

Let's Hang on to Our Hats!  
 What We Know about Learning Disabilities

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I like to define a learning disability as a psychological or neurological impediment to development of adequate perceptual or communication behavior.

Source: Kirk, S. A. (1978). An interview with Samuel Kirk. *Academic Therapy*, p. 617.

“Children with Developmental Imbalances are those who reveal a developmental disparity in psychological processes related to education ...” (p. 28).

“The key characteristic that identifies this child to the observer is the substantial *difference* between the worst and the best of his developing intelligences, or the substantial intraindividual differences noted within the child. The children with large developmental imbalances can be counted on to cause considerable difficulties in any educational program which is based on the assumption that a child’s developmental processes will be within narrow limits” (p. 29).

Source: Gallagher, J. J. (1966). Children with developmental imbalances: A psychoeducational definition. In W. M. Cruickshank (Ed.) *The Teacher of Brain-Injured Children* (pp. 23-43). New York: Syracuse University Press.

“The information provided by this patterning of abilities is much more important than his single mental age score or language scores. While his Binet mental level is listed as between five and six years, his internal variation from three to eight years is the more important educationally diagnostic information. It not only establishes the fact of developmental imbalance, but it locates the areas of specific disability.

Source: Gallagher, J. J. (1966). Children with developmental imbalances: A psychoeducational definition. In W. M. Cruickshank (Ed.) *The Teacher of Brain-Injured Children* (pp. 23-43). New York: Syracuse University Press.

Keogh (1994):

- 1) Unexpected low achievement relative to aptitude and ability
- 2) Deficits and uneven profiles in specific perceptual or cognitive processes
- 3) Evidence of within-child, presumably causal, neurological condition(s) (p. 16)

Source: Keogh, B.K. (1994). A matrix of decision points in the measurement of learning disabilities. In G. R. Lyon (Ed.), *Frames of reference for the assessment of learning disabilities: New views on measurement issues* (pp. 15-26). Baltimore: Brookes.

The consensus of 10 (11) professional organizations that composed the U. S. Department of Education (2002, 2005) LD Roundtable indicated: “the identification of a core cognitive deficit, or a disorder in one or more psychological processes, that is predictive of an imperfect ability to learn is a marker for a specific learning disability.”

Source: Learning Disabilities Roundtable. (2002, July). *Specific learning disabilities: Finding common ground*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from: [http://www.nclld.org/advocacy/Common\\_Ground.doc](http://www.nclld.org/advocacy/Common_Ground.doc)

The concept of Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) is valid, supported by strong converging evidence...  
“neurologically-based and intrinsic to the individual.”

-LD Roundtable, 2002



Hang on to our hats...

“The diagnosis of dyslexia is as precise and scientifically informed as almost any diagnosis in medicine”  
(p. 165).

Shaywitz, S. (2003). *Overcoming dyslexia: A new and complete science-based program for overcoming reading problems at any level*. New York: Alfred Knopf.

Learning disabilities and ADHD also have a genetic component...

Learning Disabilities can range from mild to very severe... and proper intervention affects prognosis...

Learning disabilities are not ability-achievement discrepancies but some students with LD will have discrepancies...

The biggest discrepancy that exists is between the LD definition and how we operationalize it.

Sources:

Hale, J. B., Naglieri, J. A., Kaufman, A. S., & Kavale, K. A. (2004). Specific learning disability classification in the new Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: The Danger of Good Ideas. *The School Psychologist, 58* (1), 6-13, 29.

Kavale, K. A., Kaufman, A. S., Naglieri, J. A., & Hale, J. B. (2005). Changing procedures for identifying learning disabilities: The danger of poorly supported ideas. *The School Psychologist, 59* (1), 16-25.

We know that people make accurate, valid placement decisions not tests or numbers.

An ability- achievement discrepancy is no longer required.

“(6) SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES.—  
“(A) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding section 607(b), when determining whether a child has a specific learning disability as defined in section 602, a local educational agency shall not be required to take into consideration whether a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skill, reading comprehension, mathematical calculation, or mathematical reasoning.  
“(B) ADDITIONAL AUTHORITY.—In determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, a local educational agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures described in paragraphs (2) and (3).

### Response to Intervention (RTI)

- Provides early intervention.
- May reduce the number of referrals.
- Attempts to provide all students with adequate interventions.
- Helps monitor the progress of all students.

### RTI does not...

- Classify
- Individualize
- Diagnose

### What Does RTI Mean for...

- Reading comprehension
- Math problem solving
- Written expression
- Content area learning
- Upper elementary and secondary students

“When I was working as a school psychologist some 50 years ago and received a referral from a teacher about a child who was having trouble learning, the very first thing I did was to visit the teacher to inquire about the problem. I wanted to know what the child was having trouble with. I wanted to know what the teacher had tried that did not work and most importantly, I wanted to know what had been done that had worked.

At that time I had never heard of Response to Intervention (RTI) and I certainly would not have predicted that there were going to be initials to describe what has always been good practice, as a ‘new’ procedure” (p. 151).

Source: Zach, L. J. (2005). Déjà vu all over again: The current controversy over the identification of learning disability. *The School Psychologist*, 59, 151-155.

Learning disabilities are specific patterns of cognitive strengths and weaknesses (intra-individual discrepancies) that differentially impact the development of various aspects of achievement.

Students with LD still need comprehensive evaluations that address cognitive and linguistic processes...

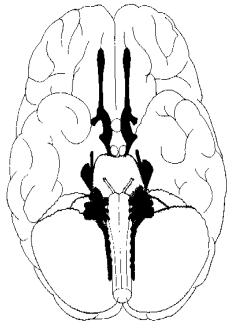
And to find more about the factors that will facilitate performance...

We shouldn't ask:  
How smart you are...

but instead:

How are you smart?

- H. Gardner



Consider other abilities that are not easily assessed by standardized tests... such as creativity, resourcefulness...

Diagnosis must take second place to instruction, and must be made a tool of instruction, not an end in itself.

Source: Cruickshank, W. M. (1977). Least-restrictive placement: Administrative wishful thinking. *JLD, 10*, 193-194.



Dr. Alan Kaufman

... there is a demand for the comprehensive assessment to drive intervention. This is the way it has always been, and this is the way it will always be because the referral questions for children with SLD have always asked, What is wrong? And how can we help? These questions demand differential diagnosis, a large part of which is determined by the cognitive abilities present in the individual child (p. 211).

Source: Kaufman, A. S., Lichtenberger, E. O., Fletcher-Janzen, E., & Kaufman, N. L. (2005). *Essentials of the K-ABC-II Assessment*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Many students with reading disabilities have trouble with phonological awareness and difficulty connecting sounds to print...

### Other Factors Can Affect Basic Reading Skills Development

Attention

Rapid automatized naming (RAN) (quick naming of simple things)

Processing speed (visual scanning speed)

Orthography (recall of spelling patterns)

Working memory (recalling and rearranging stimuli)

Word retrieval (access to stored vocabulary)

### Phonology versus Orthography

Phonology: the sounds of a language

Orthography: the marks of a writing system, including the spelling patterns

Reading and spelling requires both abilities.

**“Decoding is at once the least and yet the most important aspect of reading...”**

***-Gerald Glass, 1973***

Students with reading disabilities need methods that provide...

- structure
- explicit teaching
- feedback
- repetition
- practice

Margaret Rawson’s description of how to teach children with dyslexia:

Students with dyslexia... “need a different approach to learning language from that employed in most classrooms. They need to be taught, slowly and thoroughly, the basic elements of their language- the sounds and the letters which represent them-and how to put these together and take them apart. They have to have their writing hands, eyes, ears, and voices working together in conscious organization and retention of their learning (as cited in Henry, 1998, p. 1).

A variety of instructional programs are effective

“It would seem that, taken as a group, these studies suggest that instruction in small groups with high response rates, immediate feedback, and sequential mastery of topics—all typical of good teaching—are more important than the specific evidence-based program used” (p. 12).

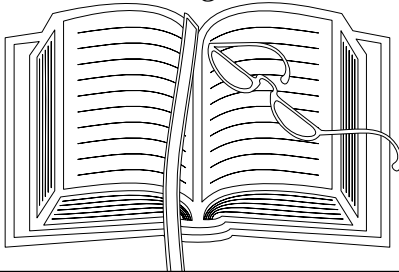
From: Responsiveness to Intervention and Learning Disabilities, A report prepared by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, June 2005.

“A variety of programs must be available for children who have a variety of needs” (p. 194).



Source: Cruickshank, W. M. (1977). Least-restrictive placement: Administrative wishful thinking. *JLD*, 10, 193-194.

***Different People require  
Different Approaches at  
Different Developmental  
Stages***



Older students with LD who have gotten good help with accuracy, often still have issues with fluency and rate.

**Smart People Can Have Learning Disabilities**

People can have scores in the average range, and still have learning disabilities.

One has to consider:

Educational history

Educational opportunities

How the person functions on a daily basis



Hang on to our hats!

“The children of superior mental capacity who fail to learn to read are, of course, spectacular examples of specific reading difficulty since they have such obvious abilities in other fields.” (p. 23)

Source:  
Monroe, M. (1932). *Children who cannot read*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

“But the evaluation for a learning disability is not triggered only by failure. It is designed to determine if the student has a learning disability no matter how well the student is currently performing” (p. 145).

Source:

Martin, R. (2005). The future of learning disabilities as federal laws change again. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 28, 144-146.

Students with learning disabilities need to be given work at the independent level (seatwork and homework) and the instructional level (teacher supported) and never at the frustrational level (too hard without your mother doing it for you).

#### IRREDUCIBLE FACTS FOR TEACHING

1. Differences in learning rate exist.  
Instructional procedures that treat students as equal are bound to be ineffective for either the upper or lower ranges or both.
2. Span of student ability  
Average third-grade class will have a six-grade spread of ability.

Source: Ladas, H.S. (1960). A handbook of irreducible facts for teaching and learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 606-607.

“It is time to resolve the convoluted thinking that mandates the ‘same’ high (‘rigorous’) grade-level standards for all. One of the things that we know for sure in special education is that one size does not fit all, and that the same standards, rigorous or not, will not result in the same outcomes” (p. 248).

Source: Larson, N. W. (2005). “The time has come,” the Walrus said, “to speak of many things!” *LDQ*, 28, 247-248.

“Furthermore, workbooks should be ordered in terms of the reading levels of the pupils in the room. No one can justify ordering thirty similar third-grade workbooks for the thirty dissimilar third-grade pupils found in any classroom in the country” (p. 525).

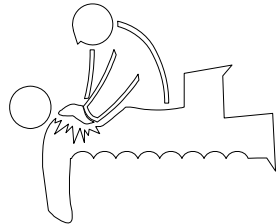
Source:

Betts, E. A. (1946). *Foundations of reading instruction*. New York: American Book Company.

“The students of greatest concern to us were those who were very poor readers at the start of the school year and as a group made no progress, despite being part of responsible inclusion program that received substantial support. We must conclude that full-time placement in the general education classroom with in-class support from special education teachers is not sufficient to meet the needs of these students. They require combined services that include in-class support and daily intensive, one-to-one instruction from highly trained personnel. This is an expensive proposition but appears to be the only solution that will yield growth in reading for students with severe reading disabilities” (p.159).

Source: Klinger, J. K. et al. (1998). Outcomes for students with and without learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 13, 153-161.

“...lower level language mastery is as essential for the literacy teacher as anatomy is for the physician” (Moats, 1994, p. 99).



Knowing what is  
needed  
to help students  
is not  
the same thing as  
being able to provide it.

Kauffman, J. M., Lloyd, J. W., Baker, J., & Riedel, T. M. (1995). Inclusion of all students with emotional or behavioral disorders? Let's think again. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 542-546.

“Slow reading acquisition has cognitive, behavioral, and motivational consequences that slow the development of other cognitive skills and inhibit performance on many academic tasks. In short, as reading develops, other cognitive processes linked to it track the level of reading skill. Knowledge bases that are in reciprocal relationships with reading are also inhibited from further development.

The longer this developmental sequence is allowed to continue, the more generalized the deficits will become, seeping into more and more areas of cognition and behavior. Or to put it more simply and sadly—in the words of a tearful 9-year-old, already failing frustratingly behind his peers in reading progress, ‘Reading affects everything you do.’ ” (p. 390)

Stanovich, K. E. (1986). Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 21, 360-407.

### Students with LD Need Understanding Teachers...

- Sympathetic
- Interested
- Developmental
- Process Oriented
- Inspiring