

NEW!
ESOL & LD



Is your program responsive to ESOL students with LD?

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Few ESOL learners have been formally identified with learning disabilities because so many of their problems resemble normal language learning problems and because of the difficulty of securing an appropriate clinical diagnosis for non-native speakers of English. Nonetheless, we can be sure that quite a few of the learners in our ESOL classes are struggling with some type of learning disability. Therefore, programs need to be prepared to respond to the ESOL learner with LD in the same way that they respond to the English-speaking learners with LD.

What does a responsive program look like? According to Ashley Hager, who has been exploring this question in and around Cambridge, MA, such a program would have staff and teachers who are well versed in LD. It would also have procedures and practices for screening and working with learners with LD systematically included in the policies and operation of the program.

Ms. Hager's findings echo the recommendations of a Maryland task force of nearly 50 experts in LD, adult learning, literacy, reading, and other fields that was assembled a few years ago to envision an adult education system responsive to persons with LD. Having a system that is prepared for persons with special needs was the strongest communication. This means that recruiting literature is available in several media and even other languages, that in-take personnel at centers have training in sensitivity to LD and other needs, that the intake procedures of the programs include initial screening for LD; and that programs have a system for referring learners with special needs to relevant experts. Gradually, requiring that all teachers would have LD training as part of a certification-appropriate instruction and provision of effective accommodations. With such a system in place, the group felt that programs would not be unduly burdened by students with special needs. Rather, they will be able to receive and support such students as a matter of course. This is essential since students with LD are now a majority in adult education.

Though neither the Maryland task force nor Ms. Hager was focusing on ESOL learners with LD, the recommendations would not be very different for a program to respond to these learners adequately. Acknowledging the very presence of ESOL learners with LD is the first big test. Then, since learning disabilities affect ESOL learners in almost exactly the same ways as they affect non-ESOL learners, requiring ESOL teachers to have as full training in LD as ABE teachers or GED teachers is the next.

Having in place a procedure for informal screening of ESOL students for LD would be another important aspect of a responsive program. Because there is no LD screening tool appropriate for all ESOL students (still being field tested), the effectiveness of screening at intake is highly dependent on the English level of the learner and on the cultural and linguistic sensitivity of the interviewer and the questions being asked.

What commonly happens is that evaluation begins after the learner has manifested problems. Using observation to obtain qualitative information to answer the five questions, formulated by this author and mentioned in Vol 1, Issue 4 of Practitioners' Points, can be a way to make the decision about whether a student should be referred for further testing. One main purpose of this screening is to help programs differentiate between problems caused by the low literacy, culture shock, health or other issues, and those actually caused by LD. Screening helps develop a learning profile and plan for students judged to be at risk.

A responsive program also anticipates the instructional challenges that arise for ESOL learners with LD. While it is true that effective ESOL teaching is generally good for such learners, this alone will not be sufficient help for those with significant challenges.

The most responsive program would find a way to provide specialized instruction in separate classes to those ESOL students with the greatest challenges. The lack of appropriate materials for adult ESOL learners with LD is another part of the instructional challenges. Specialized materials, such as those for literacy instruction for English speaking adults with LD or even beginning ESOL, would create a problem for the ESOL learner with LD. For all these measures to happen, a coordinator would need to be designated. Then we can ensure that all possibilities are attempted to educate learners.

****CHECK THIS OUT.....**
ESOL AND LD page
Bridges website:
www.floridatechnet.org/bridges

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

FLORIDA'S 2002 DISABILITIES SYMPOSIUM

"Meeting Today's Challenges - Finding Solutions"

April 17-April 19, 2002

Ponce de Leon Golf & Conference Center Resort, St. Augustine, Florida

Room Rate: \$58/night

Registration Fee: \$75

GUEST SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

-Robin Schwarz-
"ESOL and Learning Disabilities"

-June Justice Crawford-
National Institute for Literacy and

-Patti White-
Master Bridges Trainer,
Arkansas Adult Learning Resource Ctr.
"Interagency Cooperation and Systemic Change"

-Neil Sturomski-
GED Testing Service
"GED Tests & Special Accommodations"
"Strategies for Teaching LD in GED Preparation"

-Glenn Young-
Office of Vocational & Adult Education
Washington, DC
"National Update on Disability Issues"

-Tour of the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind-

-One-half day intensive workshop presented by Robin Schwarz* on Limited English Proficiency and Adults with Learning Disabilities-

***Robin Schwarz has published several articles on the topic of Adult ESOL & LD in such publications as ERIC Digest, Southern LINGS and GED Test Items.**

-Vendor Demonstrations-
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Next Issue: Frameworks of LD-Appropriate Instruction/Tutoring



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Visit our Bridges website:
www.floridatechnet.org/bridges
for previous issues of Practitioners' Points and dates and locations of future Bridges training.

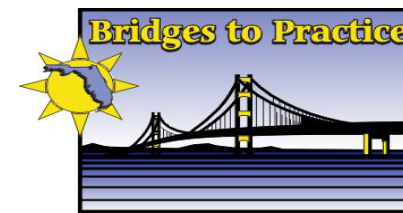
To address the instructional challenge presented by adults with learning disabilities, literacy programs need to develop and embrace systematic teaching behaviors that focus on how adults learn and approach tasks. In the absence of a systematic approach, practitioners might be tempted to use "trial and error" tactics. Current research in the field of education and learning disabilities indicates that a systematic approach to instruction is far more powerful!

(Source: Bridges to Practice Guidebook 4)

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Practitioners' Points

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Florida's Focus on Adults with Learning Disabilities

Learning Disabilities in the Correctional System

It is estimated that the incidence of learning disabilities among inmates is between 30-50% as compared to 5-15% among the general adult population. (LINKAGES, Fall 1996) While we may not know the exact percentages, that there appears to be an over-representation of individuals with specific learning disabilities among our prison population.



Some studies have suggested that individuals with LD are more at risk and susceptible to committing crimes by the very nature of being learning disabled. "Characteristics such as impulsivity, poor social skills, short-term memory, and difficulty with attention may predispose individuals with learning disabilities to problems with the law." (Sturomski, Neil, Learning Disabilities and the Correctional System, 1996)

Often, individuals who have failed school and lack self-esteem look for acceptance by joining gangs to gain a sense of belonging. When they find themselves in trouble with the law and are asked to tell their story, they may tell it differently to different people because of poor memory skills. However, their responses are perceived as lies. When in court and asked to respond to a lawyer's questions, they may not understand the questions and falsely answer "yes" under pressure. When in prison and given a set of directions to follow, their difficulty with memory and sequencing can cause their actions to be misinterpreted as defiant.

Learning disabilities affect school, work, and daily living activities. Those with LD may find the justice system difficult to understand. They may end up staying longer because of their interpretation of rights, questions, and legal terms.



You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can be used against you in a court of law....

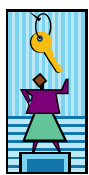
Adults with auditory processing problems may have trouble understanding their Miranda Rights.



"Educational training programs are often challenged to assist individuals with disabilities in acquiring basic life and workplace skills. Add to that the challenge of a classroom located behind an electrified, secured fence, and armed guards patrolling from towers and gates, and the obstacles to overcome have been significantly increased. Early identification and appropriate program planning can make teaching adults with learning disabilities rewarding." (McAnelly, B., LINKAGES, 1996)

Look for Barbara McAnelly's comments in the next issue of Practitioners' Points.

KEY ELEMENTS IN THE TEACHING/LEARNING PROCESS



There are several **key elements** in the teaching and learning process that help contribute to the success of teaching adults with learning disabilities. These include:

the practitioner's complete understanding of the curriculum options that have been targeted during goal-setting activities; e.g., Basic Skills, Learning Strategies, Critical Content, Social Skills, and Self-Advocacy. (Described in *Practitioners' Points, Vol. 2, Issue 1: The Planning Process*);

the creation of an instructional environment that builds on strategies to promote learner independence;

the provision of instructional adaptations and legal accommodations that correspond to how the learner takes in and processes information;

the professional development of teachers, tutors, volunteers, and program administrators to ensure the recognition of the principles of LD-appropriate instruction; and

the implementation of models for LD-appropriate instruction.



CREATING AN APPROPRIATE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Learning disabled adults may be susceptible to environmental distractions or uncomfortable practicing certain basic skills in view of others. Modifying the instructional setting can be critical to the success of the learner with LD. Consider features of the **physical setting**, such as:

- Seating arrangements
- Location of resources
- Noise and lighting levels
- Adaptable spaces
- Decorations
- General atmosphere



"People with learning disabilities must always be on the lookout for ways to work around their difficulties and solve their problems." (Scheiber and Talpers, *Unlocking Potential, 1987*.)

CREATING A STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

In addition to the physical space, practitioners will want to involve the learner in creating a "strategic" environment that promotes and supports the learner's independence. Create a strategic environment by doing the following:



➤ **Guide the learner to be active and independent.** Try asking the questions such as, "So how would you do that?" - "How would you find that information?" or "How would you remember that?"

➤ **Recognize the factors that increase learner motivation.** Learners need to understand the instructional process, be involved in making decisions, and experience the success that comes from directly applying the knowledge and skills learned to real-life situations.

➤ **Realize that instruction revolves around everyday needs of the learner.** Focus instruction on teaching adults to be independent and on helping them to succeed in their lives.

➤ **Regard learners as equal partners in the learning process.** Adult learners come with valuable information about how they have learned and how they have compensated for things they cannot do. Designing instruction around the learner's strengths, needs, and interests has the greatest potential for success.

➤ **Encourage learners to keep track of their progress.** Motivation increases when learners are taught to visually keep track of their own accomplishments using charts or graphs.

➤ **Involve those significant persons in the learner's life in promoting learning.** The learner's family, friends, and coworkers can encourage him to apply new skills at home and at work.

➤ **Individualize instruction.** The more a learner is able to practice and use skills, the greater the possibility of it being applied to other situations. The learning environment must allow for individualized goal-setting and direct instruction, as much as possible.

INSTRUCTIONAL ADAPTATIONS AND LEGAL ACCOMMODATIONS



Accommodations are changes that are legally required to allow the adult to access and profit from the basic or essential services provided by a program. Most cost little or nothing and can be easily provided, e.g., preferential seating or rearranging of equipment; allowance of extra time to complete tasks; and use of tape recorders, headphones, color coding, highlighting, large-print materials, index and cue cards.

Accommodations are often considered as the removal of barriers. If a learner with a motor control problem has difficulty writing a report, providing him with wide-ruled paper or allowing him to do the report orally would remove the barrier of the writing task.

Instructional adaptations are those routine changes that can be made during instruction to increase learning when an individual (with or without documentation of disability) has difficulty acquiring, storing, or remembering information. Such adaptations are logical choices that (1) make tasks more manageable (e.g., use of a tape recorder for memory and auditory processing problems; use of a calculator for solving math problems) and (2) enable individual to have greater control (e.g., the opportunity to work in a room free of distraction; allowance of frequent breaks).

You can alter existing material, provide more intense and enhanced instruction for the learner, or find alternate materials if:

- (1) the text is too fast-paced, abstract, or complex,
- (2) the learner has difficulty organizing the material,
- (3) the learner lacks the experiences and background knowledge needed to make the new information meaningful, or
- (4) the learner needs the information broken down into smaller chunks and simplified.

"Once adults learn strategies, they are better able to profit from accommodations that allow for independent learning and performance. However, these types of accommodations are not sufficient if the individual still processes information in a manner that does not help him or her meet the program's academic demands." (Bridges to Practice, Guidebook 4)

MAKING INSTRUCTION RESPONSIVE TO THE WAY LEARNERS PROCESS INFORMATION

A significant amount of research has been done on ways that teachers can use instruction to accommodate the different modes involved in processing of information. Research now indicates that more time needs to be spent on:



SELECTING THE CRITICAL INFORMATION (SKILLS, STRATEGIES, CONTENT);

DECIDING WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO THINK ABOUT AND ORGANIZE THAT INFORMATION;

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL PROBLEMS IN PROCESSING INFORMATION;

PLANNING INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES THAT FACILITATE GOOD INFORMATION PROCESSING;

PROVIDING EXPLICIT INSTRUCTIONS AND LEADERSHIP DURING INSTRUCTION;

CHECKING FREQUENTLY TO ENSURE THAT ADULTS HAVE MADE APPROPRIATE CONNECTIONS AND HAVE LEARNED THE INFORMATION; AND

ENSURING THAT ADULTS HAVE FULLY MASTERED CRITICAL INFORMATION BEFORE MOVING ON TO THE TEACHING OF NEW CONTENT.

Bridges to Practice makes the following recommendations for selecting materials, not only for adults with learning disabilities, but also for all adult learners served in literacy education programs:

- Use large type size (15 points or larger);
- generous use of white space;
- clear graphics, and
- an easy-to-follow layout.

MAKING INFORMATION-PROCESSING ACCOMMODATIONS

By Teaching **SMARTER***

SMARTER provides the framework for selecting accommodations based on the differences in information-processing for adults with learning disabilities. It considers the following steps:

- ❖ **Shape critical questions**
- ❖ **Map critical content**
- ❖ **Analyze for learning difficulties**
- ❖ **Reach instructional decisions**
- ❖ **Teach effectively**
- ❖ **Evaluate mastery**
- ❖ **Revisit outcomes and plans**

**(Adapted by Lenz and Scanlon 1998)*

CREATING A CONCEPT MAP

A concept map is a graphic representation of the organization of information. It is one way of helping the practitioner organize what to teach as well as show the learner how to organize the content information. An example of this follows:

Step 1: Identify the Instructional Goal, e.g.,

➤ *Improve Reading Comprehension*

Step 2. Keep Critical Questions in Mind, e.g.,

➤ *How can I use the map to help the learner understand the information, answer questions, and perform tasks?*

➤ *What is the first piece of information I want to teach?*

Step 3. Create a Concept Map Based on Content and Structure

➤ *Content- Restate the concepts in paraphrase form.*

➤ *Structure- Identify the components to be learned and keep the following in mind:*

- Limit the map to 7 or fewer parts;
- Connect each section with lines to the other sections. Use arrows to show additional information, if needed;
- Order the concepts to be learned in linear order, from left to right;
- Paraphrase "big" idea and use lines to link sub-components;
- Label lines and arrows with words that explain the relationship to be explored during instruction; and

Make simple maps by using a small number of parts, clear language, vocabulary, and few words.



ANALYZING CONTENT FOR LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

The following criteria may be helpful when analyzing potential areas of learning difficulties:



Abstractness: When content appears impractical, help the learner seek examples and explanations through questioning and research.

Organization: When organization is not clear, teach learners how to survey materials, read to confirm organization of ideas, and reorganize information for personal understanding and use.

Relevance: When information has no relationship to learners, teach them how to look for personal connections.

Interest: When information seems boring, teach learners self-management strategies for controlling attention and how to take advantage of choosing interesting assignments.

Skills: When specific content is too difficult for the learner, provide direct instruction in prerequisite skills in small manageable chunks and related to the specific content.

Strategies: When learning requires that adult learners approach tasks effectively, provide them intensive instruction in learning strategies.

Background: When the content assumes critical background beyond the learner's personal experiences, teach the learner how to ask questions to gain knowledge.

Complexity: When learning tasks with many parts, teach learners how to chunk tasks, graphically represent information, ask questions, and work in teams.

Quantity: When complex information is introduced, teach learners how to independently check and redo work, review information, ask questions, and inform others when they need help.

Activities: When adult learners lack understanding of activities, teach them how to identify expectations in materials or how to create and adjust goals based on previous experiences.

Outcomes: When information does not tell learners how to think about information, teach them how to identify expectations and goals embedded in the materials or adjust goals.

Responses: When material lacks options for learners to demonstrate their competence, teach them how to request appropriate special accommodations on evaluations.