain average on the tests to advance in the company. After I failed the first test, I told the trainer about my learning disability. The remainder of the tests were administered orally, and I did just fine."
(Shapiro, J. and Rich, R. 1999. Facing Learning Disabilities in the Adult Years)*

Vocational Rehabilitation Services is a federal and state program designed to assist individuals with physical, emotional or mental disabilities in obtaining gainful and productive employment. Services are available to eligible persons who are unemployed, at risk of losing their jobs or underemployed. Individuals who have learning disabilities tend to use vocational rehabilitation services because they are underemployed rather than unemployed.

Any person can be referred for services to one of the local vocational rehabilitation offices. After an initial application is completed, an evaluation is performed to determine eligibility, which must be made within sixty days from the date of application. A vocational counselor conducts the initial interview. With permission, data is collected from school records, previous testing and medical history. A complete vocational assessment follows. The diagnosis of learning disability must be made by a licensed physician or psychologist, and in the case of Vocational Rehabilitation, be severe enough to significantly interfere with one or more of the essential life activities indicated by the Americans with Disabilities Act.



LD is not merely a school issue. VR services can help greater numbers of LD adults be self-supporting contributors to society.

(For more information contact (800) 451-4327)



LEARNING STYLES

In our last issue of Practitioners'

Points, we addressed the stages of assessment. We use information from several different types of assessments in order to develop a learner profile:

>**Placement tests**, such as TABE or CASAS are routinely administered when an adult first enters a literacy program. They are used to determine skills and knowledge levels in areas such as reading, language and math. The results provide some general information about achievement.

>**Diagnostic assessments** can be used to determine more readily in what specific problem areas the student is having trouble, e.g., What types of math computations are problematic for the individual?

>**Trial teaching and frequent progress testing** provide feedback about how the learner is improving based on daily practice sessions. These assessments are more informal and will be useful as a guide to plan for instruction. However, they do not indicate the way a person prefers to learn.

Studies show that between 60-70% of the time, teachers are teaching to the wrong learning style. Bridges to Practice trainers strongly encourage the use of **learning style inventories or checklists** when a student initially enters the program and takes the placement test. It can also be done as a classroom activity. Most inventories take little time to complete and provide a quick way for the teacher and learner to assess what channel or combination of learning styles work best for the individual learner.

There are many different learning style inventories. They are neither formal, timed nor include a complete list of clues to learning preferences. They can be used by an evaluator or self-administered. *The 3 most common learning styles are through the **Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic/Tactile channels**. (See charts that follow.)

NEWSFLASH!

The first meeting of the Bridges to Practice Interagency Training Advisory Committee was held in Tallahassee on June 1st and was sponsored by the Department of Education and Florida's Bridges project. In attendance were representatives from the following agencies: the Department of Juvenile Justice, Dyslexia Research Institute, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the Department of Children and Families, state literacy providers and the Department of Corrections. Recognizing the magnitude of special services or accommodation needs of adults with LD, the state is committed to continuously seek ways to maximize human and fiscal resources, expand programs, services and training opportunities for program providers and practitioners as well as strengthen interagency coordination and collaboration. A Bridges Train-the-Trainer workshop presented by Patti White, Disabilities Project Manager from the Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Center and Rochelle Kenyon from Florida's Bridges project will follow at the Department of Education Building in Tallahassee on June 11-14 for selected trainers.

SCREENING FOR LD

Screening is a time to listen and gather information regarding educational, family and medical history. Some students may not require further diagnosis. Screening may lead to helpful interventions and get a sense of possible causes. Screenings can be administered any time during the instructional cycle if the practitioner identifies the need. Screenings are either done during the intake process for every adult who enters the program or as the need arises. Individual screenings require obtaining informed consent. Bridges identifies a well-received screening tool: >**Payne Learning Needs Inventory**: Includes two screening questionnaires 1) a 13-question State of Washington validated LD screening tool; and 2) a 22-question Learning Needs Inventory. Assists ABE, GED, ESL and special learning needs instructors in identifying individuals with special learning needs. No accommodations provided. Testing: 30 min. to 1 hr. NO COST. Training available.



VISUAL LEARNERS

- >Do better when you show rather than tell them.
- >Have a tendency to watch your face when read or spoken to.
- >Use few words to respond.
- >Like things neat, orderly and detailed.
- >Can find things that are lost but seldom misplace their own things.
- >Can recall where they saw something a long time ago.
- >Can find pages or place in book easily.
- >May have auditory problems and difficulty learning other languages.

KINESTHETIC LEARNERS

- >May be considered hyperactive.
- >Want to touch everything, can't keep hands to self.
- >Usually well coordinated.
- >Like to take things apart and put them together. Like to do and explore.
- >May enjoy writing things down.
- >May have difficulty establishing relationships in numbers or learning abstract symbols.
- >May have difficulty with numbers, letters, sequencing and alphabetizing.
- >May be labeled an "underachiever."



AUDITORY LEARNERS

- >Are seldom quiet, are "talkers," and always have excuses why things aren't done.
- >Tell jokes or stories.
- >Remember spoken words or ideas. May answer questions better when read to them than when they read by themselves.
- >Like musical or rhythmic activities.
- >May memorize easily, especially songs.
- >May be physically awkward.
- >May appear "brighter" than group.
- >May have poor perception of time and space and get lost easily.
- >Often reverse p-q, b-d, n-v when writing.

*From the Barsch Learning Style Inventory, Academic Therapy Publications, 20 Commercial Blvd, Novato, CA 94947
*Includes a 24 question survey.

"I thought when you became an adult, it was too late to learn."
(Anonymous)

NEW! SOURCELINE

By Linda Getz

When adults suspect they have a learning disability, they need current information, as do the practitioners trying to help them. This new feature column is a starting point to uncover the variety of resources that may help you find the answers you are looking for.

ORGANIZATIONS

Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)

P.O. Box 21192
Columbus, OH 43221
<http://www.ahead.org>
AHEAD is committed to the full participation in higher education for those persons with disabilities.



Council for Learning Disabilities (CLD)

P.O. Box 40303
Overland Park, KS 66204
<http://www.acusd.edu/~ammer/proforg%20folder/cld.html>



CLD is dedicated to working with individuals who have learning disabilities. Their publication, *Learning Disability Quarterly*, focuses on research with an applied focus.

International Dyslexia Association (IDA)

8600 LaSalle Rd., Chester Bldg.
Baltimore, MD 21286-2044
<http://www.interdys.org>
IDA is a non-profit organization dedicated to the study and treatment of dyslexia.

Learning Disabilities Association (LDA)

4156 Library Rd.
Pittsburgh, PA 15234-1349
<http://www.ldanatl.org>
LDA is a national non-profit, volunteer organization focused on advocacy, education, research and service.

National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)

381 Park Avenue, South, Suite 1420
New York, NY 10016
<http://www.nclld.org>
NCLD provides information, resources and referral services benefiting children and adults. NCLD produces an annual publication entitled *Their World*.

RESOURCE CENTERS



ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education

1900 Kenny Rd.
Columbus, OH 43210
<http://www.accesseric.org>
ERIC disseminates materials through its ERIC database and clearinghouse publications. Two examples are: *Adults and Learning Disabilities: An Overview for the Adult Educator* and *Teaching Adults with Learning Disabilities*.

HEATH Resource Center

The National Clearinghouse on Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Disabilities American Council on Education One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 800 Washington, DC 20036
<http://www.acenet.edu>
This website address is for ACENET. Select HEATH from the menu bar on the left.

WEBSITES



<http://www.abilityforum.com>
Utilizing the power of technology, this site focuses on learning disabled individuals overcoming all types of barriers including education, employment and social issues.



If she only **DID** better, she would **TRY** harder.

TRUE



If she'd only **TRY** harder, she would **DO** better.

FALSE



(Lavoie, R., December 1999. Ask Richard, Ionline.)

<http://www.iser.com>
Internet Special Education Resources (ISER) is a nationwide directory with a focus on learning disabilities. It is similar to the Yellow Pages for professionals serving the special education community.

<http://www.ldonline.org>

This website provides good information about and for adults with learning disabilities: issues, first-hand experiences, personal essays and a bulletin board for sharing ideas.



<http://ldresources.com>

Produced since 1995, this website is updated daily and contains a variety of resources with a focus on writing and technology.

PUBLICATIONS



National Resources for Adults with Learning Disabilities

was produced as a collaborative effort between the HEATH Resource Center and the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center.
<http://www.novel.nifl.gov/nalld/resource>

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<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS>
OSERS provides information, research and resources about special learning needs. Published quarterly. Free.

