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TEXT: WHAT IS MEANT BY "LEARNING DISABILITIES"?

Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, defines learning disabilities (LD) as a "disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations."

The definition further states that LD includes perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. According to the law, LD does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor

handicaps; mental retardation, or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

Also required is a severe discrepancy between the child's potential (as measured by IQ) and his or her current status (as measured by achievement tests).

It is unfortunate that in practice the LD child may be a student who does not fit into any other category but still has problems learning to read, spell, write, solve arithmetic problems, or function in school. This often makes LD a "dumping ground" for students who need remedial education.

HOW MANY STUDENTS HAVE LEARNING DISABILITIES?

A wide range of prevalence estimates have appeared in the literature--anywhere from 1% to 30% of the general population-- perhaps reflecting the variations in definitions. The most widely agreed upon range is 2% to 3%.

WHAT ARE SOME TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS WHO HAVE LEARNING DISABILITIES?

Students who are learning disabled may exhibit a wide range of traits, including poor reading comprehension, spoken language, writing, and reasoning ability. Hyperactivity, inattention, and perceptual coordination problems may also be associated with LD, but are not examples of LD. Other traits that may be present include a variety of symptoms of brain dysfunction, including uneven and unpredictable test performance, perceptual impairments, motor disorders, and emotional characteristics such as impulsiveness, low tolerance for frustration, and maladjustment.

The major types of LD may be broken into disorders in four areas:

--Spoken language: Delays, disorders, and deviations in listening and speaking.
--Written language: Difficulties with reading, writing, and spelling. --Arithmetic: Difficulty in performing arithmetic functions or in comprehending basic concepts. --Reasoning: Difficulty in organizing and integrating thoughts.

WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF LEARNING DISABILITIES?

Although there exist many teaching programs designed especially for LD children, Reynolds and Birch (1982) have suggested that the instruction required by most children who are called LD, educable mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, or behavior disordered is not readily distinguishable. A team approach is advocated to provide for their education in the mainstream setting.

Myers and Hammill (1982) underlined the importance for resource or special class teachers to match instructional systems in use in the regular classroom. Such an approach allows for discovering ways to modify the system for particular students as

well as preparing them to return to the regular program.

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Schoonover, R.J. HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES. (Interstate Printers & Publishers, Inc., Danville, IL 61832)

Stevens, S.H. THE LEARNING DISABLED CHILD: WAYS THAT PARENTS CAN HELP. 1980. (John F. Blair Publisher, 1406 Plaza Dr., S.W., Winston-Salem, NC 27103)

Taylor, J.F. THE HYPERACTIVE CHILD AND THE FAMILY: THE COMPLETE WHAT-TO-DO HANDBOOK. 1980. (Everest House, 1133 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036)

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Myers, P.I., and D.D. Hammill. LEARNING DISABILITIES. BASIC CONCEPTS, ASSESSMENT PRACTICES, AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES. 1982. (Pro-Ed, 5341 Industrial Oaks Blvd., Austin, TX 78735)

Osman, B.B. NO ONE TO PLAY WITH: THE SOCIAL SIDE OF LEARNING DISABILITIES. 1982. (Random House, Inc., 201 E. Fiftieth St., New York, NY 10022)

Reynolds, M.C., and J.W. Birch. TEACHING EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN IN ALL AMERICA'S SCHOOLS. 1982. (The Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Dr., Reston, VA 22091)

Zigmond, N., J. Sansone, S.E. Miller, K.A. Donahoe, and R. Kohnke. TEACHING LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS AT THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL. 1986. (The Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Dr., Reston VA 22091)

RESOURCES

Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities 4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234 412/341-1525

Association of LD Adults P.O. Box 9722 Friendship Station Washington, DC 20016

Orton Dyslexia Society 724 York Road Baltimore MD 21204 301/296-0232 Publication:
BULLETIN OF THE ORTON SOCIETY

FOR MORE INFORMATION

COMPUTER SEARCH REPRINTS from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) are annotated bibliographies from the ERIC and Exceptional Child Education Resources databases. Among REPRINT titles are the following:

#507 "Learning Disabled Adolescents: Programs, Curriculum, Teaching Methods" #525 "Learning Disabled Elementary School Students: Programs, Curriculum Guides, Teaching Methods" #546 "Learning Disabilities: Definitions, Assessment, and Eligibility Criteria"

REPRINTS are available from Publication Sales, The Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston VA 22091-1589

CEC CUSTOM COMPUTER SEARCHES can provide a bibliography with abstracts in a special interest area related to the education of learning disabled students.

DIVISION PUBLICATIONS such as THE DLD TIMES, a newsletter of The Division for Learning Disabilities is available through membership in CEC's LD division. For information, contact CEC Department of Member and Unit Services, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091-1589.

LEARNING DISABILITY FOCUS (twice yearly) and LEARNING DISABILITIES RESEARCH (twice yearly). For subscription information, contact CEC, Department of Member and Unit Services, 1920 Association Drive, Reston VA 22091-1589.

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