STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES AND POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS: TRANSITIONING AND REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

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Students with Learning Disabilities and Post-Secondary Institutions: Transitioning and Reasonable Accommodations

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Paper #1

The Nature and Characteristics of Individuals with Learning Disabilities

Paper #2

Literature Review on Transitioning Individuals with Learning Disabilities to the Post-Secondary Level

Paper #3

Defining Contemporary Understanding of "Reasonable Accommodation" at the Post-Secondary Level

The Nature and Characteristics of Individuals with Learning Disabilities

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Abstract

"Learning disabilities" (LD) refer to a number of disorders, that may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding, or use of verbal or non-verbal information (Siegal, 1999)." These disorders affect learning in people who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. When one considers the definition of LD and its direct impact on learning, it is not surprising that one of the areas of life most affected by learning disabilities is education. This paper synthesized information on the history and current definitions of the term LD, and investigated the link with research as to the neurobiological basis of a LD. How to diagnose a LD and who is qualified to diagnose a LD are researched and the nature and characteristics of individuals with LD are reviewed. The paper concludes with a discussion of the legal obligations that exist in Canada for postsecondary institutions to provide "reasonable accommodations" for individuals with learning disabilities. Based on the literature, there is need for continued research in the area of LD.

The Nature and Characteristics of Individuals with Learning Disabilities

Introduction

The learning disabilities (LD) field is an extremely complex yet fascinating field of study in the area of education. Individuals with LD have been the focus of various studies and educational research designed to help professionals gain a better understanding of this phenomenon. Studies (for e.g. Westby, 1999 and Siegal, 1999) have included research in areas such as: determining an appropriate, universally accepted definition; deciding how to assess and diagnosis; proper placement in educational programs; determining what is considered reasonable supports and/or accommodations, and deciding on suitable transition procedures. Research in the field of LD is evolving, and each day there is additional information and findings being reported, therefore it is vital to get the appropriate information to all necessary stakeholders.

LD affects approximately 10% of our population. In Canada this equates to more than 3 million people being identified as having some degree of a LD (Learning Disabilities Association Canada (LDAC), 2002). Recent research, (Westby, 1999) has shown that the category of LD has the highest growth rate among all categories of disabilities in postsecondary institutions. As more colleges and universities begin to admit individuals with LD, it is becoming more apparent that the services and programs students receive in junior high and secondary schools for their disability ought to be examined with the purpose of strengthening support services at the tertiary level. Long-term transitioning is a core criterion for each student's IEP (Individual Education Plan) including students diagnosed with a learning disability. Exploring the topic of

individuals with LD at the post-secondary level is crucial to the success of these individuals as they progress through life.

The goal of this paper is to review the past and current literature on the nature and characteristics of individuals with LD in order to emphasize current awareness in the field and attempt to answer questions concerning learning disabilities. Some questions that will be addressed include:

- What is a learning disability?
- How to diagnose a learning disability?
- What literature says regarding the neurological basis of a learning disability?
- What are the nature and characteristics of learning disabilities?
- What Human Rights legislation protect individuals with learning disabilities?

History of Learning Disabilities

Researchers, (for e.g. Hinshelwood, Orton, Kirk) in the fields of medicine, psychology, and education have studied children, and to a much lesser extent, adolescents with learning problems since the early 1890's. As early as the nineteenth century children who had eluded traditional categories of exceptionality had come to the attention of three perceptive British physicians working with boys in the school system. One of these physicians, eye surgeon Dr. James Hinshelwood, attempted to correlate his knowledge of patients who had received cerebral insult through disease or trauma with similar symptoms he saw in children who suffered from reading problems without any plausible reason. In 1917 he published his monograph Congenital Word Blindness and his term "word blindness" is still used in England to refer to dyslexia (LDAC, 1981).

Later, in the 1930's an American psychiatrist Dr.Samuel Orton noted that children who suffered from learning problems for no apparent reason often displayed "mixed laterality" (laterality is the process by which a person develops an awareness of the existence of two sides of the body, and ability to recognize these two sides as right and left). He suggested that the failure of one hemisphere of the brain to become dominant caused the disorder. Today, factors around hemispheric dominance are still considered important in the field of LD although Orton's original theory has not been substantiated (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC), 1981).

Since that time other researchers, (for e.g. Kirk, Paine) and professionals attempted to distinguish between individuals with an inability to learn and individuals who displayed short attention span, purposeless activity, and poor schoolwork.

Samuel Kirk, a prominent psychologist and special educator in the United States, and one of the most influential figures in the history of special education and especially LD, has been credited for first coining the term "learning disability" (LDAC, 1996). He questioned the appropriateness, for educational purposes, of the many medically-oriented terms such as dyslexia, congenital word blindness and minimal brain dysfunction, and so instead, he proposed the term "learning disability," still prominent today (The Australian National University, 1994).

By 1963, under the chairmanship of an American neurologist, Dr. Richmond Paine, task forces were established to investigate LD. By that time the field of LD had attained particular prominence in education, medicine, and psychology. At this time, parent groups were exerting pressure for appropriate services for their children, and this was a key factor the formation of the task forces.

According to the LDAC (2002) a definition of a learning disability generated by The United States National Advisory Council on Handicapped Children in 1967 did generate a great deal of activity in the field but it did not promote consensus amongst professionals because it referred only indirectly to etiological factors. The LDAC outline since this time the field of LD has been characterized by conflict and confusion because the term "learning disabilities" has been stretched to include all children who were underachieving for whatever reason.

Despite 40 years of discussion, the learning disability field still has difficulty distinguishing between students with a learning disability and students with other types of learning problems.

Defining Learning Disability

Finding an operational definition for the concept of LD has been a bone of contention within the field since Kirk first coined the term in 1962. A functional definition is still an unresolved issue today. However, despite its lack of specificity, the concept of specific LD has considerable support among professionals in the field (Shaw et al, 1995).

The United States National Advisory Council on Handicapped Children in 1967 developed a definition for LD. This definition was developed primarily for the purpose of guiding funding practices associated with United States' federal school legislation (The Australian National University, 1994). The LDAC (1981) states:

> Children with specific LD exhibit a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written languages. These can be manifested in disorders of listening, thinking, talking,

> reading, writing, spelling or arithmetic. They include conditions which have been referred to as perceptual handicaps – brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, developmental aphasia, etc. They do not include learning problems basically due to visual, hearing or motor handicaps, to mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or to environmental disadvantage. (p.6)

In 1990 eleven different conceptual definitions of LD that were in use or experienced past popularity were examined, and five common elements that existed in all definitions were identified. The five common elements included: task failure, achievement-potential discrepancy, etiological factors, exclusionary factors, and dysfunctions in one or more of the psychological factors (Shaw et al, 1995). They argue that the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities' (NJCLD) definition of LD, written in 1994, was supported among most, if not all, professionals involved in the field. That definition is as follows:

> *Learning disabilities* is a general term that refers to heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Even though a learning disability may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (i.e. sensory impairment, mental retardation, social and emotional disturbance) or environmental influences (e.g., cultural differences,

insufficient/inappropriate instruction, psychogenic factors), it is not the result of those conditions. (p.588)

A functional definition is still an unresolved issue within the LD field even today. However, in January, 2002, the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) adopted the following, more comprehensive definition to operationalize the term:

> Learning Disabilities refer to a number of disorders, which may affect the acquisition, 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.
>
> LD results 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).
>
> Learning disabilities range in severity and may interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following:
>
> - oral language (e.g. listening, speaking, understanding);
> - reading (e.g. decoding, phonetic knowledge, word recognition, comprehension);
> - written language (e.g. spelling and written expression);
> - mathematics (e.g. computation, problem solving).
>
> Learning disabilities may also involve difficulties with organizational skills, social perception, social interaction, and perspective taking.

Learning disabilities are lifelong. The way in which they are expressed may vary over an individual's lifetime, depending on the interaction between the demands of the environment and the individual's strengths and needs. The existence of learning disabilities are revealed by unexpected academic achievement, maintained only be unusually high levels of support.

Learning disabilities are due to genetic and/or neurological factors or injury that alters brain functioning in a manner that affects one or more processes related to learning. These disorders are not due primarily to hearing and/or vision problems, socio-economic factors, cultural or linguistic differences, lack of motivation or ineffective teaching, although these factors may further complicate the challenges faced by individuals with learning disabilities. Learning disabilities may co-exist with various conditions including attentional, behavioural and emotional disorders, sensory impairments or other medical conditions.

For success, individuals with learning disabilities require early identification and timely specialized assessments and interventions involving home, school, community, and workplace settings. The interventions need to be appropriate for each individual's learning disability subtype and, at a minimum, include the provision of:

- specific skill instruction;
- accommodations;
- compensatory strategies; and
- self-advocacy skills. (¶ 1- ¶ 7)

This definition attempts to define LD in a more functional manner then the earlier National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities' definition outlined previously. This

definition will help practitioners diagnose who is truly learning disabled versus those who exhibit characteristics which in some manner may resemble a learning disability.

Neurological Basis of Learning Disabilities

To assist with identifying and diagnosing individuals with LD scientists have conducted several studies of the brain and genetic research to verify that LD are genetic in nature.

Fiedorowicz (1999) discussed how a genetic basis for LD has been confirmed through twin studies, sibling analysis, and family pedigree analysis. Although there is no definitive conclusion, a possible linkage to chromosomes 6 and 15 has been identified. Also, Fiedorowicz described how research has proven through autopsy, CT Scan, and MRI studies, that there are differences in both structure of the brains of subjects with a learning disability versus subjects without a learning disability and the functioning of the brain of individuals with LD compared with those without a learning disability.

Today educators and practitioners must recognize that individuals with LD can learn, but the process may be inefficient as a result of the specific brain structure and function. Fiedorowicz (1999) describes inefficiency to mean either low accuracy or low speed in learning or performing a task, contrasted with an inability or incapacity. This means that information can be processed, but at a slower rate and/or by different methods as compared to individuals without LD. This fact will help professionals diagnose and better handle individuals with LD.

How to Diagnose a Learning Disability

Siegal (1999) describes how difficult it is to clearly identify someone with a learning disability in the absence of a clear, concise definition. Confusion still exists among professionals as to who can be identified as LD. She suggests that to identify who is learning disabled one must first discover whether or not there exists significant difficulties in one or more academic areas. In order to do this she claims, standardized tests are used to compare an individual with others of the same age to determine if he or she has a significant problem. She believes that the process of assessing whether a learning disability exists has been unnecessarily complex. She proposes a modest solution to the problem. Siegal claims that several standardized assessment tools should be used and the choice of tests should be motivated by an analysis of the components of academic achievement (i.e., reading, spelling, writing), as well as the information on the particular test's validity.

Along with administering standardized tests, Siegal (1999) believes that an important part of the assessment is an "analysis of error" committed by the individual. A good assessment should systematically analyze the errors made by individuals to help understand the ineffective strategies used and provide guidelines for remediation.

Siegal (1999) argues that regardless of the tests, the question still remains that a cutoff score must be determined in order for an individual to be identified as learning disabled. She argues that this "cutoff" score is an arbitrary one, but many professionals have used the 25th percentile to help identify who is learning disabled. An intelligence test, which gives a measure of I.Q. (intelligence quotient), Siegal argues, in many cases is administered to identify whether an individual is learning disabled, but she contends it is

not a necessary assessment tool to diagnose a learning disability. She argues cutoff scores and a standard set of tests should be used to identify a learning disability, but it will be difficult to arrive at a consensus amongst professionals on what they should be.

Siegal (1999) made one other additional suggestion in helping to diagnose a learning disabled individual. She suggests a direct interview with the individual to analyze strengths or weaknesses that may have not been detected by the battery of tests that were administered.

Waterman (1994) discusses the components of a comprehensive assessment often administered after an initial screening has been completed, and a formal assessment is deemed necessary. Waterman believes that the assessment process should be conducted by a multidisciplinary team of professionals who are responsible for conducting an assessment in their field of expertise. She further discusses the major areas students are generally assessed to determine if they have a learning disability. Besides intelligence and achievement tests, Waterman suggests tests be administered to assess language, perceptual abilities, and behavioral, emotional/social development.

Waterman (1994) argues that language provides the foundation for a myriad of skills including: communication, problem-solving, as well as expanding, integrating, analyzing, and synthesizing knowledge. Deficits in language, therefore, can have a profound impact on the ability of an individual to learn and function competently and confidently as he or she interacts in the world.

He also states that perceptual abilities are as important as language skills and they need to be thoroughly assessed. Perceptual abilities determine how individuals perceive information and how they respond. She states that the idea of "perceptual deficits" has

long been linked to LD. It is subsequently important to assess an individual's functioning in this domain.

A final assessment area Waterman (1994) discusses is behavior and emotional/social development. Here the assessment team assesses how a student conducts himself or herself in school and how well the individual is socially and emotionally developing in relation to his or her peers.

Once all the data is gathered from the assessment process, the findings are all pooled and the implications are discussed. Each professional then prepares a written report with educational recommendations and insights. The data gathered from all assessment procedures help paint a picture of the strengths and needs of the individual, and are synthesized by all members, to gain a better understanding of the individual's learning profile.

Who can make a Diagnosis?

Many professionals are involved in the diagnosis of LD in schools in Canada and the United States. They include psychologists, educational specialists, and other professionals who work in specialized fields such as speech and language. There are other professionals who may suspect that a learning disability exists but who are not licensed to diagnose the disability (LD On-Line, 2002).

Siegal (1999) raises the question of assessor qualifications for diagnosing a LD. She argues that those who diagnose a learning disability should possess a doctoral degree because they are generally trained in understanding test construction, the properties of tests, and the concepts of reliability and validity. There are others who argue that those who possess a Master's Degree could conceivably make a diagnosis if they have some

understanding of cognitive psychology, basic processes measured by tests, and the processes involved in reading, spelling, arithmetic, and writing so that they are able to interpret test results more appropriately.

This debate of assessor qualifications surfaced in 1999 in a court case in the United States (Guckenberger v. Boston University). Knoecky & Wolinsky (2000) describe how Boston University had required that the students seeking accommodations for LD were required to obtain their diagnosis of a disability either from a licensed physician or psychologist. They say that the judge in this case felt this practice was unlawful and placed enormous burden on applicants to be reassessed even when the applicant had been diagnosed recently by a specialist who had the necessary training and experience to make the diagnosis. In this case the judge accepted an assortment of assessor qualifications for making the diagnosis of LD.

A professional who is knowledgeable about LD, with a strong understanding of measurement and evaluation, test construction, and basic and psychological processes should conduct the evaluation. There is no research that relates the quality of assessment to the qualifications of the evaluator, and this is perhaps because there is no agreement on what constitutes adequate assessment nor is there an operational definition of LD. Until a consensus is reached about what dimensions are necessary and sufficiently diagnose a learning disability, this debate will continue (Siegal, 1999).

Nature and Characteristics of Individuals with Learning Disabilities

A closer examination of the meaning of LD, and the nature and characteristics of those individuals who have been diagnosed with a learning disability, is necessary to gain a clearer picture of their disabilities.

Dr. Silver (2001), a child and adolescent Psychiatrist, a clinical professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University Medical Center, and the current president of the Learning Disabilities Association of America, published an article titled "What are learning disabilities?" Its purpose was to assist parents of individuals with LD understand this complex disorder. His description can help distinguish between the different types or terms educators and professionals may use to describe a learning disability. In his article he outlined a simple scheme describing what the brain must do for learning to take place. An **input** disability may occur when the brain inputs information, primarily done through the eyes and ears. Once the information has arrived, an **integration** disability may occur when the brain needs to make sense of the information, or when the brain must store the information so that later it can be retrieved. Finally, the brain must send some kind of information back to the nerves and muscles, and this is when an **output** disability will manifest itself.

Input Disabilities:

Silver (2001) describes perception as taking in, or perceiving one's environment. In the case of the input process, information arrives at the brain as impulses are transmitted along neurons, primarily through the eyes (visual input) or through the ears (auditory input). He describes two types of input disabilities:

- visual perceptual disability;

- auditory perceptual disability.

(i) Visual Perceptual Disabilities:

Silver states visual perceptual disabilities are manifested in several ways including confusion with perception of letters or numbers. The individual may have difficulty organizing the position and shape of what he sees, and perceives letters or numbers as reversed or rotated.

Figure-ground problems are another example of visual perceptual disabilities, described as having difficulty focusing on the significant figure, but instead focuses on all the other visual inputs. Other examples Silver describes include having difficulty judging distance, or trouble organizing his or her position in space. Silver contends a visual perceptual disorder is not a result of visual problems, but the input process that takes place in the brain. (The concern is that many children, as a developmental restraint, may appear to have a visual perceptual problem until the end of grade 3, and may lead to misdiagnosis of a LD.)

(ii) Auditory Perceptual Disabilities:

Silver (2001) describes auditory perceptual disabilities as being difficulties distinguishing subtle differences in sound, difficulty with auditory-figure ground, or an inability to process sound input as fast as normal people can.

(iii) Disabilities with Input from Other Senses

Problems that exist because of taste, smell, or tactile, input are still be investigated and researched according to Silver.

Integration Disabilities

Silver describes the process that goes on in the brain once the information is registered in order for the information to be understood. Two steps are required: sequencing and abstraction. Sequencing is described as placing the symbols in the correct order; and once the information is sequenced, abstraction refers to the ability to infer meaning. Silver also describes a short-term memory disability as a combination of an inputting disability and an integration disability. An individual with a learning disability may have difficulty processing information, even when concentrating on it.

(i) Sequencing Disabilities:

A sequencing disability is described as an individual having difficulty sequencing information, inputted to the brain either visually or auditorially. A child may describe the sequence of events incorrectly even if they know all the sequence or may memorize a sequence, but not be able to use a single unit out of sequence.

(ii) Abstraction Disabilities:

Silver views abstraction disability as the inability to derive the correct general meaning from a particular word or symbol. He describes individuals with LD as having only minor difficulties in this area.

Output Disabilities

The final types of LD that Silver described were LD involving output. He described information coming out of the brain either through words (language output) or through muscle activity such as writing, drawing, or gesturing (motor output).

(i) Language Disabilities:

Children with a specific language disability usually have difficulty answering questions in a situation where they do not have time to organize their thoughts, yet are able to engage in spontaneous language situations where they have the luxury to initiate what is being said.

(ii) Motor Disabilities:

Silver (2000) describes these disabilities in two ways: gross motor disabilities when an individual is clumsy and may have difficulty running, jumping, and swimming or fine motor disabilities (more common), manifested with the mechanics of writing. The child with a fine motor disability has difficulty getting the many muscles in the dominant hand to work together as a team.

Human Rights for Individuals with Learning Disabilities

Research (for e.g. Fiedorwicz), on the neurological basis as to a LD raises issues as to supports and rights of disability sufferers. Globally, Human Rights are a hallmark of contemporary society, post WWII. Currently, as many as 58 countries across the world, Canada, belong to the United Nations (U.N.). It is designed to comply with a basic outline of the rights of all human beings (Department of Justice, Canada, 1998). The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was adopted by the U.N.– not as law – but as a universal international moral statement about how all peoples, organizations, and governments should behave towards one another. One article of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states; "...everyone has a right to an education." The Canadian government later decided to enshrine many of the provisions of the *Universal*

Declaration of Human Rights into the Canadian Constitution known as the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Department of Justice, Canada, 1998).

As more and more individuals are identified as learning disabled, the laws of our country must reflect the rights and freedoms of individuals with LD to protect them from discrimination. In Canada there exist two such acts: *The Canada Act* and *The Canadian Human Rights Act.*

The Canada Act (also called the Constitutional Act of 1982) contains the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, guaranteeing civil rights and freedoms of Canadian people. The Constitutional Act provides provisions for individuals with LD (Department of Justice, Canada, 1982). It states under the Equality Rights, Section 15 (1), that: "Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national, or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability" (Department of Justice, Canada, 1982).

As well, the Canadian Human Rights Act [R.S., 1985, c. H-6] an Act to extend the laws in Canada that proscribe discrimination, assists with guaranteeing that individuals with LD will receive equal opportunities and "...to have their needs accommodated...", without discrimination based on "... race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability or conviction for an offense for which a pardon has been granted." (Department of Justice, Canada, 1998).

Provinces of Canada also had a responsibility to assure individuals were not discriminated against. For example, in 1971 The Government of Newfoundland and

Labrador legislated *The Newfoundland Code of Human Rights,* prohibiting discrimination and harassment in employment and in the provision of services, and in accommodation on the basis of a number of prohibited grounds, for example, a "mental disability." The Code was amended in 1988 to describe a mental disability to include a learning disability. A mental disability in the Code is described as: "...(i) a condition of mental retardation or impairment; (ii) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language..." (Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2002).

In the United States of America, often reflected in the laws of Canada, there are three laws that protect the individual with a learning disability. These laws are very similar to the laws outlined in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom* and the *Canadian Human Rights Act.* The three laws that protect individuals with LD in the United States, outlined by the National Center for Learning Disabilities (2001) can be described:

> **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** of 1997 (PL-105-17) provides for special education and related services for children and young people with disabilities up to their 22nd birthday. The IDEA provides for a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and for an Individualized Education Program (IEP).
>
> **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (PL 93-112)** prohibits discrimination against children and adults with disabilities. It guarantees that persons with disabilities have equal access to programs and services that receive federal funds.

This includes public and private schools and colleges. It also applies to employers who receive federal funds.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (PL1-1-36) protects children and adults with disabilities from discrimination in employment, public, and privately operated settings. The law applies to all public and most private schools and colleges, testing institutions, and licensing authorities. It also applies to state and local governments and to private employers with 15 or more employees.

Individuals with a documented learning disability should have certain laws and regulations to protect them. In Canada and the United States, there have been recent court cases and court challenges brought forth by individuals with learning disabilities to exercise their rights.

Court Cases

There have been several legal court cases involving individuals with learning disabilities. Most common legal issues involving individuals with LD arise after the individuals establish they have a documented LD and the accommodations they seek are necessary to allow them an equal opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and competency (Knoecky & Wolinsky, 2000).

An example of a court case that Knoecky & Wolinsky (2000) describe occurred in Canada where The Attorney General of Canada v. Nancy Green and the Canadian Human Rights Commission (T.D.). The case dealt with discrimination on grounds of Ms. Green having a disability (dyslexia in auditory processing). Ms. Green was denied a bilingual position on the basis she could not meet language qualifications following testing and evaluation on a language aptitude test. The tests measured her ability to learn a second

language and Ms. Green's scores placed her well below the area of acceptance. Later testing determined Ms. Green was a highly intelligent woman who had problems achieving her full potential because of an auditory processing learning disability. The tribunal later found discrimination based on learning disability and Ms. Green was awarded damages based on the findings, with appropriate accommodations Ms. Green would be able to learn a second language (Knoecky & Wolinsky, 2000).

In the United States there have been several high-interest court cases that have had implications for students with learning disabilities. One such case was the Guckenberger v. Boston University case (1999) where the defendant (Boston University) and the plaintiffs (Guckenberger et al.) disagreed on several key issues that needed to be examined. A number of fundamental issues relevant to the definition and assessment of learning disabilities emerged that had implications for individuals with learning disabilities at the post-secondary level. Questions included: determining who is actually learning disabled, what constitutes appropriate assessment for learning disabilities, who is qualified to make the diagnosis, the decision of which accommodations should be provided, and who should decide whether or not these accommodations will be provided (Siegal, 1999).

The court acknowledged in this case that an institution has the right to require a student who is requesting accommodation to provide current documentation, conducted by a qualified professional (Gregg & Scott, 2000).

Conclusion

When the term "disability" is used, most people automatically think of physical or developmental disabilities. These are the disabilities that tend to be more visible to

others. Learning disabilities, on the other hand, are not as apparent to the outside observer, and are frequently overlooked when initiatives are undertaken for people with disabilities. The lack of clearly visible and consistent characteristics among those considered learning disabled has been the root of much controversy in this field. Nonetheless, those who live with a learning disability experience its impact on a daily basis: an impact that often has ramifications, not only in academic settings, but also in other facets of life, including vocational as well as social and recreational aspects (Johnson, 1995).

The field of learning disabilities has received considerable attention in the past number of years because of the increasing diagnosis of individuals with learning disabilities, the percentage of individuals with learning disabilities in schools today, and the implications of a learning disability diagnosis, and how this effects education. The need for continued research is evident in the amount of unanswered questions surrounding this field: Can professionals come to some sort of consensus on a uniform definition across the field? How does one make a straightforward diagnosis of a learning disability? Are their ways to assure LD students maximize their potential in education? These are only a few questions; yet, there is little argument amongst professionals that there have been gigantic steps taken in schools today to increase understanding and sensitivity towards individuals diagnosed with a learning disability.

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Literature Review on Transitioning Individuals with Learning Disabilities to the Post-Secondary Level

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Abstract

This paper synthesizes literature, related to the successful transition of students with learning disabilities (LD) to the post-secondary level. The first section outlines the history of transition services. The second section reviews the literature on transitioning services and the student with LD, and how to properly prepare these students for all the major areas of adult functioning including employment, continuing education, daily living, health, leisure, communication and interpersonal skills. The literature is reviewed on the transitioning services required to assure the successful transition to post secondary institutions.

Research (for e.g. Dunn (1996) and Rojewski (1992)) has shown an individualized transition plan promotes self-awareness and self-determination by the student with LD, and that involves all stakeholders promoting the successful transitioning beyond high school.

Literature Review on Transitioning Individuals with Learning Disabilities to the Post-Secondary Level

Introduction

The number of students with learning disabilities (LD) entering post-secondary institutions has risen dramatically. In 1985, the American Council on Education, reported 1.1% of all first-time, full-time freshmen as having a learning disability, and the percentage had nearly tripled by 1994, reaching 3%. Not only has the number of learning disabled students attending postsecondary institutions increased, so has the number of postsecondary institutions in the United States who offer services for students with LD (Vogel et al, 1998). In Canada a similar trend is occurring with post-secondary institutions developing programs and services for individuals with LD. This increase in both the number of postsecondary students with LD and the number of postsecondary institutions offering services has resulted from several factors. Vogel et al (1998) discussed several of these factors, including:

1) An increase in aspirations, expectations, and preparation of students with LD for education beyond high school;
2) Passage of the implementing regulations of section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1991 that provide equal access to reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities;
3) An increase in the number and quality of postsecondary college directories and in the number and quality of local, regional, and national postsecondary fairs, handbooks, and counseling tools to assist students in the decision-making process;

4) The willingness of some small, private independent colleges of higher education to accept students with LD who do not meet the administration criteria, but seem likely to succeed.
5) The growing awareness postsecondary institutions have the need to comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (in Canada, the equivalent is the Canadian Human Rights Act, 1998) and provide support services to meet the needs of students with LD who disclose their disability and provide (appropriate) documentation;
6) The acquisition of greater self-understanding and self-advocacy skills by young adults with LD, resulting from more effective transition planning; and
7) An increase in awareness by LD professionals in postsecondary settings of the needs of students with LD as a result of publications regarding adults with LD and the further development of postsecondary support services. (p.234)

As more colleges and universities begin to admit individuals with LD, it is becoming more apparent that the services and programs students receive in junior high and secondary schools for their disability ought to be examined, especially the transitional plan, mandated by Special Education policy. In addition to the transitional plan, the supports and accommodations individuals with LD receive in postsecondary institutions also need to be investigated.

There are many questions that surround individuals with LD at the post-secondary level. What is the nature and characteristics of LD that may complicate their success at the post-secondary level? Why is a transitional plan so important for individuals diagnosed with a learning disability? What constitutes a detailed transitional plan in

junior high and secondary schools to help prepare the student with a learning disability to be successful at the post-secondary level? This paper will review the literature on these questions.

History of Transitional Planning

Important transitions occur across everyone's lifespan. Transitions refer to a change in status. Some are normative and predictable (vertical transitions) and others are time, or situation-specific, and may not apply to everyone (horizontal transitions). Blalock, Ginger-Patton & James (1996) further described vertical transitions as: beginning school, leaving school, or growing older and horizontal transitions as movement from one situation or setting to another.

Individuals with disabilities need planning for both vertical and horizontal transitions. Historically, however, transition planning for individuals with LD has lagged behind that of other groups who received special services in schools. Most transition models were developed for students with more severe disabilities and who had more limited postsecondary options (Dunn, 1996). Recent research (e.g. Vogel and Adelman, 1992) has shown that the category of LD has the highest growth rate among all categories of disabilities entering postsecondary institutions. Therefore, transitional planning is a compulsory requirement to assist with the success rate of this group while they attend the postsecondary institution of their choice.

Blalock et al (1996) stated that services to prepare students with special needs for adult life have been operative for quite some time. Many work-study programs for students with mental retardation, common in the 1960's focused specifically on training and employment issues linked to postsecondary outcomes. It was not until the mid-

1980's that educators began to systematically examine the importance of formalizing the process to better prepare students for life after high school. Since the 1980's federal legislation in the United States relevant to the education of students with disabilities has increasingly addressed the need to plan for the transition of students from secondary schools to career-related employment, or post-secondary (Anderson-Inman et al, 1999).

The beginning of the "transition" movement is usually associated with the initiatives that came from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). In 1984, a policy on transition was promoted by OSERS and was defined as "an outcome-oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences that lead to employment...". The transition process was formalized as a result of facts that were coming to light about the adult outcomes of students who had received special education services for significant parts of their school careers. Studies were painting a very bleak picture of unemployment, long-term underemployment (for those few who have obtained jobs), minimal participation in postsecondary education, an inability to live independently, limited social experiences, restricted participation in community activities, and inordinately high arrest rates (Blalock et al, 1996). Such results have strengthened the need for a transitional plan for individuals beyond secondary school.

By 1985, Halpern recognized the limited scope of the previous model of transition and offered a revision. He suggested that two other dimensions- the quality of one's residential environment and the adequacy of one's social and interpersonal networks- are as important to successful community adjustment as is the quality of employment. Halpern's revisionist model reflected the thinking of other professionals working in the

area of transition who felt that additional dimensions must be considered if comprehensive planning and preparation were to be accomplished.

In 1990 the United States made amendments to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act to include transition services. It stated that one of the purposes of the annual Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting for students with disabilities reaching 16 years of age would be to plan for necessary transition services. The law at this time defined transition services as:

> a coordinated set of activities for a student, designated within an outcome oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation. (Blalock et al, 1996 p. 10).

By 1994, the Division on Career Development and Transition of the Council for Exceptional Children adopted a new, more comprehensive definition of transition that acknowledges that students who leave school will assume various adult roles in the community, not just enter into the world of work. Also the definition promotes the notion that transition education start in the beginning levels of schooling and that students should be intricately involved in the process whenever possible. The definition of "transition" in relation to educational needs reads as follows:

> Transition refers to a change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community. These roles include employment, participating in post-secondary education, maintaining a home, becoming appropriately involved in the community, and experiencing satisfactory

> personal and social relationships. The process of enhancing transition involves the participation and coordination of school programs, adult agency services, and natural supports within the community. The foundations for transition should be laid during the elementary and middle school years, guided by the broad concept of career development. Transition planning should begin no later than age 14, and students should be encouraged, to the full extent of their capabilities, to assume a minimum amount of responsibility for such planning. (Blalock et al, 1996, p.6)

Transition Services and Students with a Learning Disability

It was assumed students with LD were able to make the transition to adult life without too much difficulty, and emphasis should be placed on academic-related topics. However, transition planning for individuals with LD must be comprehensive in nature, addressing all the major areas of adult functioning including employment, continuing education, daily living, health, leisure, communication, interpersonal skills, self-determination, and community participation (Blalock et al, 1996).

Dunn (1996) discussed myths about learning disabilities that have prevented educators from developing transition plans for students with LD. The first myth was individuals with LD achieve success with gaining employment more rapidly than individuals with other types of disabilities.

A second myth is that individuals with LD can achieve basic academic competencies as readily as their nondisabled peers, despite research (Dunn, 1996) that shows 27% of students with LD drop out of school without minimal academic skills.

A third myth Dunn (1996) discussed pertained to the accepted definition of individuals. It is assumed that since individuals with LD have "...average to above average intelligence..." that they will be able to pursue higher education despite a wide range of intellectual abilities. Dunn described individuals with LD as having extremely diverse characteristics, and present challenges to the transition programming. Although the label "learning disability" represents a large group, each individual has a unique profile of abilities and disabilities.

To dispel confusion with understanding this extremely heterogeneous group, many researchers, including Minskoff and DeMoss (1993), have suggested classifying students with LD at the mild, moderate, or severe level.

They describe students as having a *mild* learning disability as having above-average intelligence, adequate psychological adjustment and vocational/employability skills, high academic achievement, and limited processing and language deficits. Minskoff and DeMoss (1993) further describe a *moderate* learning disability as an individual having average intelligence, some cognitive and language deficits, one or more academic disabilities, and difficulty with vocational/employment skills. Finally, they describe an individual who is classified as having a *severe* learning disability as displaying below-average intelligence, significant processing and language deficits, low academic achievement, lack of psychological adjustment, and lack of vocational/employment skills.

Finally, the hidden nature of the disability often causes people to discount its seriousness, and many believe the disability is only manifested in an educational setting. Dunn (1996) shows that individuals with LD experience difficulties in many facets of

their lives. For example, individuals with LD often have difficulty maintaining healthy, long-term relationships due to poor self-esteem and obtaining and retaining employment because of poor employment skills.

Rojewski (1992) advocates that transition services for students with LD be viewed in terms of the processes, or pathways, required to transition from school to post-school environments, rather than simply the services utilized. He felt that the focus should be more on processes rather than specific services because individuals with LD have a greater range in postsecondary training and education options than most students who require special services in schools. Rojewski (1992) describes the focus on processes as:

> 1. *Direct Path from High School to Employment*: In this case because the individual does not enter postsecondary education, most of his/her vocational preparation must occur before exiting high school.
>
> 2. *Path from High School to Post-secondary Education/Training*: The student will receive support services in high school, but it will cease after high school once the student enters a post-secondary institution.
>
> 3. *Path from High School to Post-secondary Education/Training to Employment:* Supports for post-secondary education can begin in high school and continue through postsecondary training and then end at employment.
>
> 4. *Path from Post-secondary Education/Training to Employment:* Finally, services are initiated after a student enters post-secondary education and include academic support and job placement (p.139).

Rademacher (1998) focuses her research on adults with LD, saying that children with LD do *grow up* and eventually *grow older*, but never *outgrow* their disability. She states that the impact of a learning disability is generally felt in five distinct areas of their lives including: self-esteem, education, vocation, social interaction, and independent living. She describes individuals with LD as having lifelong needs.

Rademacher (1998) specifically cites lowered self-esteem from frequent criticism, teasing, and/or rejection due to academic, vocational, or social struggles. As a result, individuals with LD are less apt to take risks or strive to reach their full potential. A low self-esteem can also affect a person's self-advocacy, often reflected in poor motivation. Motivation, maturity, and insight into his or her disability are keys to success. Individuals with LD may also possess poor judgment of other's moods and attitudes, and may be less sensitive to other's thoughts and feelings. This could lead to difficulty in finding and keeping a job or developing a long-term relationship.

Blalock et al (1996) also suggests that transition planning for individuals with LD must be comprehensive in nature and reflect the individual's many areas of needs. Transition planning should address all the areas of adult functioning including employment, continuing education, daily living, health, leisure, communication, interpersonal skills, self-determination, and community participation.

They also describe several highlights regarding the growing database of information related to the transition needs of students with LD. They include:

- Students with LD receive inadequate vocational experiences.
- Students with LD are most likely to have to find a job on their own – little help is given to them by the schools or adult agencies.

- Relatively few students with learning disabilities go to 2-year colleges (12%) or 4-year colleges (4%) within 5 years after leaving school, and only 16% attend vocational schools.
- Students with LD are less adept than their nondisabled peers at using community resources and managing various aspects of their lives.
- Over 50% of adults with LD have difficulty initiating and maintaining social relationships (p.7)

Although the focus of this paper deals mainly with the transitioning needs of individuals with LD into a post secondary setting, research (for e.g. Dunn (1996) and Rojewski (1992)) on this group strongly suggests that transitional planning is needed in all facets of the individuals' lives.

Rademacher (1998) describes the transition from public school to a postsecondary setting as difficult for the most capable of individuals. For the student with a learning disability, this transition can be a nightmare without the proper supports being in place. Dunn (1996) states an alarming statistic that over 50% of students with LD who enter a postsecondary setting drop out before finishing their program of study.

Defining Postsecondary Education

There are a wide variety of postsecondary settings available for students. Postsecondary education can be classified into two main categories: the college/university option, or the vocational-technical option. Colleges and universities offer many potential benefits leading to personal growth and fulfillment. Community colleges are built to serve local communities and are usually centrally located and within reasonable commuting distances. Community colleges offer Associate Arts Degrees, and

may serve as employment credentials or be applied to four-year college programs. Some courses lead to an Associate of Applied Science Degrees, usually occupationally specific degrees and may not transfer to many Bachelor's degree programs. Other courses lead to a certificate, directly tied to a specific entry-level position. Open admission policies of colleges make it possible for anyone over 18 years of age to attend (Rademacher, 1998).

Rademacher (1998) reports four-year colleges and universities vary in admission requirements and student population. A growing number of schools have services for students with disabilities. The vast majority of postsecondary students who use disability support services are individuals with a learning disability. She said the services included counseling, tutoring, and test accommodations.

Vocational-technical education programs can be either public or private. These small, specialized schools offer practical training lasting less than two years and may not have staff that is skilled in accommodating individuals with LD.

Minskoff and DeMoss (1992) describe the programming each of these groups of students should receive while attending school. The severity of the disability (mild, moderate, or severe) is the determining factor in the program the individual with a learning disability may select. An individual who is classified as learning disabled is generally described using three descriptors; mild, moderate or severe.

Those classified with a "mild" learning disability generally receive services to prepare them for college, with inclusion in general education classes and remedial support. They have average to above-average intelligence and their needs can be accommodated while they are educated in the regular classroom, unless there are other

compounding factors. Those individuals diagnosed with "mild" LD may pursue a college education immediately following high school or later in life (Minskoff & DeMoss, 1992).

A student classified with a "moderate' learning disability has average intelligence, with more pronounced struggles in psychological processing, academic achievement, social functioning and/or vocational/employment. These students would generally benefit from a combined academic and vocational curriculum and would also benefit from inclusive programming. In this case, with adequate transition services and continued on-the-job-training, these students can succeed in a variety of vocational endeavors (Minskoff & DeMoss, 1992).

Those classified as having a more severe learning disability require a more functional and vocational secondary program. They are classified as having pervasive needs with cognitive processing, language, academic achievement, social functioning, and vocational/employment skills. Programming would include life skills curricula in special education offered along with mainstream vocational education, or special vocational education. These individuals will most likely need ongoing family, community, and on-the-job support in order to be successful throughout their lifespan (Minskoff & DeMoss, 1992).

Transition Services Required by Individuals with Learning Disabilities

Transition programming for students with LD must take into account some of the distinctive traits of the population. Dunn (1996) and Rojewski (1992) identified key components and discussed several considerations for transition programs for students with LD. These standards should be included in their written transition plan and are

intended for those students with LD who have potential to move into postsecondary institutions.

1. *Individualized Planning:* Individuals with LD constitute a heterogeneous group and the transitional program for each individual will vary according to their strengths, needs, interests, and educational goals. Each individual plan will be designed based on several sources and supported by various data and cover all areas of the individuals life. (Dunn, 1996)

2. *Vocational Preparation:* Rojewski (1992) states that vocational and career development have been the primary focus of transitional planning. A wide range of services and activities, including systematic vocational assessment, exploration, and job training should be available and in-depth career/vocational assessment should form the basis for appropriate transitional planning. Many individuals with LD hold unrealistic career aspirations and they need vocational counseling, instruction in work ethic and study habits.

3. *Job Seeking and Placement:* A structured job-seeking curriculum is a key component to any transitional plan. The curriculum may vary according to the individual needs, but activities such as how to use various resources to locate potential jobs, resume writing and techniques to use in interviews may be implemented in such a curriculum. (Rojewski, 1992)

4. *Follow-up and Support Services:* Dunn (1996) discusses that research has shown that individuals with LD may need ongoing services beyond secondary schooling such as resource and agency referrals, and campus support at postsecondary institutions.

5. *Academic Remediation and Support:* Although professionals have identified academic remediation and support as an area needing attention for individuals with LD, this area often is neglected in transition planning. The nature of the remediation and support will depend on the students' postsecondary goals. Rojewski (1992) argues the weakness of many transitional programs has been that they have addressed academic skills deficiencies in isolation, and have not prepared these students for postsecondary institutions because they did not participate in college preparation classes in high school.

6. *High School Curriculum:* Dunn (1996) believes that the focus of the individual's high school curriculum is another consideration when designing a student's transitional plan. Individuals with LD vary in abilities, severity of disabilities, motivation, and interests at the postsecondary level. In the case of students who show potential for postsecondary institutions, their curriculum should include experiences in mainstream courses and access to content and concepts critical to college success. Seidenberg and Koenigsberg (1990) stress if individuals with LD are to be adequately prepared for postsecondary institutions, they should be exposed to secondary programming, reflecting the skills and competencies critical to the success. They also stressed students need to have practice using accommodations and supports, as they are mainstreamed in regular college preparation courses.

7. *Understanding One's Disability:* Dunn (1996) states that an individual diagnosed with a learning disability needs a clear and realistic understanding of their disability in order to select more appropriate goals. The clearer these individuals grasp their potential, the more empowered the individual will feel in many areas of their life, including social,

familial, academic, and vocational. This self-awareness will also lead to greater advocacy skills.

8. *Self-determination:* Self-determination is described as the ability to make choices, set goals regarding their lives and the services they receive, and initiate actions to achieve their goals. As stated in the definition of transition, the primary goal for these students is to assist them in "...assuming emergent adult roles in the community. These roles include employment, participating in post-secondary education... " (Blalock et al, 1996). The focus of transitional planning is the attainment of adult independence. Dunn (1996) argues it is critical that students with LD participate in the decision-making process for their futures. In order to make informed choices, individuals need to be provided with experiences to learn those skills.

9. *Transition from Postsecondary Settings:* Dunn (1996) reports many transitional plans either focus on secondary schooling to postsecondary or from secondary schooling to work, but few transitional plans include postsecondary transitioning to the "real world". This is an area that needs to be addressed in transitional plans. Learning disabilities are lifelong and even if an individual successfully completes postsecondary training/education, they may well need assistance or support with career counseling, job placement, and/or independent living.

10. *Psychosocial Issues:* Most services for individuals diagnosed with a learning disability have focused on academic needs. One area often overlooked is the emotional frustration accompanying the diagnoses. Low self-esteem, feelings of incompetence, frustration, shyness, immaturity, are just a few of these emotions. Dunn (1996)

recommends individual counseling and self-help groups as two ways to improve social skills and enhance self-advocacy.

11. *Problem-Solving:* Problem-solving abilities and strategies are critical for all human beings to be successful. This is heightened for individuals with LD when handling new and challenging situations that their general curriculum may not address (Dunn, 1996).

Research (for e.g. Dunn (1996) and Rojewski (1992)) on transitional planning for the mild learning disabled individual has determined these components are crucial for each individual's transitional plan. The list is not exhaustive as more research is conducted regarding effective transitional planning. It provides a solid starting point for professionals designing a transitional plan for an individual with a learning disability.

Successful Strategies for Postsecondary Students with Learning Disabilities

Harris and Robertson (2001) reviewed typical services that are offered in postsecondary institutions across the United States. Accommodating individuals with disabilities has become a legal issue in the United States and Canada. The Canadian Human Rights Act [R.S., 1985, c. H-6] assists with guaranteeing that individuals with LD will receive equal opportunities and "... have their needs accommodated", without discrimination based on "... race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability..." (Department of Justice Canada, 1998). Most postsecondary institutions offer some form of academic assistance and have a Disabled Student Services office (Harris & Robertson, 2001). The main question postsecondary institutions grapple with is not whether to offer assistance to these students, but what form this support should take.

Typical services offered in postsecondary institutions include orientation to learning disability services, accommodation letters to professors/instructors, adaptive testing procedures, adaptive computer technology, use of a word-processor or spell-check on assignments and tests, priority class scheduling, and in some cases, course substitutions. Additionally, workshops on study skills and individual tutoring are available. However, the key to success is the student's degree of motivation, assertiveness, and self-determination (Harris & Robertson, 2001).

In most cases, in order for an individual to access the learning disability services offered by the postsecondary institution they need to voluntarily submit a self-disclosure and verification form. The self-disclosure form generally is included with the admission package and the student is sent information about services the institution provides as well as a verification form. Documentation from a licensed professional detailing the diagnosis, outlining recommendations, and accommodations are also required (Harris & Robertson, 2001).

The student is responsible to attend an orientation session about the range of services, request and deliver letters to professors detailing their needs as well as the required accommodations. The goal of the services is to empower the student and emphasize the establishment of independence and self-advocacy (Harris & Robertson, 2001).

Conclusion

Success for an individual with a learning disability at the postsecondary level depends on many factors including the severity of the disability, early identification, remediation, career choice, and support from family, friends, and others. An additional

factor is a detailed, appropriate transition plan that provides updated accurate information on the nature and characteristics of the learning disability, and the steps to move from secondary school to a postsecondary institution.

There is no doubt that appropriate programming for individuals identified as learning disabled are forever evolving. Research (for e.g. Dunn (1996) and Rojewski (1992)) raises more questions than answers. For now, however, educators in Canada are faced with the dilemma of balancing an individual's legal rights with the various policies and procedures in our country. Individuals transitioning into a postsecondary institution can take comfort that today's institutions have come a long way by providing reasonable accommodations to students who deserve them. With continued efforts and additional research, the success rate will continue to flourish for this capable group of individuals.

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Defining Contemporary Understanding of "Reasonable Accommodation" at the Post-Secondary Level

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Abstract

This paper reviews the literature relevant to the contemporary understanding of what is considered a "reasonable" accommodation at the postsecondary level. Defining what a learning disability (LD) is and what transition services they need to maximize their potential at the postsecondary level is reviewed, as well as the process followed in order for the student with LD to receive accommodations. This paper presents research that indicates that most faculty members are willing to provide accommodations, but are concerned with determining the nature and extend of the provisions. Due to the request for accommodations, both the institution and the student involved often face challenges to assure that the integrity of coursework is not jeopardized. Canadian legislation, such as the Charter of Rights and Freedom and the Canadian Human Rights Act, assures the rights of individuals with LD are protected at the postsecondary level are reviewed. The final sections review how the literature defining reasonable accommodations and support programs for individuals with LD at the postsecondary level. Research (for e.g., Strasburger, Turner, Wallis (1998)) has shown that the most success for assuring an accommodation is reasonable is when the essential requirements for a course or program of study are defined, and the accommodations do not impinge on these requirements.

Defining Contemporary Understanding of "Reasonable Accommodation" at the Post-Secondary Level

Introduction

Prior to 1970 few postsecondary institutions had specific programs of support for students with disabilities, and those programs were primarily for individuals with sensory disabilities (Levine & Nourse, 1998). Currently most postsecondary institutions are at different stages in their development of integrating and providing services for individuals with LD. Today, most post-secondary faculty members provide a range of possible accommodations for students with learning disabilities, despite their concern for what is considered sufficient (Scott, 1997). In addition, service-providers are seldom required to have specific certification requirements to work with students with LD at the postsecondary level (Westby, 2000). Yet, the numbers of students with LD who enter postsecondary educational settings increase each year. The 1994 National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) in the United States found that only 12.4% of students with LD who finished secondary school chose to apply to a postsecondary institution (NJCLD, 1994). However, by 1999 the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students found that nearly 31% of youth with LD then enrolled in postsecondary school. More alarming, only 15% of those who entered a postsecondary institution actually earned a certificate, degree, or license (Anderson-Inman, Knox-Quinn, Szymanski, 1999).

The goal of this paper is to investigate the issue of accommodations for students with LD at the post-secondary level by exploring the following questions:

- What unique challenges do individuals with LD face in comparison to other individuals with disabilities requesting accommodations? What personal characteristics will help an individual with LD to experience success?
- Why do challenges occur when a student with LD transitions from a secondary to a postsecondary institution?
- What unique challenges do individuals with LD face in the duration of their postsecondary education?
- What is the role of the faculty member in providing accommodations for course work?
- Do students with LD have civil rights protecting them or is the accommodation provided at the discretion of the faculty in the classroom?
- What process must the individual with LD follow to receive the accommodation?
- What is considered a "reasonable" accommodation in the context of the post-secondary institution?
- Is the transitioning process from secondary to postsecondary institutions meeting the needs of the individuals with LD?

What is a learning disability?

Students with a LD have unique needs when compared with other individuals who are defined as "disabled" by The Individuals with Disabilities Act or by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada. Scott (1997) describes a learning disability as a generic term for a heterogeneous group of disorders that affect how individuals receive, encode, store, and retrieve information. Learning disabilities are found in individuals with average or above average intelligence but who, because of

presumed central nervous dysfunction, have significant difficulties in any of a variety of achievement areas such as reading, mathematics, spelling, written expression, and oral language. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning.

In 2002, the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) adopted a more comprehensive definition of LD. The following description includes key components of the definition:

> "Learning Disabilities" refers to a number of disorders, which may affect the acquisition, 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 may also involve difficulties with organizational skills, social perception, social interaction and perspective taking.
>
> Learning disabilities are *lifelong*. The way in which they are expressed may vary over an individual's lifetime, depending on the interaction between the demands of the environment and the individual's strengths and needs. Learning disabilities are suggested by unexpected academic achievement which is maintained only be unusually high levels of support.
>
> ...For success, individuals with learning disabilities require early identification and timely specialized assessments and interventions involving home, school, community and workplace settings. The interventions need to be appropriate

for each individual's learning disability subtype and, at a minimum, include the provision of:

- specific skill instruction;
- accommodations;
- compensatory strategies; and
- self-advocacy skills (LDAC, 2002)."

As such, LD are distinct from global intellectual deficiency, or more visible physical disabilities. Subsequently, students will have very diverse academic and personal needs when transitioning to post-secondary schooling. The Canadian definition of LD: a lifelong condition; therefore, a core component of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) should be a transitioning component that may assist students with the move to a postsecondary institution.

Transition planning

In 1994, the Division on Career Development and Transition of the Council for Exceptional Children adopted a comprehensive definition of transition acknowledging students who leave school will assume various adult roles in the community. The definition promotes the notion that transition education starts in the beginning levels of schooling and students should be intricately involved in the process whenever possible. The definition of "transition" in relation to educational needs reads as follows:

> "Transition refers to a change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community. These roles include employment, participating in post-secondary education, maintaining a home,

> becoming appropriately involved in the community, and experiencing satisfactory personal and social relationships. The process of enhancing transition involves the participation and coordination of school programs, adult agency services, and natural supports within the community. The foundations for transition should be laid during the elementary and middle school years, guided by the broad concept of career development. Transition planning should begin no later than age 14, and students should be encouraged, to the full extent of their capabilities, to assume a minimum amount of responsibility for such planning. (Blalock et al, 1996, p.6).

The definition implies that student involvement in the development and implementation of this plan is key to their success beyond secondary school. However, research completed in 1994 by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) show students with LD who choose to attend a postsecondary institution have found that many learning disabled students are not prepared for the rigors of most post secondary educational programs.

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities [NJCLD] (1994) believes that a comprehensive transition plan is essential for individuals with LD who plan on attending a post-secondary institution. The primary objective of this planning is to help the student select, access, and succeed in a postsecondary education program. The NJCLD believe a compressive transitioning plan will involve contributions from four key groups: the student, parent(s), the secondary school, as well as postsecondary education professionals.

It is essential when a student with LD chooses to attend a post-secondary institution the transitional program enables the student to experience optimal success. A student's transition plan should reflect the student's interest, preferences, desires, and abilities. According to Miner and Bates (1997), secondary students are able to express their goals for the future, and the transitional plan should be designed to help the student achieve their goals. This active involvement in the transition process helps students promote their self-concept, independence, and self-advocacy. These personal characteristics correlate to high levels of *self determination* (NJCLD, 1994).

Legislation in the United States has placed an emphasis on self-determination during the transition process (Durlak et al, 1994). "Self-determination refers to the extent to which a person assumes responsibility for his or her own goals, accomplishments, and setbacks" (Durlak, p.51). Individuals with LD generally face several obstacles during a lifetime; therefore, teaching them to be 'self-determined' can be a difficult task. Field (1996) suggests there are several instructional strategies, initiated and proven successful to promote self-determination of learning disabled students. Those strategies include: "(a) using modeling, (b) providing opportunities for choice, (c) providing attribution retraining, and (d) using appropriate behavior strategies (p.47)."

Strasburger, Turner, and Walls (1998) designed a study to examine the relationship between the services and programs students with LD receive in secondary school, with the success they experience at postsecondary institutions. Their study identified six characteristics that successful students with LD display:

- realistic adaptation leading to control over one's life
- self-awareness and acceptance of life events

- ❖ proactive decision-making and active engagement in the decision-making process
- ❖ perseverance
- ❖ appropriate goal setting and self-directedness
- ❖ availability and use of effective support systems (p.64-65).

In addition to these, research conducted by Vogel, Hurby, and Adelman (1993) reviewed literature and presented data on additional factors associated with student success and failure. One important factor they identified was the development of *self-reliance,* reflective of achievement, motivation, persistence, autonomy, resilience, compensatory strategies, and problem-solving. A second factor they identified related to postsecondary success of students with LD is *verbal ability,* reflective of achievement in English courses, reading comprehension, written expression, and oral language skills. They argue that those students with LD who attend postsecondary institutions with self-reliance and verbal ability appear to stand a better chance of matriculation.

Once the individuals with LD applies for and is accepted to a postsecondary institution, there is a detailed process most institutions follow in order for any accommodations and services to occur. The following section describes this process more clearly.

Seeking accommodations

Legally, the accommodation process begins when a student identifies himself, or herself, as an individual with a disability and asks for assistance. This can occur early as when the individual with the learning disability applies for entrance into a postsecondary institution, as the application forms often have a place to indicate a disability. Grossman

(2002) argues the courts and laws have been fairly consistent in placing the responsibility on the student to initiate the accommodation process. Most post-secondary institutions have a disabled student services office or provider, generally found in student handbooks or similar publications that universities develop. The handbook will often reference the process of obtaining individualized support and states the location and title of the person whom students should contact (Grossman, 2002).

Section 504 of the United States' Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states individuals with disabilities at the postsecondary level have the responsibility to notify the appropriate institutional representative or LD service provider of their learning disability, and the type of accommodations that may be necessary. (Brinckerhoff, Shaw & McGuire, 1992). In Canada, the Canadian Human Rights Act [R.S., 1985, c. H-6] assists with guaranteeing individuals with LD will receive equal opportunities at the postsecondary level and "... have their needs accommodated", without discrimination based on "... race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability..." (Department of Justice Canada, 1998).

A central piece of the identification process is providing suitable documentation on the disability. Attaining an accommodation in a post-secondary institution is a two-way street. It is the responsibility of the institution to provide the accommodation, and the responsibility of the student to make a timely request for that accommodation. Many post-secondary institutions require the student seeking accommodation to provide sound documentation for each element of the definition, as well evidence of the need for the requested accommodation (Grossman, 2002). Different definitions of LD currently exist

in the field; therefore, verifying the existence of a LD can be a daunting task for postsecondary service providers (Scott, 1994).

Obtaining the appropriate documentation is almost always the financial responsibility of the student seeking accommodation (Scott, 1994). If the documentation is rejected, the rationale should be explained to the student so that he or she can determine whether it makes sense to seek further testing and/or additional documentation (Grossman, 2002).

The question remains for many service-providers, "Has the student provided adequate documentation?" Unfortunately, federal law offers no guidance on the documentation needed to provide evidence of the functional impact of a learning disability in a postsecondary setting (Scott, 1994). Therefore, postsecondary institutions must establish their own standards for making a decision on whether a LD exists and/or whether an accommodation is reasonable.

After the student provides adequate documentation, the service-provider determines if the student with LD is "qualified." A qualified student with a disability is one who meets essential requirements of a task in spite of their disability when provided reasonable accommodation (Scott, 1994). Scott deemed "qualified" is not a permanent status for a college student with a LD, but rather, entails continual assessment of merit. As with any other postsecondary student, a student with a LD will be evaluated at numerous points in the process of achieving a degree, and must meet institutional standards at each point to be considered "qualified." An integral part of assessing qualified status in each area is the student's right to have nonessential requirements

accommodated based on individual need. The institution must then decide if the accommodation is "reasonable" (Scott, 1994).

Shaw (1999) argues that the question of "reasonableness" should not be discussed, but instead the LD provider, the student, and the faculty member should sit and discuss the type of accommodations requested for a particular course. He states the final determination of accommodation should be made by the disability service provider and not to be open to reinterpretation by the professor. Once the service provider states an accommodation should occur, it is not a debate on whether or not an accommodation should be made available, but more how and when the accommodation will be made available.

However, Scott (1994) believes that a reasonable accommodation must first and foremost be based on documented individual need. She feels that evidence of a LD and the need for a specific accommodation should be logically connected. A "reasonable accommodation" once decided upon should not compromise essential requirements of a course or program (Westby, 2000). Westby stated that with a reasonable accommodation students with LD have the same opportunity to pass or to fail at the postsecondary level as other students.

Evidence presented in a court case, Guckenberger v. Boston University case, where the defendant (Boston University) and the plaintiffs (Guckenberger et al) disagreed on several key areas regarding services for individuals with LD at the postsecondary level (Siegal, 1999). A number of fundamental issues relevant to the definition and assessment of LD emerged which had significant implications. One implication dealt with evidence demonstrated the field of LD relies in large part on

clinical judgments and that there is no uniform method to determine which disabilities require which accommodations, or how best to make that determination (Westby, 2000). This lack of a standard diagnostic reference has led many faculty members at postsecondary institutions to become confused over what to do, and how to handle the accommodation requests for individuals with LD. The following section discusses the dilemma faculty members may face by providing accommodations for students with LD at the postsecondary institutions.

Faculty response

Various institutions have expressed an assortment of responses of faculty members at the postsecondary level when dealing with accommodating the student with LD. Scott (1997) discusses how some faculty members respond passively, providing whatever accommodation is requested, whereas others adamantly dig in their heels and refuse to provide any academic adjustments on what they perceive as "preferential treatment." Most faculty responses, however, fall between these extremes. Surveys of faculty attitudes reveal that the large majority of faculty members are willing to accommodate students with LD but struggle with ethical concerns in balancing the rights of students with LD, with the academic integrity of the course, program of study, and institution (Scott, 1997).

Another faculty concern on accommodations is that students may become dependent on these accommodations (Shaw, 1999). Service providers need to keep in mind that some of the accommodations offered in postsecondary settings may not be transferable to the world of work (Shaw, 1999). For example, few employers are comfortable giving their employees double-time to complete a job assignment. Thus, it is

important to recommend accommodations that can gradually be reduced over the course of students' careers, so that when they enter the workforce they will be better prepared to compete with their nondisabled peers for employment.

Unfortunately, many individuals with LD who enter into a postsecondary institution without the proper skills to be successful face many challenges. The following section discusses challenges the individual with LD may experience while transitioning and/or attending a postsecondary institution.

Student Challenges

Individuals with LD face many more challenges when transitioning to a postsecondary institution than their non-disabled peers. They may find the transition from high school to a post secondary institution a traumatic experience. Besides not understanding how a learning disability impairs learning, or how to communicate it to others, some students with LD have to make significant adjustments when transitioning to a post-secondary institution (Brinckerhoff, 1996).

In high school, students with LD are generally in a structured, extrinsically controlled, supportive setting. At the post-secondary level, students with LD are expected to (a) balance personal freedom with the need to set personal goals; (b) work on semester projects; (c) glean information from numerous sources, including class notes, texts, and library reference materials; and (d) in general, function autonomously (Brinckerhoff et al, 1992). Due to the dependence created in high school, many students with LD enter post-secondary institutions lacking appropriate study habits and learning strategies to cope with the independence required (Brinckerhoff et al, 1992).

Post secondary institutions request students assume responsibility for their own learning. Therefore, students with LD must learn how to prioritize their time, allowing sufficient amount of time to study. It is a general rule in most post-secondary institutions for each one hour of class time students should allow two hours of study time outside of class (Brinckerhoff, 1996). These findings indicate most students with LD take longer to read assigned materials, to take classroom notes, and to interpret important points given in an assignment; therefore, they find the postsecondary schooling more difficult than secondary schooling because there is decreased in-class opportunity for learning and less direct teacher-student contact.

The dilemma of providing accommodations for the growing population of students with LD is further complicated by the fact that LD is considered the "invisible" disability. Requests for reasonable accommodations are not straight forward tasks of providing a ramp for a student in a wheelchair, or arranging for an interpreter for a student who is deaf. Accommodations of the needs of students with LD frequently involve academic adjustments in faculty teaching and evaluation of learning (Scott, 1997). Therefore, requests made to the professor need to be reasonable and appropriate for the student requesting the accommodations.

Recent research (for e.g., Hardy-Cox & Klas (1996)) has also shown that programs for students with LD range from very specific to the general. Hardy-Cox and Klas (1996) identified that post-secondary environments tend to lean toward more generalized support programs. They discuss various policies that exist in postsecondary institutions across Canada and found that individuals with LD are generally more successful in programs that are specific. In Canada for example, Memorial University of

Newfoundland in St.John's, offers a range of services and a multidisciplinary advisory committee for students with LD. In the fall of 1990 a project was funded and built on a five stage model of support services to the student: (a) to heighten the awareness of faculty, students, high schools and community groups about LD and services available for students; (b) to assess students and determine their eligibility for participation in the project; (c) to assign the accepted participants to a faculty mentor and to provide peer support; (d) to consult with students on an emerging basis regarding progression of their studies; and (e) to involve students in career exploration and preparation.

Individuals with LD in Canada are guaranteed assistance based on the Charter of Rights Freedom, Canadian Human Rights Act, Provincial education laws, and in some incidences, case law. The following section will highlight legislature in Canada that deal with individuals with LD who are attending postsecondary institutions.

Canadian legislation

In Canada, there are several laws that protect individuals with LD from discrimination. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees civil liberties of Canadian people and ensures that each person will be treated equally and without discrimination regardless of their "mental disability." Section 15 of the Charter reads:

(1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

The Canadian Human Rights Act [R.S., 1985, c. H-6]; an Act to extend the laws in Canada that prevent anti-discrimination, assists with guaranteeing that individuals with

LD will receive equal opportunities and "to have their needs accommodated", without discrimination based on "... race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability or conviction for an offense for which a pardon has been granted" (Department of Justice, Canada, 1998).

Finally, the provincial education codes in Canada also guarantee those individuals diagnosed with a LD will receive educational opportunities, and have their needs accommodated without discrimination. A provincial legislature makes provision for education by passing statutes that create an educational system and provide for its management and funding (Bezeau, 2002). Most provinces now have one main statute, called a schools act, an education act, or a public schools act, that does just that for elementary and secondary education. Nevertheless, all provinces have other statutes that relate directly to education. These cover such matters as the creation of the ministry or department of education, private schools, teacher organizations, organizations of other personnel such as trustees, collective bargaining by teachers, and staff pensions (Bezeau, 2002). There are also statutes for colleges and universities. Education statutes undergo frequent amendment, and, at any point in time, one or two provinces will be undertaking a major overhaul of important education legislation including legislation regarding students with exceptionalities (Bezeau, 2002).

In addition to legislation, Canadians are also guided by various case laws dealing with individuals with disabilities at the postsecondary level. The following section gives a brief overview of case laws that influence postsecondary institutions.

Legislation and LD

Case law and statute law are intertwined. When a judge interprets a statute, the interpretation may become binding, according to the principles of *stare decisis*, and now be considered a law. Therefore, it is not sufficient to look only at the text of a statute. One must also investigate how courts have dealt with pieces of legislation dealing with the issue. Tables of statutes judicially considered present the citations of cases considered a particular legislative provision. Since these cases are crucial to the interpretation of statutes, they must be consulted. In some incidences American court cases influence decisions made in Canada because such cases are so new to the Canadian court system. Therefore, when dealing with students with LD at the postsecondary level, rulings in the American courts are worth citing. For example, reviewing court cases from the United States may help clarify the parameters of "reasonableness" as it applies to accommodations at the post secondary level.

One Supreme Court Ruling in the United States provides guidance pertaining to higher education access for students with disabilities. While the case focused on a student with a hearing impairment, the Court's methodology in weighing the rights of the student and the institution is equally instructive in considering the access needs of students with LD (Scott, 1997). In *Southeastern Community College v. Davis* (1979) Frances Davis, a licensed practical nurse with a hearing impairment, applied to the registered nursing program at Southeastern Community college (Scott, 1997). The school had denied her admission because the nursing faculty felt that she would require either extensive individual supervision in (or exemption from) the clinical phase of the nursing program in order to ensure patient safety. Davis filed suit against the college

stating that she was discriminated against and denied admission solely on the basis of her hearing impairment. The Supreme Court has defined a qualified person with a disability as "one who is able to meet all of a program's requirements in spite of his (her) handicap (Scott, 1994, p.405)."

In finding for the institution, the Supreme Court also stated that:

1) postsecondary institutions have the right to establish and maintain academic and technical (nonacademic) standards that are essential to a course or program;
2) the student's physical and mental abilities must be considered on an individualized basis as they relate to the specific program (stereotypes about disabilities are not permissible);
3) a wide range of accommodations that might permit the individual to participate in the program must be considered. (Patients safety and undue administration hardship were areas the Court examined in weighing the accommodations requests) (p. 92).

In another court case, *Dinsomore v. Pugh and the Agents of the University of California at Berkley* (1990), a faculty member refused to provide a requested accommodation on an exam and contested the existence of the student's diagnosed learning disability (Scott, 1994). The faculty member adamantly proclaimed his right to academic freedom and refused to provide the student with extended time. In an out-of-court settlement, the institution was required to develop clear policies and procedures for ensuring that students with disabilities would receive appropriate "reasonable" accommodations in a timely fashion (Scott, 1994).

As with other court cases, this case agreed that a student with a LD may receive a reasonable accommodation but the question remains, how does one define what is "reasonable". The following section will continue to discuss what research says regarding defining a "reasonable" accommodation.

Defining 'Reasonable'

Scott (1997) believes that accommodating students with LD at the postsecondary level is not as simple as a student making a request and the faculty member agreeing to the request. As stated earlier, how, when and what accommodations are considered "reasonable" is negotiated between all stakeholders including the service-providers, faculty, and the student with the LD.

There were two outcomes suggested by the court procedures and court rulings involving students with LD at the postsecondary education: active participation and informed participation by all stakeholders (Scott, 1997). Any faculty who are concerned that a requested accommodation will compromise the academic standards of a course or program should actively participate in a discussion with the student (and service-provider of learning disability services if appropriate) concerning what is reasonable. Also, one of the most important contributions faculty can make to the discussion of reasonable accommodations is to review carefully and articulate the academic and technical standards that are essential to a course or program of study (Scott, 1997).

Based on an extensive review of the literature, Scott (1990) recommended a series of questions for faculty to consider in establishing nondiscriminatory essential requirements in a course or program of study. The following guiding questions and discussion are drawn in large part from these recommendations:

(1) What is the purpose of the course?

(2) What methods of instruction are absolutely necessary? Why?

(3) What outcomes are absolutely required of all students? Why?

(4) What methods of assessing student outcomes are absolutely necessary? Why?

(5) What are acceptable levels of performance on these student outcome measures?

Defining essential requirements in a nondiscriminatory fashion may require more in-depth consideration for some faculty in areas that may be accommodated differently than in the past. The purpose of these reflective questions is to prompt faculty to clarify course expectations – not change them for students with LD (Scott, 1997).

By proactively defining what is essential to a course or program of study, in content and procedure, and accommodating nonessential elements, we preserve the principles of academic freedom without impinging on the basic civil rights of students with disabilities (Scott, 1994). Faculty and academic departments are asked to define and seek consensus on the core of their discipline. Scott (1994) believes that in some cases this is a Herculean task. Therefore, she feels determining the essential elements of a course or program should go beyond the individual faculty members and departments, and should be addressed within fields or disciplines. Once the essential requirements have been delineated for a course or department, requests for accommodations can be considered and deemed 'reasonable' or not.

Westby (2000) has said determining the difference between a reasonable accommodation and non-discrimination is the responsibility of the postsecondary

institution. He feels that accommodating a student with LD is more difficult than accommodating other students with disabilities, LD involve disabilities with thinking and learning processes, and the challenge is to determine what thinking and learning processes are necessary for a particular course or area of study. There are many examples of accommodations for LD, but Westby states there is seldom guidance in how to consider these academic adjustments for individuals in specific contexts. This is where the faculty members and experts in fields of study need to determine the thought processes and learning processes that are necessary for success in that area. This will help to decide whether a particular accommodation is "reasonable" or not appropriate.

In some cases, accommodating a course at the postsecondary level is only part of the answer for supporting individuals with LD. Many individuals with LD enter postsecondary institutions lacking the necessary skills to be successful in their field of study. These students need additional programming and training to assist with their education development. The following section will discuss the support programs available to students with LD that would be beneficial, yet are above and beyond simple accommodations.

Support programs

Programming for students with LD in postsecondary settings is a complex process. Scott (1997) describes requests for accommodations by students with LD as frequently involving academic adjustments in faculty teaching and evaluation in learning. Accommodation requests that would typically be deemed reasonable, he feels may include, "the provision of a note-taker for class lectures; extended time on exams or class assignments; use of a spell-check, grammar-check, and/or proofreader on written tasks;

tests in alternate formats, such as oral rather than written exam; and other forms of accommodation based on individual student profiles and needs (p.86)."

Service providers at postsecondary institutions have several responsibilities for assisting LD students. They are chiefly responsible for dialoguing with faculty about (a) precisely what LD's are; (b) the degree to which services are, and should be, accessible to all students; (c) the extent to which curriculum change jeopardizes academic integrity so the adjustment is no longer one that provides an equal opportunity for the students. It is imperative decision-makers and educators be aware students with LD often have above average intelligence and that adjustments made for them should not jeopardize excellence (Hardy-Cox & Klas, 1996).

However, Brinckerhoff et al (1992) also believe service providers at the postsecondary level should prioritize service delivery options that promote student independence, by providing learning strategy instruction and self-advocacy training within a setting tailored to meet the unique needs of the student. They believe the focus should not only be on accommodating the disability, but also promoting independence.

The type of instruction that should be encouraged in college is training in learning strategies, including study skills, memory techniques, test-taking strategies, time management, note taking, and organizational strategies. These skills should develop academic self-sufficiency as opposed to the tutorial approach students receive instruction in the content they are having difficulty (Brinckerhoff, 1992).

Another crucial component of service delivery is training in self-advocacy. Self-advocacy is taught when the service provider shares the diagnostic data with the student, helps the student understand and learn to explain his or her disability, and both models

and practices approaches for the student to identify and request the necessary accommodations (Brinckerhoff, 1992). Learning strategies and self-advocacy training are so vital to success for individuals outside the postsecondary setting. LD are lifelong conditions, and having additional learning strategies and self-advocacy skills will only benefit the individual long-term. Unfortunately, service-providers at most postsecondary settings face several challenges when servicing students with LD. The following section will highlight the challenges they may face and ways to offset these challenges.

Offsetting Institutional Challenges

Student affairs and service providers' at the postsecondary level face many challenges in meeting needs and concerns of students with LD. The first challenge is a fundamental one: communicating a clear statement of the extent the institution is committed to maximizing student's abilities to attain personal and academic success. Institutions need to make a statement about what services they can provide to meet the challenges of accessibility, and the individual will then make the decision whether they can depend on this particular institution to support their learning disability (Hardy-Cox & Klas, 1996)

A second challenge facing service providers is the invisible nature of LD. "Certifying" or "demonstrating" to the university community that even though these students may appear fully proficient, they have special needs that may not be obvious initially (Hardy-Cox & Klas, 1996). This challenge is overcome when a multi-disciplinary team determines the eligibility of services, and communicates to faculty.

A third challenge is to delineate the *degree* of modification of teaching and evaluation methods, to ensure the integrity of academic work for all students. Hardy-Cox

and Klas (1996) suggest the following before making any adjustments: (a) remediating students deficits – identifying the deficits and directing intervention to teach those particular skills; (b) capitalizing on student's strengths – using an existing skill to compensate for a weaker area; and (c) complementing the students' approach by circumventing weaknesses and helping the student to achieve through use of equipment (e.g., calculators, tape recorders, and computers), proofreading, and increased time allotments for reading and testing (p.95). Hardy-Cox and Klas (1996) note the above challenges are being compounded by overstretched budgets for LD services and educational programs.

Conclusion

Determining whether or not an accommodation is reasonable is not a one-step process. The literature (for e.g., Scott (1997) & Brinckerhoff (1996)) provides support for the accommodations, often mandatory at the postsecondary level; but the service-provider, the faculty member, and the student determine under what conditions they will be provided.

The key is to encourage as many individuals with LD with potential to attend postsecondary institutions. All those involved with educating students with LD are responsible for assuring they receive the best educational experience possible. They must be prepared for the struggles students with LD may face at the postsecondary level. Assisting and encouraging the individual with LD at the secondary level will make the transition all the smoother.

Although many questions still exist surrounding this complex, yet fascinating field, continued research in the area of LD is necessary. Individuals with LD have been

the focus of various research studies (for e.g., Levine & Nourse (1998) &Hardy-Cox & Klas (1996)) to gain a better understanding of the issue, yet continued research is needed in areas such as: definition, assessment and diagnosis, placement, transition, and what is deemed 'reasonable' supports/accommodations in situations. Servicing individuals with LD at the postsecondary level is a relatively new phenomenon in education, and each day there is additional findings reported. The key for researchers is getting the updated information to the necessary stakeholders to assure success for individuals with LD attending postsecondary institutions.

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