



Issues in Identification of Adult ESOL Students with LD

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As awareness about LD in adult learners is growing, so is the realization that ESOL learners also may have LD. Programs and teachers are eager to know how to identify the ESOL students with LD, but the process is not as straightforward as it is for English-speaking learners.

■ Problems with screening tools

Screening tools for use with adult students usually involve student self-evaluation, and/or interview. Though it is tempting to use these quick and easy-to-administer tools with ESOL students, it is not possible. Many of the questions on the tools are about behaviors "typical" of adults with LD, such as forgetting how to spell simple words, making grammar errors in writing, or not understanding oral directions. But these behaviors are also typical of learners of a new language and would be expected for illiterate persons. Other questions have cultural values that ESOL students may not share, such as using time wisely or feeling good about oneself. Or there are questions about things unknown in other cultures, such as special education placement, or previous diagnosis of a learning problem. In other words, these screening tools are inappropriate for ESOL students and if used, could yield scores that may falsely indicate LD.

■ Appropriate informal evaluation of ESOL students

With the need to screen ESOL students increasing, however, some approach must be tried. K-12 settings commonly rely on a whole-student evaluation to eliminate all other possible causes for a student's lack of progress or specific problems in learning, and this strategy is equally useful in adult ESOL. The following five-question process can help educators make decisions about whether a learner probably has LD and whether referral for further diagnosis is needed. If questions one through four are answered affirmatively, the possibility of LD is strong, whereas any negative

answer would indicate that there is probably some other reason for lack of progress.

1. Has the noted problem persisted?

LD is organic, so problems last a lifetime and do not arise suddenly. Typically, persistence is confirmed when learners have made no progress over a year or two, but sometimes teachers notice specific problems like persistent poor spelling or reading comprehension that impede progress to a higher level. Programs should consider not only the duration of the problem, but also whether it has persisted with different teachers and in different types of classes. Then the learner should be told about concerns over his or her progress because the learner may report previous difficulty, either while in school in his or her country or in another program. (NOTE: the term "learning disabilities" should not be used in the discussion, as it is little known in other cultures and translates negatively.) Generally speaking, problems that result from the normal language learning process diminish with time and practice, while those resulting from LD do not. Also, although LD is neurologically based and therefore supersedes a particular language, problems may be more severe in a second language than in a first. Finally, teachers may mistake cultural differences or first language interference problems as behaviors caused by LD, so efforts should be made to find out about those possibilities as well.

2. Has the problem persisted in the face of appropriate, competent instruction?

Because of the many constraints on adult ESOL programs, appropriate across-the-board placement is often impossible. For example, if students are placed on the basis of oral proficiency, the fact that they have never learned to read and spell English may be less important than the fact that they can speak very well. Thus, a student may have poor or non-existent foundation skills in some areas. Before this second question can be answered affirmatively, therefore, a student's skills should be carefully evaluated and needed instruction provided to see if the problem is alleviated. On the other hand, if, after a year in a foundation-level decoding class which includes literacy-level letter recognition, the student persists in not being able to learn the letters, then the question is answered affirmatively automatically.

This newsletter was developed through an Adult Education State Leadership Grant from the Florida Department of Education, Division of Workforce Development.

3. Are there clear strengths and weaknesses in the class setting?

Persons with LD nearly always have specific strengths and weaknesses, a characteristic that differentiates them from learners with overall low learning aptitude. While the student may appear to have only weaknesses in a reading class, a closer look may reveal strong oral skills, a clear sense of organization, or a strong visual memory. Moreover, depression, stress, or poor health will more likely affect all areas of learning, not just specific ones. These observations should be limited to the classroom for this question.

4. Are there clear strengths and weaknesses OUTSIDE the classroom and school?

Adult ESOL teachers often have little idea of what their students' lives are like beyond school. Yet the teacher who sees only a discouraged, unsuccessful student in class may be surprised to learn that the student organizes all the activities at his church, or has negotiated all the tangles of bureaucracy to obtain services for her children at their school. This type of information is valuable in confirming that the student in fact has strategies for learning and probably learns in other ways than those the classroom demands. Strengths such as good social skills, promptness or quick learning of American social values, such as calling when absent, are important, too.

5. Is the problem preventing the student from reaching an academic or life goal such as a test, license, or diploma?

This question helps evaluators decide if formal LD diagnosis is necessary. Students cannot obtain legally mandated accommodations without documentation of their learning problem; however, some are learning English merely to better themselves, or communicate with health providers or children's teachers. In this case, referral for testing may not be advisable since the diagnostic process is risky for ESOL students. Few diagnosticians are available who are experienced with non-English speakers or the problems that testing such persons presents. Instead, the information from questions one to four can help in planning more appropriate instruction and helping the learner develop strategies to compensate for the challenges she/he has.

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Assistive Technology and Accommodations



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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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.

Instruction for adults with learning disabilities often needs to be provided over a long period of time. In fact, practitioners who are considered effective with adults with learning disabilities have been described as relentless. Because mastery of critical information will require more time for adults with learning disabilities than for other learners, you must plan for an extended instructional journey if mastery is to be attained.

(Source: Bridges to Practice. Guidebook 4)

Practitioners' Points is a publication of Florida Human Resources Development, Inc.

Practitioners' Points

Volume 2, Issue 3

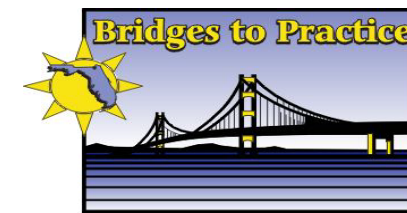
Disabilities in the Florida Department of Corrections

By Barbara McAnelly, Assistant Bureau Chief, Education and Transition, Florida Department of Corrections, Special Education

The Florida Department of Corrections (FDC) houses males and females convicted of felony charges with sentences over one year in length. Currently the FDC houses over 72,000 inmates in major correctional institutions, work camps, road prisons, and work release centers statewide. Of that population, over 5,000 inmates are considered youthful offenders between the ages of 14 and 24. FDC houses 1,707 inmates under the age of 22 with verified histories of receiving special education services while in public schools. This means that 31% of the youthful offender population has verified disabilities. Specifically, there are 42% with Learning Disabilities, 44% with Severe or Emotional Handicaps, 12% with Educable Mentally Handicaps, and 2% who have Speech and/or Language Impairments.

The FDC has been proactive in the identification and provision of services to inmates with disabilities by developing a process called "Exit Upon Entry." This "Exit Upon Entry" process has an established screening process for inmates with disabilities as part of the reception process (intake). In addition to the screening, the inmate with a disability provides information about goals for education, employment, communication, transition, and daily living skills in regard to incarceration and release. This information is utilized to appropriately place inmates with disabilities at institutions with specialized staff that can assist with the educational process.

"While no definitive evidence exists to establish a predisposition towards a life of crime, there certainly is enough evidence to indicate the likelihood that a greater percentage of persons with disabilities will become incarcerated than persons without disabilities. The Florida Department of Corrections (FDC) will continue to educate and transition inmates with disabilities, regardless of age or the reason for incarceration." B. McAnelly, Florida Department of Corrections



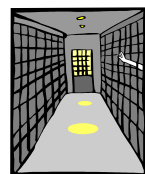
Florida's Focus on Adults with Learning Disabilities

Funding for the supplemental aids and services for the under 22 population with disabilities is provided through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a federal grant program for students with disabilities. As a final step in the "Exit Upon Entry" process, Transition Assistance Specialists provide inmates with disabilities community contacts and pertinent information for their transition back into the community. Those who are eligible to return to public schools are provided contact information about who to see and where to go to re-enroll. Inmates who are unable or ineligible to return to public schools are provided contact information for Adult Education Centers and literacy programs in their home community.

In contrast, the Department houses over 67,000 inmates over the age of 24. Within this population, many were incarcerated prior to their 22nd birthday and have verified disabilities. Add the youthful offender population and those who continue to be incarcerated following their 22nd birthday to the rest of the general population who may have been incarcerated prior to identification procedures, and one will find that approximately 60%-65% of the FDC general population has a disability.

While the established screening process for inmates over the age of 22 is not as intensive as the screening process governing the population under 22, the FDC still has the capability to verify disabilities during the reception process.

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



This information is transferred to the education department at the institution to which the inmate is permanently assigned. Classroom teachers and Test Administrators will review the available educational histories and testing information to determine if patterns exist that replicate common characteristics of learning disabilities and other exceptionalities. Teachers will utilize learning style inventories and basic processing skills tests to determine the strengths and weaknesses of all inmates. This information helps to identify those inmates with learning disabilities, and create an instructional environment that is supportive and builds on the strengths of all the inmates, including those with disabilities. Federal funding is unavailable to assist with the education of inmates with disabilities over the age of 22.

The Department utilizes legislatively appropriated funding for educational services and supplements educational programs with funding from the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. This funding operates numerous Literacy Tutoring Programs within correctional institutions. These programs offer inmates with disabilities the opportunity to participate in the educational process without having to be in the traditional educational setting that caused frustration and stress in the public school system.

There are established procedures for the provision of both educational and transition services for incarcerated. Specific procedures relating to special ed. services for inmates under 22 and adults with disabilities are also in place. The FDC tries to ensure that all inmates with disabilities, regardless of age, are provided the educational assistance and guidance needed to be successful in the educational environment. Classroom teachers and other correctional staff are provided training on the common characteristics of various types of exceptionalities as well as strategies,



modifications, and interventions that can be utilized in the educational, work, and treatment settings within the correctional institutions. This approach helps all correctional staff to deal more effectively not only with disabled inmates, but with all inmates in general.

In viewing the disabled population represented in the FDC, one would have to question the relationship between disabilities and incarceration. While no definitive evidence exists to establish a predisposition towards a life of crime, there certainly is enough evidence to indicate the likelihood that a greater percentage of persons with disabilities will become incarcerated than persons without disabilities. The FDC will continue to educate and transition inmates with disabilities, regardless of age or the reason for incarceration.



(See *LINKAGES*, Vol. 3, #2, Fall 1996 for Barbara McAnelly's complete article on "Exit Upon Entry" along with additional articles about correctional education for learning disabled adults. The full text is available at http://www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/adult_correctional_education_programs.html)

"It is estimated that 3-10% of adults in this country have learning disabilities. While many of these individuals have succeeded in postsecondary educational settings and employment, a large number have not achieved a level of literacy needed to function effectively within society. These low levels of literacy interfere with employment opportunities, educational goals, self-esteem, and empowerment. Reports indicate that 50% of adults who have LD are involved in adult literacy, basic education, and job-training programs. In fact, it is suggested that these adults are the largest subgroup in these programs. This should alert us to the fact that significant numbers of adults with LD do not receive appropriate services. They require intervention that is specific to their needs."
(Shapiro, J., Rich, R., *Facing Learning Disabilities in the Adult Years*, 1999.)

"If you can't learn one way, they need to try another, but most teachers won't try or don't know how to." (Comments from an adult with learning disabilities, Smith, Sally, *Succeeding Against the Odds*, 1992.)



TWO FRAMEWORKS OF LD-APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTION

-A student's failure to learn means that we have not yet found the way to teach them-

► DIRECT INSTRUCTION MODEL

Adults who have great difficulty in learning to read or spell with fluency as a result of a language-based learning disability may require direct instruction in English word structure to be able to decode a 3-letter word. One such approach is the Orton-Gillingham approach in which the student is taught isolated sounds (phonemes) as units and then how to blend them into syllables and words. The student masters the concepts by hearing, speaking, seeing, and writing using a multi-sensory structured language approach. Direct instruction also offers a structure for teaching more advanced skills, such as how to paraphrase a reading passage or write a four-paragraph essay. The four essential phases include:

PHASE 1: Provide Objectives, Establish Expectations, and Introduce the Skill

- Provide clear, precise overview in a minimum of words. Use vocal inflection and pause consistently to emphasize key points and to be sure that the student is paying attention and is ready to learn. Student motivation will increase if you provide a rationale for the information to be taught as well as make a connection to previously learned skills.

PHASE 2: Introduce and Model the Skill

- Present the skill step-by-step and model it. Present it visually and orally to assist the student in identifying the steps as they are modeled. Ask the learner to listen to your self-talk or to "think alouds," which demonstrates the thinking skill steps.

PHASE 3: Guided Practice with Feedback

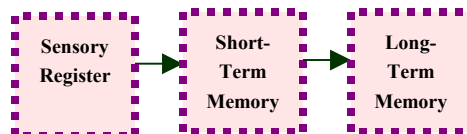
- Provide a series of experiences to allow the learner to try out the skill as you carefully monitor performance. Feedback should be immediate and specific. Praise what was done well and provide corrective feedback followed by another chance to do the skill correctly.

PHASE 4: Independent Practice and Generalization

- Have the learner complete tasks without assistance, e.g., through homework. Plan with the learner where to use the skill that will generalize to other environments.

► INFORMATION PROCESSING MODEL

Information-processing theory arises from work in cognitive psychology. To learn new information, materials must be input through one or more of our senses, attended to, perceived, and remembered.



According to the information-processing theory, signals or experiences are first received through the sense of **vision, hearing, touch, taste, or smell**. They reach the **Sensory Register**, where they are held briefly for rapid recognition. If preserved, the signals are sent to **Short-Term Memory**, often referred to as working memory. This is a temporary storage center, with about 5-20 seconds allotted for conscious attention and processing. We have just a very brief amount of time to attend, perceive, and think about the information, then either send it to **Long-Term Memory** or "bump it" and displace it by new signals.

This theory is very useful when working with individuals with learning disabilities because it helps practitioners think about how information can be most clearly and explicitly presented so that the learner is actively involved in the learning process.

INPUT: For most individuals, and especially those with LD, the more modalities that are used the better the chance that the input will be remembered.

ATTENTION: An individual with LD may be paying attention to things other than the lesson. For example, during a lesson on a short /a/ sound, the learner may be paying attention to the rain outside the window or what the instructor is wearing rather than the content. In another situation, the learner may be paying attention to the information presented by the teacher, but not the critical attributes of the lesson. In a lesson using words that begin with /b/, such as banjo, ball, or band, the learner may be paying attention to the meaning of the words rather than the sound of the first letter. The practitioner must clearly identify to the learner what should be the focus of their attention.

PERCEPTION: Based on a person's specific disability, that individual may have difficulty interpreting information from one or more channels. A person with an auditory processing problem may misperceive what is said to him or her. The statement, "She is very bad" could be misinterpreted as "She was very mad." Yet, the person with a visual perceptual problem may read slowly because of the difficulty discriminating /b/ from /d/.

SHORT-TERM MEMORY: When an individual has to remember an unfamiliar telephone number in order to make a telephone call, he/she must perform "mental work" to keep the information active. In this case, the individual might keep repeating the numbers while dialing. If a learner does not perform some "mental work" like self-questioning, thinking about how new information fits with what he or she already knows or looks for patterns in new information, the information that enters working memory is lost.



LONG-TERM (WORKING) MEMORY: Many individuals with disabilities do not automatically take in new information and connect it with what they have already learned. Use of mnemonics, concept maps, visual images, and graphic displays can help learners see how information is organized and aid long-term memory.



SUMMARY: The **DIRECT INSTRUCTION** model can assist us in learning skills and procedures, whereas, the **INFORMATION-PROCESSING** model directs us in how to help the learner develop higher-order thinking skills so that he or she can:

- Develop strategies to attack tasks,
- Remember information through the use of graphics and images, and
- Use stories and episodes from his or her life to attach meaning to experience.

The **SMARTER** planning and teaching routine discussed in the previous two issues of Practitioners' Points* incorporates key elements from both of these models. (*Volume 2, Issues 1 & 2 at <http://www.floridatechnet.org/bridges>)

"I always had significant memory problems...If I was told to do things, twelve seconds later, it was gone...I couldn't follow the steps to a task."
(Shapiro, J., Rich, R., *Facing Learning Disabilities in the Adult Years*, 1999.)

-Memory is necessary for learning...it is the only evidence that something has been learned!



STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING MEMORY & LEARNING

Difficulty with memory tasks is a well-reported symptom of a learning disability that may be caused by:

- Time Delay-** Too much time may elapse to process the information so it never moves from Short-Term (STM) to Long-Term Memory (LTM).
- Non-Essential Information-** Student focuses on non-essential information and has no prior knowledge or experience to "hook" up with the new information.
- Interference-** Student confuses sound-symbols, e.g., /d/p/b/q/g/. It takes 40 opportunities to rehearse information for it to go from STM to LTM. It takes 200 opportunities for individuals with LD or mental retardation to move from STM to LTM.
- Physical Trauma-** Traumatic brain injury dramatically affects memory and ability to retain information.
- Disability Inhibits Demonstration or Retrieval of Information-** It is reported that 95-98% of students are asked to demonstrate learning through pencil and paper tasks, putting people with disabilities at a disadvantage.

Strategies to enhance memory include:

- Gaining the Learner's Attention**
 - Cue and use contrast, create emotion, determine a purpose, and organize the content for learning.
- Activating Prior Knowledge**
 - Find the knowledge and experience that the student has and get them "hooked" with the new experience.
- Involving Student Actively in Learning**
 - Use cooperative learning, reciprocal teaching/learning, hands-on learning and role-playing projects.
- Constructing Meaning from Content**
 - Build vocabulary, use graphic organizers, include drawings and illustrations, incorporate problem-solving techniques, organizing and clarifying learning techniques, and interdisciplinary/thematic instruction.
- Demonstrating/Applying Understanding**
 - Use QAR to understand questions, write learning logs, summarize, discuss and allow oral presentations, creative projects to demonstrate understanding/measure performance.

(Dr. Tes Mehrig, Dean, The Teachers College Emporia State University, CEC Presentation, 2001.)