The ABCs of Learning Issues

Helping to Bridge The Gap Between The Home and The School

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Author:
➤ The ABCs of Learning Issues
  ➤ A practical guide for professionals and parents of children with learning issues
  ➤ Available in English and Spanish

Member:
➤ International Educational Consultants Association
➤ National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs
➤ The Association of Boarding Schools
➤ Council of Exceptional Children
➤ Learning Disabilities Association of America

B.S. Boston University, School of Education
M.Ed. The College of William and Mary
Workshop Objectives

- Differentiate the differences between a language acquisition issue and a learning disability

- Identify, recognize, and rectify specific learning issues through:
  - Clinical definitions and educator’s observations
  - Behaviors observed at home and at school
  - Effective strategies to incorporate at home and at school

- Learn how to effectively advocate for children with learning disabilities
Today’s Agenda

1. Learn about the benefits of bilingual evaluations, as well as the evolution of equal education federal laws

2. Explore six common learning issues, and understand the association between learning issues and behaviors as identified in formal evaluations

3. Engage in a discussion about how parents, educators, and administrators can strengthen the home-school partnership
Lemon Grove Grammar School class photo, c. 1930. Teacher at left is Jerome Green
Evolution of Equal Education Laws

- 1954: Brown vs Board of Education
- 1964: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act
- 1974: Equal Education Opportunities Act
- 1975: Public Law 94-142
- 1986: Public Law 99-457
- 2015: Individual with Disabilities Education Act
Evolution of Federal Educational Laws—
Guarantees Rights for Students and Families

Brown vs Board of Education (1954)
- Unlawful to discriminate
- Education should be afforded to all citizens on an equal basis
- Parents and advocates could now secure equal opportunities for children with disabilities

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI)
- Prohibited discrimination on race, color and natural origin in programs that receive federal financial assistance

Public Law 94-142 (1975)
- The Education for All Handicapped Children Act
- The Bill of Rights for children with disabilities and their families
- A free appropriate public education (FAPE)
- The least restrictive environment (LRE)
- An individualized education program (IEP)
- Procedural due process
- Nondiscriminatory assessment
- Parental participation
Evolution of Educational Laws Continues to Improve Parents’ Rights

Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA)

- Prohibits discrimination against faculty, staff and students
- Requires school districts to take action to overcome barriers to students’ equal participation

Public Law 99-457 (1986)

- Amendments were made to the Education of Handicapped Act that pre-school children could now receive free and appropriate service

Individual with Disabilities Education Act of 1975-2015 (IDEA)

Continues to improve parents’ rights and access to students with disabilities.

There are 13 different disability categories:

- Autism
- Deaf-blindness
- Deafness
- Emotional disturbance
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual disability
- Multiple disabilities
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health impairment
- Specific learning disability
- Speech and language impairment
- Traumatic brain injury
- Visual impairment
  (including blindness)
English Language Learners Face Additional Challenges

- Difficulty in language acquisition in a child’s first language will also affect acquisition of a second language.

- Conversational skills sufficient for the playground fall shy of the formal language required in the classroom (BICS) vs. (CALP).

- Language-based learning difficulties will present in both primary and secondary languages of children who have learning issues.

- Many educators are not trained to distinguish between English language learning issues and learning disabilities.
Children who are acquiring a second language are at a disadvantage in performing well on standardized tests.

Formal assessments that incorporate cultural traditions and practices of English language learners are essential.

These tests assist in determining children’s present level of cognitive and academic performance.
Bilingual Students Require Bilingual Evaluations

- Bilingual evaluators are invaluable in assessing the profiles of English language learners
- Evaluators need to be fluent in the child’s first language and in English
- Assessment tools should be administered in the child’s native language
- Assessments should be normed in both the first language and in English
- Norms should be obtained according to grade level and chronological age
Identifying if English Language Learners Also Have Learning Disabilities

The school team needs to obtain:

- Background history of the child
- Family history
- Language proficiency and use of language in the home and in the community
- Socio-economic status
- Developmental milestones in native language (L1)
- Academic history including reading and writing skills in (L1)
- Curriculum-based data and observations
- Assessment of school’s capacity to educate ELLs and Multi-cultural learners (MCLs)
- Work samples
- Intervention results
Differentiating English Language Learners From Learning Disabled Students

Educators need to differentiate between:

- Inattention and distractibility
- Impulsivity and hyperactivity
- Forgetfulness and disorganization
- Disorganization and disruptiveness

Melissa Farrall, Pamela Wright and Peter Wright, *All About Tests and Assessments*, p.141
The ABCs of Learning Issues

An exploration of definitions and practical strategies for parents and professionals
Understanding Definitions and How They Shape Our Approach and Behaviors we Observe

• Processing Speed
• Working Memory
• Reading Comprehension
• Written Language Skills
• Computational Accuracy
• Information Overload
Processing Speed
## Definitions of Processing Speed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clinical Definition</th>
<th>Educator’s Observations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The rate at which the brain can:</td>
<td>Student’s brains require more time to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Absorb information (input)</td>
<td>- Make sense of the information (input)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Digest and analyze input</td>
<td>- To produce an appropriate response (output)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Create an appropriate response (output) in a time efficient manner</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What Does This Definition and These Observations Mean?

- Children process information slowly reducing their ability to work efficiently and effectively within a specified time frame.

- Parents and educators observe the following:
  - Reduced output when asked to complete tasks in a short amount of time.
  - Struggle to complete tasks under time constraints.
  - Focus and effort is evident, despite the length of time required to complete tasks.
Which Strategies Will Help with Processing Speed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home-based Strategies</th>
<th>Classroom-based Strategies</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ Create a schedule to help plan long-term assignments</td>
<td>➢ Offer extended time for completion of assignments, quizzes and tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Break assignments down into components</td>
<td>➢ Reduce length of assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Share reading passages and proofread reports together</td>
<td>➢ Smash the task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ When completion is unlikely, communicate with teacher and request more time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Let your child take frequent breaks to regroup and refocus</td>
<td></td>
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Working Memory
## Definitions of Working Memory

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<tr>
<td>➢ Refers to the instantaneous and temporary process of holding onto information, processing and manipulating it within a matter of seconds</td>
<td>➢ Refers to memory that is shorter than short-term memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ These memories last a matter of seconds and help people to process information and form appropriate responses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What Does This Definition and These Observations Mean?

- Children who struggle with working memory struggle to hold onto information temporarily which makes processing and understanding information very difficult.
Observing Working Memory Difficulties

Parents and professionals observe students:

- Struggling to follow spoken direction
- Difficulty remembering components of a multi-step problem
- Inaccurate recall of recently learned information
Which Strategies Will Help Develop Working Memory?

**Home-based Strategies**

- Teach your child to repeat back information as they receive it or to say it aloud to themselves
- Provide graphs, charts, and maps to help your child complete assignments
- Use fact sheets for math facts, word banks, and visual graphic organizers to help jog memory
- Review fact sheets regularly

**Classroom-based Strategies**

- Reinforce what is being presented by incorporating multiple modalities
- Provide graphs, charts, and maps to help students follow class lectures
- Teach students to jot quick notes to remember key facts or instructions as presented
- Use ‘cheat sheets’ with math facts, word banks and visual graphic organizers
Reading Comprehension
Definitions of Reading Comprehension

**Clinical Definition**

- The ability to read text, process it and understand its meaning
- Ability to comprehend text is influenced by different skills
  - Sight reading—instantly recognize words on a page
  - Decode unfamiliar words—sound out unknown words
  - Understand syntax—the structure of a sentence

**Educator’s Observations**

- Refers to the process of reading, understanding and interpreting written information
  - Students with reading comprehension issues struggle to make meaning out of recently read material
  - It is a challenge for them to analyze and make meaningful interpretations
  - They may also struggle with written instructions
What Does This Definition and These Observations Mean?

- When children struggle with reading comprehension it is important to discover which foundational reading skills need strengthening.

- Identifying areas of vulnerability is essential to increase reading comprehension.
Observing Reading Comprehension

What parents and professionals observe:

- The child may read well but does not understand the meaning
- The child is not able to interpret and analyze reading material
### Which Strategies Will Help with Reading Comprehension?

#### Home-based Strategies
- Listen to audio book while simultaneously reading assigned text
- When reading with your child ask for analysis of plot development, character analysis and predictions
- Highlight quotes and important passages for easy reference
- Create story maps

#### Classroom-based Strategies
- Provide scaffolding of reading comprehension in every subject
- Require written or verbal analysis to gauge students’ comprehension level
- Provide a list of terms for parents to facilitate home-based strategies
Written Language Skills
Definitions of Written Language Skills

Clinical Definition

- A person’s ability to use writing as a medium of effective communication
- The ability to encode letters into words and sentences that result in generating a written message

Educator’s Observations

- Difficulty relaying ideas in an organized and concise manner when asked to write them
- Uses simplistic vocabulary and ideas
- Summaries of content are underdeveloped and lack direction
What Does This Definition and These Observations Mean?

- Children with underdeveloped written language skills express ideas that appear to lack logic and a cohesive sequence of events.
- Their summaries lack salient details and a clear thesis statement.
Observing Written Language Skills

What parents and professionals observe:

- Written vocabulary use is simplistic and underdeveloped
- Ideas conveyed are basic and lack sophistication
- Written format is without direction and lacks logical sequential order

From hieroglyphics to modern writing, written language serves as a medium of effective communication
Which Strategies Will Help Written Language Skills?

**Home-based Strategies**
- Preplan all writing assignments with your child
- Create graphic organizers
- Provide word banks
- Act as a scribe
- Use Voice-to-Text technology

**Classroom-based Strategies**
- Use graphic organizers to assist with developing, arranging, and presenting assignments
- Provide a vocabulary list of common terms to incorporate into their assignments
- Teach students how to scaffold their writing assignments
Written Language Skills Sample

Did you know that 1 billion people around the world do not have clean water? Some people have to walk 20 or 3 miles to collect water. Or have to wait 20 or 3 hours for it to rain. And for clean water, bring animals water for animals to. You can do something like, maybe a bake sale. Or donate food, or donate clothes, or donate money. And that would really help.
Computational Accuracy
Definitions of Computational Accuracy

Clinical Definition

- The ability to calculate a mathematical equation and arrive at the correct answer

Educator’s Observations

- Students struggle to correctly compute simple math facts
- Students may have a deeper conceptual understanding of math and numerical relationships and still arrive at an incorrect answer
What Does This definition and These Observations Mean?

- Unable to manipulate number facts in their heads
- Miscalculate basic number facts
- Lack automaticity
Observing Computational Accuracy

What parents and professionals observe:

- Students struggle to calculate simple math problems
- Misalign rows of numbers leading to incorrect answers
- Students may understand the concept but still calculate the wrong answer
Which Strategies Will Help Computational Accuracy?

**Home-based Strategies**
- Provide calculators, rulers, measuring cups and other aids
- Practice addition and multiplication facts
- Practice percentages, decimals, fractions, and metric conversions
- Use graph paper to assist with number alignment

**Classroom-based Strategies**
- Provide a visual point of reference of math facts
- Provide calculators
Information Overload
## Definitions of Information Overload

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<tr>
<td>➢ A person who struggles to understand information and effectively utilize it</td>
<td>➢ Students struggle to understand content due to the volume of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Decision making and learning are affected when one receives too much information at one time</td>
<td>➢ While all of us have some degree of information overload these students are overwhelmed by information others easily digest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What Does This Definition and These observations mean?

- Students who struggle with Information Overload will underperform
- The volume of information is overwhelming and students shut down
Observing Information Overload

What parents and professionals observe:

- Students appear to be dazed or lost in thought
- Productivity lessens more quickly than expected for the specified task
## Which Strategies Will Help Alleviate Information Overload?

### Home-based Strategies
- Design a homework routine that includes frequent breaks
- Break down assignments into manageable components
- Let the school know the level of information overload experienced at home

### Classroom-based Strategies
- Reduce the amount of information being presented in a class period
- Present small amounts of information at a time
Tips for Parents

You are your child's best advocate
Be an Informed Parent

- Understand your child’s profile
- Keep a paper trail
- Create a folder for report cards, transcripts, home-school communications, parent-teacher conferences, and IEP meetings

Adapted from Understood.Org
## Build Working Relationships

- **Know who is on your team**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General education teachers</th>
<th>School district representative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special education teachers</td>
<td>School psychologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School district representative</td>
<td>Translator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Maintain an open line of communication with teachers, service providers, and school principals
- Be mindful and curious
- Ask questions and document answers on your child’s level of academic performance, class participation, social-emotional behavior, attention, etc.

*Adapted from Understood.Org*
Maintain Communication

- Home-school communication is essential
- Use all methods of communication
  - Emails, hand-written notes, parent-teacher conferences, annual meetings
- Through regular communication, parents and educators can partner together

Adapted from Understood.Org
Learn Educational Terminology

- All professions have a common language
- As parents it is important to learn educational terminology fostering home-school communication
- Learn what ‘push-in’ and ‘pull-out’ means, as well as acronyms like RTI and CST

Adapted from Understood.Org
Understand Your Rights Under Federal Laws

FAPE and IDEA mandate that your child has specific rights

- **FAPE** - Free and Appropriate Public Education for children 3-21 who have learning and attention issues

- **IDEA** - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is tailored to meet individual needs

Adapted from Understood.Org
Remain Calm and Carry On

- Parents are *an equal* part of the team and their voice matters
- Bring a parent representative or an educational advocate to meetings
- Learn phrases that you can use to redirect conversations or diffuse tense situations

“I did not ask for additional accommodations at this point, I more or less wanted to hear what her teachers and support staff had to say. I was very pleased to hear the progress Lia is making and that they enjoy working with her.

I also was not comfortable asking for things without sounding completely competent - as this is not my area of expertise. I felt like I was winning simply because I didn't cry at this meeting”  Parent comment
Talk to Your Child

- Ask your child if they are receiving services or specified accommodations and interventions
- Ask if they are finding the services helpful
- Teach your children educational phrases that will promote self-advocacy

Adapted from Understood.Org
Tips for Educators Who Work with ELLs and LD Students
English Language Learners Can Succeed

- Use academic language
- Engage in higher-level thinking
- Contribute to classroom discussions
Supporting English Language Learners

Educators need to understand:

- Language acquisition
- Academic development
- Social development
The Majority of English Language Learners Are Thought to Have Learning Disabilities. This is a Misconception!

- Are English Language Learners’ difficulties due to language acquisition or learning difficulties?
- Difficulties in the acquisition of the English language can mirror characteristics of learning disabilities.
- Understanding the reason specific behavior is exhibited is essential to identifying the underlying causes.
Distinguishing between Language Acquisition and LD

Educators must understand:

- Second language acquisition
- Recognize characteristics associated with learning disabilities
- Differentiated instruction
- English language learners cannot be taught in the same manner or with the same materials
Tips for School Administrators
Support Your Educators:

- Consider creating the position of a Director of bilingual and language development
- Consider hiring a home-school liaison for the front office that reflects the school population
- Provide professional development
- Have knowledge of school curriculum
- Provide strong leadership, knowledge and understanding of all students
- Troubleshoot issues, support and mentor teachers
- Offer guidance to help schools and educators implement specific individualized education program (IEP) services
- Maintain a thorough understanding of Special Education Law
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ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITION

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