

Maximizing Learning Strengths: Practical Approaches to Learning Difficulties & Disabilities

CLLS Webcast
September 23, 2004
Leslie Shelton, Ph.D.,
Leshelton@aol.com

HorizonLive Chat Area

Questions and Comments

1. Type your questions into the Send a Message Box.

Send A Message: Hello Class, are there any questions?


2. What you type is displayed in the Chat Box for all to see.

Connecting to server...
Connected: Welcome to the HorizonLive Messaging Server (v3.2.5) at infopeople.horizonlive.net
You say: "Hello Class, are there any questions?"

Getting Help

For technical problems, click on IM Button

Send a Private Message to **HorizonHelp**




Agenda

- A Brief History – why the LD Guide
- LD and a CLLS Philosophy
- Distinguishing between differences, difficulties and disabilities
- Assessment and Screening
- Questions
- Break – 10 minutes
- Instructional Approaches
- Training for tutors, staff, learners
- Summary and Questions


I. Brief History of LD Guide

- LD Task Force formed in 1999 - 2001
- Why? The Need
 - confusion between differences, difficulties, and disabilities
 - conflicting paradigms (deficit oriented vs. growth models)
 - lack of research on adults/generalizations from children
 - new research focusing on phonemic awareness
 - competing approaches – real life vs. language processing skills
 - heightened emphasis by “LD specialists”



Purpose of LD Guide and LD Training

- Provide clarity, dispel myths, and offer a common perspective
- Focus on effective approaches and describe resources
- LD Guide available on the CLLS website (www.literacyworks.org/cls) under "Staff Resources"



A Common Philosophy

The following guiding principles were developed by the LD Task Force.

- > *recognize abilities rather than disabilities*
- > *see the whole person rather than a disabled person*
- > *recognize unique gifts, talents and capacities of learners*
- > *focus on strengths to help overcome difficulties*
- > *discover genius in every human being*
- > *honor each person's unique ways of knowing.*



II. An Important Perspective

- Emphasis on *learning disabilities* results in a tendency for anyone having trouble with reading or writing to be labeled as *learning disabled*
- *Learning disabilities* vs. *language processing difficulties*
- A small percentage of these difficulties are actually caused by a specific disability.



A Reason for Caution

- A 1997 study by the Council for Exceptional Children found:
 - 80% of children identified as *learning disabled* actually had *reading problems*
 - At least 75% of these children had been misdiagnosed
 - Only 5% had disabilities.
 - Poor reading skills were due to ineffective reading instruction, lack of reading readiness, and cultural or environmental factors.



What is LD? The distinctions

- **Learning differences** – cultural, environmental or cognitive preferences, including learning styles & multiple intelligences.
- **Learning difficulties** - refers to reading difficulties caused by a variety of factors including emotional, psychological or physiological barriers that affect language processing.
- **Learning disabilities** – specific neurological difficulties usually associated with reading and math processing difficulties.



Reflection

- How do these distinctions affect how you view your students?
- How do they influence your view of instruction?

NOTE: Most of the adult learners in CLLS programs have reading and writing difficulties. Yet they also have strongly developed intelligences that were either dismissed or underutilized in school.



Taking Dis out of Disabilities

- Focus on abilities to address difficulties
- Realize only 5% to 10% of reading difficulties are caused by specific language disabilities
- Understand that LD definitions isolate and stigmatize two of the eight intelligences



Examining the definitions

- Examples of 2 current definitions (p. 12).
- Examine words used – *deficit, disorder, dysfunction*
- Words pathologize people with reading difficulties
- Based on a deficit paradigm vs. growth paradigm



Understanding Reading Difficulties

- Most learning disabilities are *reading difficulties*
- Reading difficulties are primarily caused by *phonologic awareness problems*

“Children and adults with reading disabilities have trouble with the most basic step in the reading pathway: breaking the written word into smaller phonologic units. And phonologic difficulty is independent of intelligence.”

Reid Lyon, National Institute of Health,

1996



Human Capacities Focus

Even though adult learners may have phonologic processing difficulties, it is essential to:

- *See students as whole and capable*
- *Teach about multiple intelligences*
- *Focus on real life talents and goals*



III. Assessment and Screening

What should programs be doing to assess skills and screen for language processing barriers?

Assessment: Assess for Skills, Abilities & Intelligences

Screening: Screen for auditory and visual difficulties

Diagnosis: Refer for testing when there is little progress



Assessing Learning Abilities

- Find and use tools that identify learning strengths.
- Teach learners and tutors about multiple intelligence theory
 - Eight ways of being smart



Discovering student strengths

- discuss the MI chart of being smart
- discover your student's most developed intelligences by using the "I Can" card to discuss what her or she loves to do or is good at.

(See Handout: "I Can" cards)



Video clip 1 – Using the "I Can" Card

- Discovering Student Strengths
Donna and Leslie make a list of what she loves to do.



Video Clip 2

- Identifying Skills
 - Donna and Leslie break down the skills that Donna uses to plan a party.



Video Clip 3

- Identifying Intelligences
 - Donna and Leslie check off which intelligences Donna uses.
 - Donna identifies her own intelligence preferences.



The Language Intelligence

- Language Intelligence is *only one* of eight intelligences
 - learners may have barriers that affect language processing
 - it DOES NOT mean that they are not language smart.



Red Flags: Screening Indicators of processing difficulties

Most language processing difficulties that can affect reading and writing fall into three categories:

- Auditory Processing Difficulties
- Visual Processing Difficulties
- Kinesthetic Processing Difficulties



Stages of Processing

- The 3 forms of sensory processing involve five stages
 - “Blocks” can occur at any stage These include:
 - Sensory Input
 - Perception
 - Conceptualization
 - Storage
 - Retrieval

(source: Charles & Patricia Lindamood)



Responding to Red Flags

- Multi-sensory approaches and creative lesson activities are the most effective ways to address difficulties.
- Difficulty processing language does not mean a learner is not smart in other ways.
- Non-language based intelligences such as bodily, musical, spatial, natural, social and self smarts will:
 - greatly enhance literacy instruction
 - increase learner success.



Auditory Processing Difficulties

Auditory Processing means understanding that letter symbols represent speech sounds & perceiving the connection between the sequences of sounds and letters in written words.

- Those who cannot perceive the contrasts between speech sounds or the correct order of letters in syllables:
 - will learn more effectively through visual memory than understanding sound/symbol associations.
 - Drilling a person about the sounds of letters or words is a source of frustration and fatigue



Auditory Discrimination, Perception, and Memory

Understanding how auditory processing works:

- **Auditory Discrimination** is the ability to distinguish one speech sound from another.
- **Auditory Perception** is the ability to perceive the number, order, and difference of speech sounds within a spoken pattern.
- **Auditory Memory** is the ability to remember information that it is given verbally.



Red Flags! Indicators for Screening

- *Refer to the Red Flags Handout (p34 - LD Guide)*
 - Review the indicators listed
- **Screening should be twofold:**
 - Tutors and staff can watch for difficulties in reading, writing, spelling, speaking and listening.
 - If a number of the Red Flag indicators appear, then follow with an auditory discrimination test – i.e. the Lindamood Auditory Conceptualization test or Wepman Auditory Discrimination Test.



Auditory Difficulties in Real Life

- People with auditory or phonemic awareness processing difficulties are:
 - **Not able to rely on their ears alone** for accurate decoding and encoding. They need visual and kinesthetic clues to help them.
 - Emphasizing or drilling **phonics** is an exercise in futility and set-up for failure.
 - **Strong visual and spatial learners.**
 - They often think in pictures as they read. If there is no picture for a word they have no way to put the word in visual memory.



Visual Processing Difficulties

- **Visual Processing means:**
 - noticing shapes of letters and words
 - recognizing subtle differences in symbols and patterns,
 - remembering what symbols or shapes look the same or different.

Visual processing involves not only the functioning of the eye and optic nerve, but also the areas of the brain which process visual information.



Visual Perception, Discrimination, and Memory

- **Visual Perception** is the ability to perceive shapes and colors accurately
- **Visual Discrimination** is the ability to see the difference between similar shapes/objects and to isolate an image or line of print from a busy competing background.
- **Visual Memory** is the ability to store information and retrieve it from storage whenever needed

(Skinner, et.al. 1996)



Red Flags! Indicators for screening

- **Refer to Red Flags Handout** (p. 38-LD Guide)
 - Discuss the Red flags listed.
 - Screening should include:
 - Tutor and staff observation of the indicators listed.
 - Irlen test for scotopic sensitivity if student complains of squirming print, eye fatigue, or watering eyes.



Visual Difficulties in Real Life

■ Learners

- > tend to rely on their ears or body sensation for clues.
- > may have difficulty remembering details on a comprehension test
- > Poor visual perception and memory will affect spelling and writing because the person cannot remember visual clues.



Kinesthetic Processing Difficulties

■ Bodily-Kinesthetic Processing means

- > The placement of the tongue and shape of the mouth affect the production and articulation of speech.
- > A person needs good motor coordination to hold a pencil to write.



Sensory-motor perception, discrimination, or memory

- Sensory-motor discrimination is the ability to feel, analyze and self-correct how the mouth moves to make specific sounds.
- Sensory-motor memory is the body's ability to remember how to make certain sounds
- Dysgraphia describes a person's difficulty holding a pencil, forming letters correctly, and writing legibly.
- Poor visual motor integration describes the mechanical problem of copying text or writing in a poorly organized fashion.



Red Flags! Indicators for screening

- Refer to the Red Flags Handout (p43 - LD Guide)

Screening should include:

- > Observation of written errors
- > Observation of speech or pronunciation difficulties
- > Learner knowledge of prior testing that revealed dysgraphia




Kinesthetic Difficulties in Real Life

- People with kinesthetic processing difficulties may:
 - > find it difficult to copy text or write using a pen or pencil
 - > find writing uncomfortable and tiring
 - > benefit from using a computer
 - > have poor balance or motor skills
 - > benefit from cross-lateral activities to improve right-left brain sync




Summary: Assessment & Screening

- Assess for skills and screen for difficulties
- Many of the indicators of one difficulty can be seen in the other difficulties.




Questions

- Respond to audience questions



10 minute Break

- Stretch
- Send questions to Leslie
- Questions will be answered live in the last 15 minutes of the web cast.



IV. Instructional Approaches

- What Works
 - Learner inclusion, real life focus, creative engagement
- CLLS Programs offer:
 - Individualized instruction for the whole person
 - Goal-directed learning
 - Focus on learning strengths
 - Creative multi-sensory activities
 - Targeted materials



What works

- A Balanced two-fold approach:
 - Multi-sensory activities that involve a blend of the learner's intelligences
 - Targeted instruction that assists with phonemic awareness and phonologic processing.
 - See LD Guide for descriptions and reviews p.46
 - See MI for Literacy and ABE web page at <http://literacyworks.org/MI>
 - *Honoring Diversity* kit



Real Life Examples of MI Approaches

Watch video of Patty – video clip 4

- creating a clay scene
 - *Using kinesthetic, spatial and self intelligences to address an Auditory Memory problem.*



Real Life example -- Ray

Watch video of Ray – video clip 5

- spelling “hundred”
 - *Using the musical and spatial intelligences to address a visual and auditory challenge*



Real Life example -- Donna

Watch video of Donna – video clip 6

- describing how her tutor George helped her
 - *Bringing intelligences into lessons*



Reflection

- In these three examples, what was working?



Packaged materials & methods

- Many companies and individuals have developed their own specific materials to address **phonologic processing**
- Evaluate these based on a demonstrated track record and examples of success.
 - Determine if they are targeted for children rather than adults
- Review the descriptions of materials provided in the LD Guide (p 46)
 - Reviews were written by fellow CLLS staff and are not endorsements of particular approaches.



Overview of materials

- Materials listed include:
 - Bright Solutions (S. Barton)
 - Honoring Diversity kit
 - Irlen Institute Scotopic Sensitivity Overlays
 - Learning 2000
 - Lindamood-Bell
 - Literacy Solutions "Tutoring Techniques"
 - Reading Revolution
 - Scottish Rite tapes
 - Teaching Adults Who Learn Differently guide
 - Wilson Reading System



Summary of Approaches

- Pros and cons of the different approaches and the CLLS guiding principles.



Training: tutors, staff, learners

- What is needed?
- Some common needs of staff, tutors, and learners
 - Understand multiple intelligences and learning capacities
 - Discover how to translate into learning strengths and instructional practices
 - Understand the three primary causes of reading and writing difficulties
 - Learn about Red Flags to watch for
 - Have a staff member or resource person who can conduct more in-depth screening tests if needed



Summary of Training

- Review the strengths and assets of CLLS programs to address reading difficulties

- View video of Donna discussing perspectives from a learner – video clip 7



Question and Answer Time

- Leslie, Donna, and Holly answer your questions



Thanks

- The End! Good luck!

- Remember to look at the following resources:
 - LD Guide online in the CLLS website
 - MI in Adult Literacy on the CLLS website
 - www.literacyworks.org/cls
