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Students with Learning Disabilities in Transition to College: Challenges, Rewards, and Supports

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Overview

- **What is a learning disability?**
- **Kinds of LD & processing difficulties**
- **Learning strategies**
- **Classroom concerns**
- **Discussion and questions**

A Learning Disability …

- **is a neurologically-based disorder of processing information**
- **impacts listening, thinking, speaking, reading, written language, spelling and/or math**
- **often exists in the presence of notable strengths**
- **is lifelong, but manifests differently over time**

but is not a…

- **type of mental retardation/low intelligence**
- **psychiatric disorder**
- **physical disability**
- **lack of motivation**

Common Types of LD and AD/HD

LANGUAGE-BASED LD

Listening (Receptive Language)

Easily overloaded by auditory input, especially directions or detail-filled talk

Visual or kinesthetic (hands-on) channels are often stronger

Reading (Receptive Language)

Speed, accuracy, vocabulary, comprehension, main concept vs. detail

Oral Expression (Expressive Language)

Thinking of what to say; finding words; conceptualizing parts and whole; elaboration

Written Expression (Expressive Language)

Ideation, organization, sentence structure, grammar, spelling, proofreading

NON-VERBAL LD

Social skills

Can miss social cues; misinterpret non-verbal communication

Part-whole understanding

Miss the forest for the trees; focus on detail at expense of big picture in writing/reading comprehension

Math

Difficulty with math concepts; visual spatial understanding

AD/HD Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Attention

Trouble maintaining attention, focusing for long stretches of time; occasional hyperactivity cases. Medication is common and can affect alertness, sleep, eating.

Executive Function

Difficulty with organizing, planning, starting, monitoring, remembering to do, completing, sense of time, studying effectively, keeping track of belongings and due dates

Sources of Processing Difficulty

Memory: Storage and Retrieval

Input/output path: visual, auditory, kinesthetic; verbal or non-verbal; conceptual: organization of associations; retrieval fluency

Short Term or Working Memory

Trouble multi-tasking, such as listening and copying from the board simultaneously

Processing Speed

Slow compared to other abilities; extended time critical

Visual-Motor Skills

Trouble copying/writing quickly, tracking from question to answer sheet (scantron); poor handwriting

Visual Detail

Difficulty with charts, graphs, numbers, mathematical signs

Sequencing

Following directions, steps, or logic in order

Auditory

Sound awareness; breaking down auditory input

Developmental Education Concepts

Scaffolding:

Teach and assess in incremental steps within a larger context

Universal Design:

Inclusive classroom construction; consider all kinds of learners

Feedback:

Immediate, concrete, specific, frequent and balanced

Models:

Positive examples and/or rubrics of how to meet expectations

Explicit (vs. implicit):

Detailed and clear; written and oral

Corrective (vs. punitive):

Multiple chances vs. high stakes; strength-based

Collaboration:

Team-work, groups, co-construction

Transitions to College – Differences between High School and College

- **Reduction in feedback**
- **Structure of outside class time**
- **Rules vs. choices**
- **Teachers vs. professors**
- **Responsibility for seeking assistance and advocacy**
- **Nature of course assessment**
- **Effort vs. outcome (product)**

Developmental Teaching Strategies for the Classroom Instructor

Metacognition: Awareness of individual strengths and weaknesses

Syllabus: Explicit and detailed; calendar with dates and assignments due; post updates as schedule changes; checkpoints for long-term projects

Homework: Explained at beginning of class; written

Reading: Every class & in manageable doses; questions to prompt active reading

Class Presentation: Varied; not just lecture: small group, demo, concrete examples from student experience visual supports (keywords, diagrams)

Engagement: Stand up and move time; change activities, active learning environment, student-centered

Lecture Notes: Clear order; provide outline on Blackboard; concept diagrams

Discussion/Student Participation : Prompts prior to class; partner share to start; small group with reporter; allow time to think; jot down questions and thoughts; wait longer for more hands

Texts: On reserve; with good advance organizers, summaries

Mnemonics: Explicitly show how to remember concepts, terms, etc.

Study Guides: Help students see what you think is important

Videos: Use guided questions; structured prompts

Class Lists (names): Helps students find study partners, etc.

Assessment: Frequent and varied ; multiple modes (papers, tests, projects, presentations)

QUESTIONS and COMMENTS

"Parents, professors, friends, etc. often give students unrealistic feedback about their performance which only serves to incapacitate them and stifle their development and growth as human beings."

"How do I cover my content when so many students have so many different learning needs?"

"…the majority of students seem to come to a learning environment with very little real interest in learning and see college as a means to an end to get jobs and make money."

"At what point do we begin to enable students toward learned-helplessness, and when/where do we set limits so students can grow interdependently?"

I have a student who…