25 years of progress: New knowledge, better practices, and ongoing questions about working with children and youth with learning differences

David J. Chard, Ph.D.
Dean ad interim
Boston University
Wheelock College of Education and Human Development

Successful Learning Conference
2019
25 Years of Successful Learning: Looking to the Future

William Cruickshank
1915-1992
Progress made, but still work in progress

Improved Public perception

Percentage of Americans Who Say It’s Accurate That “Children With Learning Disabilities Are Just as Smart as You and Me.”

- Somewhat accurate
- Completely accurate

2004: 76% (46%) and 30%
2010: 81% (48%) and 33%

Source: Tremaine Foundation, 2010

79% of Americans and 99% of educators agree that kids learn in different ways.
Increased Expectations

Parents’ Expectations of Students After Graduation: Students With LD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student expected to:</th>
<th>Definitely will</th>
<th>Probably will</th>
<th>Definitely/probably won’t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate from high school with a regular diploma</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend postsecondary school</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eventually get a paid job</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live independently</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, 2003

Increased Expectations

Inclusion in General Education Classrooms in 2015–2016

Source: State of LD (2017), National Center for Learning Disabilities
Advances in research

• Research has resulted in:
  • Improvements in identification
  • Standards for identifying research-based practices
  • Documented effective practices in teaching:
    • Academic skills
    • Non-cognitive behaviors
  • Application of research findings across populations

What are Learning Disabilities?

Learning Disabilities refer to a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency. Learning disabilities result from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering or learning. These include but are not limited to: language processing; phonological processing; visual spatial processing; processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions (e.g., planning and decision-making).
Trends in Identification

• Multi-tier models are now used throughout the U.S. (Al-Otaiba, 2014)
• The law offers an option to use RTI to identify students with LD; but decisions remain unstable (Spencer et al., 2014)
• Growing evidence that we can identify students who need Intensive Intervention without “wait-to-fail” (Greulich et al., 2014)
• Evidence regarding intensive and customized intervention is still emerging (Kearns & Fuchs, 2013; Al-Otaiba, 2014).

Promise and Limitations of Response-to-Intervention

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Legal Advocacy Remains Vital

• *Endrew F vs. Douglas County School District*
  "an educational program reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child’s circumstances, not an education that is just a little bit more than nothing."

Advances in research

Research has resulted in:
• Improvements in identification
• Standards for identifying research-based practices
• Documented effective practices in teaching:
  • Academic skills
  • Non-cognitive behaviors
• Application of research findings across populations
Obstacles and opportunities

Lack of Commitment to funded research

President’s Budget (2011)
### Public perception

#### Parents

**Myths About Learning and Attention Issues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth</th>
<th>Fact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40% of parents believe</td>
<td>Learning and attention issues are not serious and do not require evaluation for special education for learning issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are given too much work</td>
<td>Most parents believe that when it comes to learning and attention issues, they can help their children without professional assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are not working hard</td>
<td>Children are not working hard enough with learning and attention issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with learning disabilities are too intelligent to help other children</td>
<td>Children with learning and attention issues are often intelligent and can help other children with learning and attention issues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Educators

- 33% of classroom teachers and other educators believe sometimes what people call “learning or attention issues is really just simple

- 61% of classroom teachers say they are somewhat or not very confident in their ability to implement OSHA guidelines.

#### Healthcare Professionals

- 66% of healthcare professionals say they are somewhat or not too confident about recommending evaluations for learning issues.

- 20% of healthcare professionals say they are confident in identifying learning and attention issues.

- 52% of healthcare professionals say they are somewhat or not too confident in identifying learning and attention issues.

**Source:** A survey commissioned by the National Academy of Medicine and conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago, August 2017. The survey was conducted online with a nationally representative sample of 1,200 parents of school-aged children. Data were weighted to ensure the sample is representative of all households with school-aged children and to allow for inferences to the general population of parents. All responses were coded into one of five age categories of children, ages 5-12, and surveyed from August with parental consent for children under 12.
Diminished Community Identity

Inadequate Number of Teachers

Reasons for the shortages:
- Poor work conditions
- Few incentives
- Fewer qualified faculty
- Limited supply of teachers willing to work in certain communities
- Credentialing barriers
- Inconsistent professional preparation
Inadequate Professional Preparation

Extent of the shortages:
- 49 US States report shortage of special education teachers and related service personnel
- Special education teachers leave at nearly twice the rate of general education teachers.
- 51% of school districts and 90% of high poverty school districts report difficult recruiting special education teachers.
- Ratio of SWD to special education teachers is higher than ratio of all students to general education teachers.

Establish consistent, practice-based curriculum 
Focus on core set of practices (e.g., HLPs for students with learning and attention issues) 
Create standard expectations for induction with assessment prior to certification 
Develop standards for ongoing professional development

Why our work remains important: The Consequences

Students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) are
31% more likely than students without disabilities to experience high levels of being bullied.

Students with other health impairments (OHI)—many of whom have ADHD—are
43% more likely than students without disabilities to experience high levels of being bullied.

Source: State of LD (2017)
Disproportionate Impact

The Consequences

2013 NAEP Scores

Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Students without disabilities</th>
<th>Students with any type of disability (SWD)</th>
<th>Students with specific learning disabilities (SLD)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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Math

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Early Reading Issues and Later Challenges

McLaughlin et al. (2014) found that participants with RD at age 7 were:

- 74% less likely to have attained a high level of education by their late 30s and early 40s
- 56% less likely to have attained a high level of income by midlife ($>60,000)

When controlling for family educational and economic background and demographic variables.

- Impacts of RD in early childhood continue to be felt in midlife.

The Consequences

18% of students with SLD dropped out in 2013–2014, compared to 6.5% of all students

205 Average number of students with SLD that year who dropped out each school day nationwide
The Consequences

Young Adults With LD: Involvement in Criminal Justice System

- 52% Stopped by police for offense other than traffic violation
- 32% Arrested
- 16% Spent a night in jail
- 16% Have been on probation or parole
- 55% of young adults with LD reported having some type of involvement with the criminal justice system within eight years of leaving high school

Source: National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, 2011

Additional Issues to Consider

- Personalized Learning
- Charter Schools
- ESSA Related Policy Changes
- Pay for Success Initiatives
- Development versus Education
Call to Action

- Continue to do high quality research
- Expand advocacy efforts
- Innovate in teacher education
- Recruit and support teachers
- Re-energize our professional community

Select References