LINKS IN LEARNING

A manual linking second language learning,
literacy and learning disabilities.

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WELCOME TO Links in Learning

What is the purpose of this manual?

➢ **To inform teachers who are working with new Canadians in LINC/ESL literacy programmes about learning disabilities and other disabling conditions which may interfere with the learners' success in learning language and literacy skills;**

➢ **To help such teachers to assist those learners who are having difficulties in their language and literacy programmes, by identifying the possible signs of learning disabilities or other disabilities using an informal interview style assessment and interpreting the results of such assessments;**

➢ **To use the results of these informal assessments to modify the way they teach and therefore the learners learn;**

➢ **To ensure that both the teachers and the learners know about community based resources that can provide them with additional information and help to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.**

It is **NOT** the purpose of this manual to teach you the basics of your job. We know that most of you know a great deal about teaching new Canadians second language and literacy skills. The chances are that you probably know more about this than we do. But, if you work through this manual and apply the information that it contains, you may find it easier to help some of those learners who are currently having difficulties in your programme because of an unidentified or unacknowledged disability.

Our goal is to provide you with tools to help you to help these learners. Our expectation is that this process will enhance your job satisfaction and ensure greater success for more of the learners in your programme. This does not mean that you will be singling out people who are having difficulties with learning and telling them that you have identified that they have some kind of a disability. We know that you would not be comfortable in doing this. But the more you and the learner know and understand about how he or she can learn better with your help, the more successful you will both be.

Good luck! We thank you for your efforts and wish you and your students continued progress!

ABOUT THE WRITERS OF Links in Learning

Pat Hatt has severe learning disabilities which have interfered significantly with her ability to read. In spite of this she has a Master's degree from York University, specializing in the field of learning disabilities.

She now works for the North York Board of Education in the Continuing Education Programme as a programme leader for special needs adults. Her daily work brings her into contact with learners in North York's ESL programmes who have disabilities and who, as a result, require significant programme modifications. Pat is past president of the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario and vice-chair of the Ontario Advisory Council on Disability Issues. In addition to **Target Literacy**, Pat has developed several other resources used in adult literacy programming, including the **Adult Picture Dictionary.**

Eva (Ujlaki) Nichols worked as the executive director of the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario from 1984 to 1994. She now works as a consultant in the fields of advocacy, legislation, government liaison and training for the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario as well as other organizations working with exceptional learners. She chairs the Minister of Education and Training's Advisory Council on Special Education and serves on a number of other advisory bodies relating to special needs and education.

Eva's education originally focused on pure sciences, with degrees and post-graduate diplomas in zoology, chemistry, immunology and genetics. Prior to working for the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, Eva worked in genetic counselling, taught life sciences at the University of Toronto and served as a school trustee on the Scarborough and Metropolitan Toronto school boards.

In addition to **Target Literacy,** Eva has published a number of resource books on learning disabilities and special needs, including **Design for Success**, an employers' guide to learning disabilities, **Did You Ever Wonder Why?**, a guide for personnel in the criminal justice system, **Still Putting the Pieces Together,** a parents' guide to special education in Ontario, **Tools for Transitions**, a manual for guidance counsellors and **Alternatives for Their Future**, a handbook for social service personnel. Recently, she wrote and edited **Invisible No Longer**, a self-advocacy manual for adults with learning disabilities, which will be used as a training manual by the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario.

English is Eva's second language. She was born and grew up in Hungary and is therefore very well aware of the challenges faced by individuals arriving in a new country without speaking the language.

During the past couple of years, Pat and Eva have been delivering a series of training workshops to literacy practitioners in Ontario, based on **Target Literacy,** their previous joint project. It is anticipated that **Links in Learning** may be used in a similar fashion to provide a series of training sessions throughout Canada.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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HOW YOU CAN USE THIS MANUAL

This manual, **Links in Learning,** consists of four major sections. These are An Introduction to Learning Disabilities, The Assessment Interview and its Application, Programme Modifications and Resources. In addition there are several other minor sections, such as the Case Studies and a series of Appendices.

Initially, you should read the section on learning disabilities and ensure that you understand what learning disabilities are and what they are not, in the context of your programme and the population of learners that you are working with. It is not necessary or expected that you will memorize the material in detail. After all, if you come up against a situation that you don't understand, then you can always reread the relevant section of the manual or contact someone who can help you sort out the situation.

It is our hope and expectation that you will find the sections on the **Assessment Interview** and **Programme Modifications** really useful and you will return to them time and time again. You may even want to think about photocopying some of the relevant pages in those two sections for your own materials. And obviously once you are comfortable with using these, then you will not have to keep referring back to the background information.

This is your manual and you should use it in the way that suits you and meets your needs best.   There is no one right way that will be comfortable for everyone. For this reason you may well find that you will want to make comments or notes right in the book to help you to use it well. Remember, this is a manual and it's just fine to do that!

It is our hope that you will choose to attend the **Links in Learning** workshops that we plan to offer throughout Ontario or perhaps even Canada to give you the opportunity to have some direct training as well as the opportunity to ask all those questions which a book cannot answer. In the meantime, use the manual your way and if any urgent questions do come up, feel free to contact your local branch of the Learning Disabilities Association or the writers of this manual.

ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT FOR LINKING LANGUAGE LEARNING, LITERACY AND LEARNING DISABILITIES

" Sometimes it still seems like it was yesterday instead of over thirty five years ago. It still invades my dreams from time to time.

Having come to the city from the refugee camp in the north, I was almost immediately taken to the residential school in the country. I was really scared. I didn't speak a word of English yet and suddenly I was going to be one of three hundred girls at a place, where two hundred and ninety-nine (so I thought) spoke fluent English.

They told me on the way how lucky I was to have been accepted and to have someone make the arrangements for me. I told myself how lucky I was, but I found it hard to really believe it. Then suddenly we were there. I felt incredibly alone. All those who understood my mother tongue and who I was and where I came from, were gone.

I gritted my teeth, turned around and smiled. I resolved that nobody would know how I really felt. I resolved that I would learn to speak and read and write English as quickly and as well as I could. That was going to be the way I coped with the fear and the loneliness. I was really going to show them what I was made of! None of them would see me cry! "

It may seem self indulgent to begin with a personal anecdote, yet I think it makes sense in this context. As I look back now, I do believe that I was lucky. I received an education and learned to function in English under circumstances which were certainly unusual for a political refugee in her teens. Fortunately, because none of my fellow students had their families with them and we all wore identical school uniforms, my difference was not obvious or visible. Therefore, I had the opportunity to focus on learning and on working hard, without worrying about what the others were thinking about me or where my next meal would come from or where I would sleep the next night. I was indeed lucky!

When we think about new Canadians, even those who are not refugees, we must consider that they are coping with all of these factors of survival and quality of life, in addition to having to learn a new language and become orientated to a new culture. Many people who arrive in Canada with limited or no knowledge of English enter language programmes in order to improve their English and their literacy skills at the same time. Such programmes are delivered in a variety of settings, including universities, community colleges, school boards, as well as community based LINC and literacy programmes.

The majority of people who enrol in these programmes are successful at learning the requisite skills. They become proficient users of the English language and become familiar with the culture of Canada and the community in which they have settled.

But in spite of the most ideal conditions, for a significant number of people, especially those for whom the LINC programmes seem more appropriate than the community college or university based programmes, the learning of English language and literacy is and continues to be extremely difficult. There can be many reasons for this and sometimes it may be due to the presence of specific disabilities. Such disabilities may be congenital or acquired as a result of their past experiences such as illness, trauma or injury. These disabilities may be learning disabilities. Or they may be physical or developmental difficulties.

You may feel reluctant to think about disabilities when you are teaching in a language or literacy programme. Are you perhaps overreacting?

Consider the following examples shared with us:

➢ Students who are hardworking participants in a programme, who attend regularly, who seem to have tremendous difficulties with some aspects of the programme and are so competent in some others;

➢ Students who seem so slow and yet after a long time come up with such excellent responses to your questions;

➢ Students who are very withdrawn and reluctant to participate, but when it comes to written materials may suddenly shine;

➢ Students whose competencies range among the various LINC levels and who therefore do not fit into any of the existing programmes satisfactorily or successfully.

These are just some of the observations that have led teachers in language and literacy programmes to go looking for the underlying causes of their students' difficulties. Could it be that these learners, exhibiting such difficulties, actually have learning disabilities?

Learning disabilities will be discussed at great length in this manual. But it seems useful to offer a brief definition right here, so that we are all talking about the same thing. If you are quite familiar with learning disabilities and what they are, then please bear with us.

When we are talking about learning disabilities we are talking about the difficulties that some people have with **processing** information that they see or hear or read or feel. These people usually have reasonable abilities and aptitudes and the issue for them is not that they cannot learn, but rather that they learn differently from the way that most other people do. So what these people need more than anything in a learning environment is a different way of being taught.

People who have learning disabilities are usually born with the condition and have it throughout their lives. Their learning disabilities will effect many aspects of their lives, not just those things which we traditionally consider "learning" or schooling related tasks. This is why the assessment process in this manual looks for patterns involving language learning, literacy as well as life skills.

You will see when you look at the formal definition of learning disabilities in Appendix 1, that there is reference to the fact that persons with learning disabilities have average to above average intelligence. The purpose of this statement is to ensure that people who use the definition do not mix up people who are slow learners and those who have learning disabilities. The most important thing for you to remember right now is that learning disabilities do not correlate to someone's intelligence but to their way of learning.

There tends to be an understandable reluctance to refer people who have limited capabilities in English usage for testing for having a learning disability. The reason for this reluctance is that the formal tests used for the identification of learning disabilities are typically normed on a population that is English speaking. In fact many of the tests are normed on middle class white Americans, which makes them difficult to use with most other populations.

It is also important to recognize that, superficially at least, some of the descriptions of learning disabilities sound just like the descriptions of the things that people who are enrolled in the first and even second levels of LINC programming have difficulties with. For example, "may speak a little", "may recognize some letters but have trouble pronouncing them", "has little or no ability to decode words" and "little or no understanding of meaning" are all descriptors used in the LINC level one description. These can all be symptoms of learning disabilities as well, but clearly need not be so when we are dealing with someone who has recently arrived in Canada and has just begun to learn English.

This is why it is so important to ensure that we do not embark on searching for learning disabilities as soon as we identify that a newly enrolled learner is having difficulties. Further, it is very important to remember that people who are enrolled in the LINC programme and who have learning disabilities have also had those same learning disabilities before they arrived in Canada. Therefore, in looking for the signs of learning disabilities, the most important factors are a good understanding of the learner's competencies in his or her mother tongue, both spoken and written, as well as the patterns of difficulties which will appear in areas other than learning to speak, read and write English.

Many people, even some with quite obvious learning disabilities, do not know that the reason why they have had and continue to have difficulties with processing information, even in their mother tongue, is because they have a learning disability. Learning disabilities are usually invisible to others and are often unrecognized by the individual who has them. Although the individuals who have them may realize that they seem to have problems with certain tasks, they often do not know how to verbalize or explain these problems or whether

other people have similar difficulties. A common reaction among persons with learning disabilities is that *"I must be really stupid to have such problems. I'd better not let anybody know what's happening to me."*

The presence of these complex problems, especially when they are not recognized or acknowledged, often results in high levels of frustration. Many of the learners eventually drop out of language or literacy programmes. Their continuing difficulty with English language usage and literacy in turn hampers their ability to obtain and maintain suitable employment. They want to lead a successful life, but do not know how to achieve it when they have such difficulties with language and literacy skills.

10% of the general population has learning disabilities. This statistic is independent of ethnic, linguistic or cultural background, and can, therefore, be applied to the population of new Canadians just as much as to those who were born in this country. Many of them, just like their Canadian born counterparts, do not know that their difficulties with learning language, literacy and life skills may be due to the presence and interference of a learning disability. This does not mean that they cannot acquire the requisite skills, but rather that the training that they receive must focus on their learning strengths and be modified to meet their special learning needs.

It is particularly difficult for someone who had managed to establish a successful pattern of employment in his or her country, either by coping with or circumventing the impact of a learning disability and who had functioned as a competent capable individual, to return to the frustrations of having to learn and relearn academic and functional skills. In spite of their innate abilities and desire to become successful in their new life, they may have significant difficulties with learning, which in turn can impact all other aspects of their lives.

As stated earlier, we know that people who teach English as a second language to new Canadians know a great deal about the teaching of language, literacy and cultural or life skills. Most of you are qualified adult educators who do not have to be convinced of the importance of using suitable materials, of focusing on the needs of the learners or of recognizing the importance of learner motivation and attitudes.

The informal interview based assessment tool that is included in this manual should assist you to confirm your suspicions of the presence of a learning disability or some other disability in your population of learners. It has been developed for this specific purpose and is quite different from the formal psycho-educational testing that is used by professionals who are qualified to diagnose disabilities. It has been tested in a programme setting which is quite likely to be very similar to the one where you work with new Canadians. It has been piloted by teachers who are probably very similar to you.

The most important issue for you to remember, and we shall probably remind you many times throughout this manual, is that having a learning disability does not mean that people

cannot learn or that they are slow learners. Yes, learning certain things may take them longer than it will take others, especially if you continue to teach them the way you have always done, rather than the way that they best learn. But people with learning disabilities are of average intelligence, whose brain handles things differently than yours or mine might. But they can learn!

You may wonder why the primary focus in this manual is on learning disabilities. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, learning disabilities, given that they are invisible, are much less likely to be recognized in the population of new Canadians than physical disabilities. And yet, when it comes to learning a new language, literacy skills and acquiring a new culture, a learning disability may turn out to be a greater barrier than the other more visible disabilities.

Secondly, we know that the understanding and acceptance of learning disabilities varies throughout the world. For example, there are many places right here in North America where people do not believe that learning disabilities exist. Then, people who have learning disabilities are led to believe that they are slow learners. In other cases people have grown up, developing their own coping mechanisms, such that they function well and can avoid the need for certain academic skills. An example of this might be someone who, using his excellent verbal and entrepreneurial skills has been successful in running his own business, without having to do any reading and writing, since most of the business transactions were verbal. For such an individual learning literacy skills in a new language may be very difficult. After many years of competence, he has gone from being a successful businessman to a poor learner. It is not surprising that the difficulties that they encounter in these programmes may turn out to be a major shock for some learners. In such cases, a good understanding of learning disabilities, if that turns out to be the problem, is imperative in order to assist the learner to learn to cope in the new language as quickly and as well as possible.

It is important to recognize that some of the difficulties exhibited by learners in your programme, such as difficulties with grammar or syntax, may have absolutely nothing to do with learning disabilities. These may be due to the fact that the individual needs to be taught differently for a while or has to overcome a high level of stress arising from his or her recent history or has to become familiar with the Canadian style and way of language teaching and/or learning.

For example, if you notice that a learner reverses the way he or she reads or writes English and you know that this individual's mother tongue is written from right to left, then you are much less likely to think of dyslexia as the cause of the reversals, even if they persist. Similarly, learners whose mother tongue is written in a pictographic rather than phonetic mode, such as Chinese, may have trouble with the traditional sound symbol relationships of English. This could be but probably will not turn out to be the symptom of a learning disability.

Our assessment tool will allow you to sort out some of these differences. In other words, it will help you to identify the presence of learning disabilities or the reasons for the individual's learning difficulties, if they do not have a learning disability.

You may find at first, as you read about learning disabilities and work on learning to differentiate them from other causes of difficulties, that you think that everyone, including yourself, has a learning disability. Don't worry! This usually turns out to be a passing phase.

You will have to remind yourself, frequently perhaps at first, that you cannot cause someone to develop learning disabilities nor do people acquire learning disabilities, as a result of enrolling in a second language programme. The people in your programme whose difficulties with learning English are due to a learning disability had those same difficulties in learning to function in their mother tongue. This is why it is important to look at the learner's functioning in a variety of areas including their literacy skills, and not just at their fluency in English.

Once you have become comfortable with identifying these disabilities, then you will have to focus on two other issues.

One is how you modify your programme so that the teaching method complements the learning style and strengths of the learner and secondly, how to ensure that the learner understands and becomes comfortable with the identification that you may have made of any special learning needs that he or she has. This is not an easy task, but in our experience sensitive caring teachers can certainly learn how to do it without destroying their learners' self esteem and willingness to persevere with learning.

A similar need had been identified within Ontario's existing literacy programmes. The excellent reception given to the handbook written for literacy practitioners called **Target Literacy**, demonstrated that such a manual accompanied by training workshops enables literacy practitioners to identify the presence and type of learning disabilities in their learner population and address and meet their needs effectively.

Links in Learning will not turn you into a learning disabilities or special needs specialist. You do not need such expertise to meet the needs of new Canadians who wish to learn English language and literacy skills and who have special needs. The right attitude coupled with common sense are the most important components here. If in doubt, trust your experience and your instincts!

Nor does this manual offer you a collection of prescriptions to "cure" these special needs. Remember, a learning disability and the other conditions included in this manual are not diseases to be cured or things that can be fixed. The people who have them do not need to be

"fixed" either. Rather, they need to understand what is going on, what kind of a special need they may have and how they can cope with or compensate for its presence. The learners and you, the teachers, must both accept and understand that success is possible. With the right kind of help most people with learning disabilities can and do learn.

We began with a personal anecdote - let us finish with one.

"It is difficult to fully explain to people who do not toil daily with the frustration of a learning disability, what it is really like to be so afflicted. Living with a learning disability is not merely continual feelings of stupidity, depression and insufficiency - it is much more. For most, it is a defensive lifestyle, a life full of unpleasant surprises that continually cut down any tender young shoots of optimism that may emerge. It is timorously waiting for that ultimate error that will destroy all the modest success and keep you down forever.

Here is an example. The dentist's receptionist handed me a medical insurance form to fill out prior to a recent appointment. I had just begun flipping through the pages in a magazine when I sensed someone standing beside me and about to speak. I looked up and there stood the receptionist, my form clutched tightly in her hand. Then she bellowed, in a tone that could easily have been heard out in the street, Mr. Van Loon, surely we can do better than this! Then she handed me back the form together with a new one. I had misread the instructions below the lines and my name and policy numbers were both in the wrong place. Also, I had signed where the dentist was supposed to sign."

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INTRODUCTION TO LEARNING DISABILITIES

Learning disabilities: the background

Learning disabilities are a group or cluster of significant difficulties that some people have with processing information in the conventional manner. People with learning disabilities represent 10% of the general population. In spite of having reasonable ability and average intelligence, these people face major barriers to learning which go way beyond the normal range of strengths, weaknesses or variations in learning style. Learning disabilities are a real disability.

Unfortunately, some people still don't believe learning disabilities exist. They think that people claim to have a learning disability to get out of doing things that they don't want to do, or because they lack ability. A learning disability is not a crutch for lazy, unmotivated people. It does not provide an easy explanation for people who lack ability. Learning how to deal with a learning disability takes hard work and determination.

If you are interested in learning more about the history of learning disabilities and how our understanding of this condition and its impacts has improved over the past few decades, please read Appendix 4, entitled **A historical review**.

Learning to live with a learning disability

Research tells us that the first key step for a person who has an invisible disability such as a learning disability, is to "reframe" his or her own self image in the context of *"Yes, I have a learning disability, but I am O.K., I can still be an able person."* Such self awareness does not develop in a vacuum and calls for knowledge and understanding on the part of the person who has the condition as well as acceptance and support from those who are important in the person's life, including family, friends, teachers and other professionals. This is why an understanding of learning disabilities and their implications for the lives of people is so important for just about everybody. There are no people that I know of who do not know someone who has a learning disability. And even if they don't necessarily know what it is, when it is described in some detail, almost invariably they will say *"Ah, now I understand what's going on!"*

Wouldn't it be great if such understanding was assured, so that having a learning disability and receiving the necessary accommodation would be no more noteworthy than having to wear glasses or being left handed. A little bit different, but within the mainstream!

The causes and identification of learning disabilities

Today we know that there are many factors which may influence the development of learning disabilities. These include genetic inheritance, exposure to drugs, smoking and alcohol during prenatal development, immature development of the nervous system, etc. Advances in medical technology which assist with the survival of new babies who are quite premature, of low birth wight or are born addicted to drugs such as crack, have actually increased the incidence of learning disabilities. This is an interesting contrast to the elimination of certain other disabling conditions through improved medical technology such as inoculation against German measles and the identification of certain enzyme and chemical deficiencies at the time of birth.

It can now also be demonstrated quite conclusively through such high technology processes as CAT scans, PET scans, certain computerized electroencephalograms and others, that learning disabilities can be attributed to a central nervous system dysfunction or differential function. The value of this information is not so much that each person suspected of having a learning disability should be tested this way, but rather that those who have been led to believe that it is somehow their fault that they have these problems can be reassured that having a learning disability is not anyone's fault. Further, that they cannot make it go away by doing certain things.

It is important to realize that occasionally learning disabilities are not congenital but are acquired, primarily as a result of damage or injury to the brain. Such diverse conditions as strokes, multiple sclerosis, traumatic head injury, convulsions due to a very high fever may create secondary or acquired learning disabilities. Post-traumatic stress syndrome also gives rise to symptoms which are similar to or are actually acquired learning disabilities. This is significant within the LINC environment, since the victims of torture and individuals who have had traumatic experiences such as being held in prison or a concentration camp for a long time often develop post-traumatic stress syndrome.

It is interesting to note that while congenital learning disabilities tend to occur in many more males than females, (80% males, 20% females), this divergence does not appear to be the case for the acquired condition. This certainly supports the theories correlating the presence of learning disabilities to genetic and developmental causes, given that the male nervous system is much more vulnerable at the time of birth than the female one.

Before looking at the types and manifestations of learning disabilities, it is worth reiterating that people who have learning disabilities have at least average ability. Therefore, provided they get the necessary help to develop appropriate coping and compensatory strategies and have access to accommodation, usually they can learn and be successful at functioning at or close to their potential.

The definition of a learning disability

One of the dilemmas facing the person with learning disabilities as well as those who work in this field is that in addition to the challenge posed by the invisibility of the condition, there is no one clearcut definition that everyone accepts. This makes acceptance of the condition as a real disability quite difficult.

There are variations in intensity and severity in many other disability areas, but this does not appear to bring into question the validity of the condition as a disability. Although we know that for example the range of available or residual vision among people described as blind is quite varied, it has not been necessary to question the existence of blindness or the need to provide support to those who are described as blind. We also resist trivializing the condition, just because so many people have to wear glasses to function in their daily lives.

We cannot help believing that people with learning disabilities would have an easier time looking for acceptance and support if there were an easily understood universally accepted definition for this condition.

Currently, there are three definitions in use. These are the definitions developed by the Learning Disabilities Association, the educational system and the World Health Organization. All three of these appear in the **Appendices** section of **Links in Learning**.

If you are to identify the presence of learning disabilities in the learner population in your programme and provide programme modifications for them, then you also have to have some understanding of what exactly you are talking about. The following list may help:

1.   A learning disability is a real disability. It is recognized in legislation as a handicap and it is illegal to discriminate against someone on the grounds of having a learning disability.

2.   A learning disability is a chronic or lifelong condition of neurological origin, which selectively interferes with the development, integration and demonstration of both verbal and non verbal functional abilities.

3.   Learning disabilities range from mild to moderate to severe and may appear singly or in clusters. The more complex the clustering is the more severe are the manifestations of its presence.

4.   Learning disabilities occur in 10% of the population. Those who have them have average to above average intelligence, with significantly depressed performance in the areas effected by the learning disability.

5.   Learning disabilities can effect any aspect of a person's life, including academic learning, employment, social adjustment, self esteem and the tasks of daily life.

6. Learning disabilities are intrinsic to the individual and may arise from a variety of genetic, biochemical or developmental causes. They are not due to the presence of other disabilities or a disadvantaged environment, although they may appear in conjunction with any of these.

7. People who have learning disabilities are often viewed negatively by themselves as well as by society. This is primarily due to a lack of understanding. With help, support and accommodation persons with learning disabilities often can achieve as well as the population which does not have learning disabilities.

The categories and manifestations of learning disabilities

Learning disabilities are usually divided into five categories. Most people who have learning disabilities will have several problem areas. The effects may be mild, moderate or severe.

The five categories are: visual, auditory, motor, organizational, conceptual.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is not usually considered as a specific learning disability, however, this condition is quite common among people with learning disabilities.

It would be helpful if we could provide a statistical breakdown of how frequently these categories occur and in what combinations. At the moment we can't do this, in spite of the large amount of research that is done by educators, psychologists and doctors.

As each category is described below, we have included some comments on how these conditions may appear in a LINC classroom setting. But it is important to recognize that there is tremendous diversity among the types of learning disabilities, their manifestations and their impact on those who have them. It is not feasible to give you a checklist, which will allow you to carry out an absolute determination that a learner has one of these learning disabilities.

Let us now consider some of the common manifestations of these five categories of learning disabilities.

Visual learning disabilities

Visual learning disabilities relate to problems that the human brain has with handling information that the eyes see. These are not conditions that will be eliminated by the use of glasses or contact lenses. However, before an identification is made that someone has a visual learning disability, it is a good idea to ensure that he or she does not need glasses to address the problem.

In a LINC classroom setting, visual learning disabilities are likely to appear as difficulties with reading and writing primarily in the literacy component of the programme, as well as dealing with the variety of other visual information which is around, such as recognizing people, following a map to the classroom, etc. Certain tasks which are sometimes introduced into a LINC classroom to provide variety, such as word and crossword puzzles may be very hard for persons with visual learning disabilities to handle. You may find that they have suddenly forgotten words and how to write them when it comes to dealing with the down and across requirements of a puzzle.

The following are some of the more common visual learning disabilities:

- **Impaired visual perception** leads to difficulties in seeing the difference between similar things, such as similar shaped objects, including letters such as b and d

- **Poor visual memory** results in people not remembering things that they have seen many times before. This can include such things as people's faces, words, their own name, and at what street they need to turn at to get home.

- **Figure-ground discrimination** is a particularly difficult form of visual perception problem. A person who has this kind of learning disability is unable to identify a specific thing when it is surrounded by similar things. For example, the person may not be able to see the traffic light or the stop sign on a busy street. It can also include many things related to reading - for example, not being able to find the place to write your name on an application form.

- **Reversal** of letters, words and numbers is probably the most common sign of a learning disability. People who experience reversals tell us that it is extremely frustrating because it doesn't happen all the time. Sometimes 41 will appear as 14 and sometimes not. They have no way of knowing which is correct.

- **Visual tracking** problems affect a person's ability to follow a line on a page. People who have this difficulty explain that the words move around on the page, and the lines may slip off the edge altogether.

Auditory learning disabilities

Auditory problems relate to the processing of information that we hear. A person who has certain kinds of auditory learning disabilities may appear hearing impaired, yet they do not need to have louder sounds in order to process them better. In fact, shouting at a person with an auditory learning disability will generally make things worse rather than better.

In a LINC classroom setting an auditory learning disability may present in a similar way to deafness, in that the individual who has it may appear not to hear what is being said or appears to be a careless or ineffective listener. When it comes to the acquisition of a second language, auditory learning disabilities represent the greatest barrier, followed closely by conceptual learning disabilities. You may observe that the individual with the auditory learning disability appears to cope much better in a quiet setting or when you are speaking to him or her individually. People with auditory learning disabilities are often quite hesitant in their speech. On the other hand new Canadians who are just beginning to acquire the language will also demonstrate a similar hesitancy at times. Therefore, we must look for the pattern of fluency in the learner's mother tongue to establish the cause for the hesitancy observed.

Auditory learning disabilities include:

- **Impaired auditory perception** means that the person will not hear everything that is said or hears it incorrectly. For example, they may have difficulty with syllables that are not accented - seven and seventy may sound the same. Similarly, they may not be able to distinguish between words that sound somewhat alike - for example, how and who.

- **Poor auditory memory** results in a person having difficulty remembering what has been said. Short term and/or long term memory may be affected. They may remember things said in the past, but cannot recall their own words from just a moment ago. Or they may have no long term memory for things they have learned in the past and need to be able to recall.

- **Poor auditory sequencing** skills interfere with a person's ability to follow instructions. This is an extreme form of poor auditory memory. It can cause significant difficulties in a classroom, on the job or in social situations.

- **Poor listening skills** mean that the person has difficulty selecting the sounds to listen to. They hear a confusing jumble of unsorted sounds, like having the television, radio and vacuum cleaner all running at the same time. A person with poor listening skills may appear uncaring or uninterested. Obviously, in a second language learning setting this may result in little or no apparent progress. The manifestations are not so much incorrect sentence structure or syntax as inappropriate answers to questions asked.

- **Speech problems** are considered to be a learning disability, when the difficulty lies with the words used, the sentence structure, the style, rather than articulation problems such as stuttering. People who have this kind of a learning disability may sometimes mispronounce common words, saying *"bisghetti"* for spaghetti or *"hopsital"* for hospital.

They may also mix up their sentences, such as saying *"start and restop"* instead of "stop and restart". Many will consciously choose simple words when they are speaking, although they understand and can write correctly more suitable and complex words. The reasons for these difficulties may relate to any of the auditory difficulties described above.

Motor learning disabilities

Motor learning disabilities relate to the various motor functions of the body, including neuromuscular, sensorimotor and sensory integrative functioning.

In a LINC classroom setting, motor learning disabilities may appear as difficulties with eye-hand co-ordination in writing or a general lack of co-ordination or as clumsiness, which at times could even result in some minor accidents such as the bumping of desks, the placement of a cup of coffee next to rather than on a table, etc.

Motor learning disabilities include:

- **Eye-hand co-ordination** problems, which will show up in difficulties with handwriting and similar activities.

- **Small muscle control** difficulties may result in awkwardness of certain actions or misjudging where to place things.

- **Large muscle control** difficulties will show up in clumsiness, awkwardness, difficulties in certain physical activities such as dancing and sports.

Organizational learning disabilities

Organizational learning disabilities often create major problems. Employers, fellow workers and family members are inclined to believe that the person who has these problems is lazy or careless, rather than struggling with a pervasive disability.

In a LINC classroom setting, organizational learning disabilities may appear as problems with following the correct sequence of activities or tasks, time management problems, etc. The learner may seem lost or uninterested or unmotivated at times, in spite of the fact that he or she is really anxious to learn.

Organizational learning disabilities include:

- **Poor ability to organize time** results in not meeting deadlines, always being late (or much too early), having a poor sense of time both in terms of how long something might take or how much time has passed since a certain event.

- **Poor ability to organize tasks** results in not understanding the steps required to carry out a particular task. These may be such simple things as getting dressed in the morning, or complex tasks such as planning a party or a move.

- **Poor ability to organize space** may impact on organizing a closet, desk or kitchen cabinets or laying out a page in a written document.

- One of the key learning disabilities in this category is the **impairment of executive function.** What this means is a person's ability to analyze things, apply information in a new way or adapt to new circumstances. Clearly, this could be a major difficulty for someone who has recently arrived in Canada.

Conceptual learning disabilities

Conceptual learning disabilities relate to problems someone might have with understanding abstract concepts, complex language, consequences and other intangible information.

In a LINC classroom setting the person with a conceptual learning disability may appear to be really slow or uninterested. Conceptual learning disabilities are much harder to identify than the other categories, especially in a second language learning situation. It is probably harder to determine whether a person's problems with language are due to this condition or some other cause especially when we consider cultural variations in body language, social skills and language use. For example, among native born Canadians the lack of eye contact with others is often considered a sign of a conceptual learning disability. Clearly, this would be a quite inappropriate conclusion if the learner's cultural background is such that direct eye contact is viewed as bold or even rude. We should not jump too hastily to the conclusion that a new Canadian has a conceptual learning disability, without significant evidence obtained from other sources than just their language usage or observable social skill difficulties.

Common signs of conceptual learning disabilities include:

- **Difficulty in judging non-verbal language**, such as facial expressions or body language.

- **Difficulty in understanding figures of speech** such as idioms, metaphors or similes. For example, a person with this difficulty would take an expression like, "It's raining cats and dogs" literally, and expect to see these animals falling from the sky.

- **Difficulty in anticipating the future** results in a person with this kind of difficulty wanting to deal with things now. They might not be able to "defer gratification" and would purchase something today with borrowed money, rather than saving and buying it later. Difficulty with **predicting consequences** also relates to difficulty with anticipating the future. The individual may do something impulsive, without considering its consequences. This is the kind of difficulty that may lead people with learning disabilities into contact with the criminal justice system.

- Predisposition to **rigid thinking** means that a person may be unable to see that flexibility is required to deal with a situation. This person will not "see" things in shades of grey, but only in black and white.

- **Poor social skills** and **social relationships** create tremendous problems for many people with learning disabilities. Some examples are: lacking the "social graces", not maintaining eye contact during a conversation, standing too close to another person, using an inappropriate tone of voice or language. Many people with learning disabilities who have social skills deficits, find it very hard to keep a job.

Some obvious signs of learning disabilities: a checklist

➢ Overactive or impulsive behaviour. Easily distracted by other sounds and activities in the area. Moves around a great deal, fidgets. Speaks too softly or too loudly.

➢ Uneven achievement, varying from task to task and time to time.

➢ Can't estimate time or distance with reasonable accuracy or consistency.

➢ Poor memory. Gets lost easily.

➢ Difficulty in grasping abstract ideas or relationships.

➢ Doesn't follow what you are saying:
   - can't answer questions appropriately.

- misses the point of discussions.

- has trouble following verbal and/or written directions.

- has to look intently at speaker to understand what is being said.

- takes a long time to answer a simple question.

- daydreams.

- appears to be confused or "slow".

- talks to self.

- makes irrelevant remarks in conversation.

- has difficulties with asking questions

➢ Can't read and/or write well or at an age appropriate level.

➢ Can't relate events in proper sequence.

➢ Can verbalize but can't write well.

➢ Has difficulty in expressing thoughts.

➢ Doesn't read documents before signing.

➢ Won't fill out forms or fills them out incorrectly or with difficulty.

➢ Doesn't remember or won't give address, phone number, etc.

➢ Shows wide variation in moods and responsiveness.

➢ Has a poor self concept.

➢ Shows mixed or confused laterality - for example, may use right hand to catch a ball and left foot to kick it.

No one person will manifest all or even most of these signs of learning disabilities. Most people with learning disabilities will show quite a few of these signs of learning disabilities.

On the other hand, many others may display one or two of these signs without necessarily having a specific learning disability.

Strengths, weaknesses and learning styles

It may seem like a cliche, but we all learn differently. Everyone has some areas of strength and some areas of weakness. There are some things that we do well and we usually enjoy doing these. There are other things that we don't particularly like to do, but given that we cannot avoid them or pass them to someone else to do, we persevere and either learn a quick way of disposing of the task or we grin and bear it. There are other things that we avoid at all costs, because we know that we simply cannot do them without either looking foolish or without significant pain. We usually tend to know this about ourselves and can often describe our own strengths and weaknesses and what works for us. For example, if we ask several people about how they plan for a trip to the supermarket, we shall discover that some people write a detailed shopping list, some jot down a few notes, some glance in the pantry and then set out, while others just know what they need by looking around at the supermarket shelves. Obviously, there are no right or wrong ways of creating a shopping list. But, if you constantly run out milk or some other staple, because your method is inefficient and does not work for you or your family, then you might have to think about how you might change how you handle such a routine task.

Traditional educational methods, including remedial teaching, tend to be based on the fact that the majority of learners function within the normal range for most of the routine tasks of daily living. That means that most learners will achieve an acceptable level of performance with the regular practice of certain skills.

Therefore, a person who hasn't learned to read in school but does learn in a literacy programme with the individualized attention from a literacy tutor, may have some difficulties within the normal range. However, that person almost certainly does not have a learning disability.

Remember: people who have trouble with reading may have learning disabilities, but the majority don't. Similarly, people will learn a second language at varying rates, but the majority will be successful sooner or later. Just because they learn more slowly than you did, that does not mean that they have a learning disability in this area.

You will sometimes hear the statement that we all have some learning disabilities. This is not true! We all have strengths and weaknesses as well as different learning style preferences, but this must not be mixed up with having a learning disability.

Where do learning styles come in?

Just like our varied strengths and weaknesses, we all have a preferred learning style or modality. There are three predominant learning styles - visual (learning by seeing things), auditory (learning by hearing things) and kinesthetic, (learning by doing things). If you review the listed characteristics, you will probably recognize your own learning style. Most people fit into the overlapping areas (see the chart below). That means that although they may definitely have a preferred learning style, they can also learn through the other modalities. They may find it harder or less comfortable, but they can usually adjust or adapt. Clearly this is not the same as having a learning disability!

Learning modality chart

Visual Learner

- remembers visual details

-follows along when others read

- prefers to see what's to be learned

- needs written instructions

- has trouble following lectures.

Kinesthetic Learner

- has to do it to know it

- prefers activity based learning

- studies by writing over and over

- may be restless in class

Auditory Learner

- enjoys oral   discussion

- studies by talking aloud

- requires oral explanations

- has trouble with written direction

- reinforces doing a task by talking himself
through it

Building on modality preferences

In a language programme, it is helpful if the teacher is conscious of and tries to build on the learners' preferred learning modalities. In practice this means that the teacher must utilize all three modalities in the process.

Many people are quite aware of their learning style and if asked can describe it quite well. It is important to recognize that changing to a new language will not interfere with someone's learning style preference, even if the new language is quite different from the learner's mother tongue. For example, a new Canadian may have major difficulties with reading English, given that he cannot at the time of enrollment recognize the letters of the English alphabet. If however his preferred learning style is visual, then this will persist and he or she may well have difficulties in a programme which focuses almost exclusively on spoken material and auditory skills.

It is important to differentiate between learning styles and learning disabilities. It really helps if you can do this both from the point of view of helping the learners in your programme reinforce their preferred learning style and recognizing how you might improve your teaching methodology so that you don't inadvertently favour your preferred learning style as your teaching style.

You can check your own learning style as described in Appendix 6. Then you can see how you might use this information to strengthen the way you teach to all three modalities.

The impact of stress

There is no question that stress is a factor in everyone's ability to learn. For many people some stress is a really positive influence. But excessive amounts of stress tends to result in people becoming virtually paralyzed and unable to cope. For example, not being able to read when society places such an emphasis on reading is a source of stress for anyone. "*I must be stupid!"* is a common reaction, whether it is stated or only thought.

Not being able to function effectively in the language of the country in which we live and where we have to earn a living can also be extremely stressful, especially if we were competent and successful in the past in the country where we lived before.

For the person who has learning disabilities, stress can be particularly difficult to handle. The ability to deal with the effects of the learning disability depends to a great extent on the person's confidence and willingness to take risks. Regardless of the reason why a learner isn't succeeding, it is important to reduce the stress level in the learning environment as much as possible. A working relationship based on mutual trust and respect will boost the learner's confidence and make learning easier.

The issue of speed of learning

Both in this manual and elsewhere in information relating to learning disabilities, you will note the great stress that is placed on the fact that persons with learning disabilities have at least average intelligence. Most of the definitions refer to the discrepancy between potential and performance for those who have been identified or are suspected of having a learning disability. They also tend to stress that a learning disability is not due to mental retardation (Ministry of Education definition) or general intellectual retardation (World Health Organization definition). It is important to recognize that the reason for this exclusion is not because we value less those who are truly slower learners, perhaps because of a developmental disability or some other cause. Rather, we want to ensure that, even while it is recognized that some people with learning disabilities will carry out certain tasks more slowly than others with a similar intellectual potential, the outcome or product of the learning process ultimately will not be inferior.

An analogy that we sometimes use to explain this is a comparison with a car. Different cars take different amounts of time to reach the one hundred kilometre speed limit on the highway. But provided that once they reach that speed they can maintain it safely and efficiently, then we are likely to be quite satisfied with it.

What this means is that we have to learn to differentiate between those for whom we need to alter our expectation of speed of learning and efficiency of using information, once the learning process has taken place. You will find more information about how you might do this in the section on programme modifications further on in this manual.

Characteristics of the adult learner who has learning disabilities

By the time persons with learning disabilities grow up they may be discouraged, depressed, overwhelmed and angry. Their life experiences may have appeared to them to be little more than a collection of accumulated failures, subtle and overt rejections, and feelings that they never were able to meet the expectations of parents, educators, peers, themselves and society. At the same time, many adults with learning disabilities feel that they should have overcome or learned to cope with their learning disabilities. Those who have not done so, often cover up the more obvious signs of having a learning disability by altering their behaviour. Many of them avoid situations where they may have to engage in a task with which they have major difficulties. However, sometimes this is not possible and they have to persevere with things in spite of their difficulties.

The following characteristics are usually described in the literature as some of the specific observable manifestations of the presence of a learning disability in adolescence or adulthood. No one person will manifest all of these characteristics.

1. Inadequate or uneven academic skills:

A learning disability often interferes with the acquisition and application of basic academic skills. Therefore, the demonstrated performance of academic skills may be at odds with the person's intelligence and level of schooling. Further, many people with learning disabilities prefer to drop out of educational or training programmes, rather than persevere with limited or no success in an educational setting.

2. Poor or slow communication skills:

A person who appears to be of average intelligence, but is not able to handle the input and/or output of information as efficiently or as fast as one would expect, may have a learning disability. He may misunderstand questions, give responses which are off topic, or leave out pieces of information. If provided with cues, prompts and extra time to process the material, then their innate ability allows them to give competent answers to questions to which, when pressured, they may just say *"I don't know."* It is important that this reduced speed of function is differentiated from the difficulties presented by a person who has developmental disabilities.

Clearly it is important to differentiate between new Canadians who have just begun to learn English and people whose language use is poor due to a learning disability.

3. Poor social skills:

Signs to watch for might include lack of emotional expression, constantly interrupting the conversation of others, poor eye contact, lack of facial expression and impulsivity. Some persons with learning disabilities are unable to read social cues any more efficiently than they are able to read the printed word. They don't monitor their social behaviours any more effectively than they proofread their written work, and don't take interactional language in context, just as they don't read in context. Others are no more adept in expressing themselves socially than they are at dealing with linguistic or motor activities.

Inadequate perception of one's own and others' social messages, difficulty with perception and expression of emotions, and immature behaviour have created significant problems for those who have learning disabilities, when it comes to job skills, as well as the establishment of casual and intimate relationships. Many people with learning disabilities use so much energy trying to appear "normal" that they have less energy to devote to social information processing. Others do not even attempt to problem solve social situations and do not select appropriate strategies.

Again, we must not confuse cultural variations with poor social skills due to learning disabilities.

4. Defensiveness and poor self esteem:

A person with a learning disability is often defensive due to the past patterns of failure in his or her life. Such defensiveness manifests itself in the reluctance to take risks or in rejecting positive suggestions from others. Their poor self esteem is often the result of internalizing and adopting the most negative self image portrayed by others to the person with learning disabilities. They commonly state that they must be stupid.

5. **Learned helplessness**:

Because of their unsuccessful attempts at achieving success, a person with a learning disability may feel victimized. Constant failure is attributed to a lack of understanding, stupidity or the malicious intent of others. These people will often wait for others to find solutions to their problems instead of taking the responsibility for accommodating their learning disability. They sometimes seem to assume that magical outcomes will occur and things will be resolved without their participation.

Such thought processes are related to deficits in cause/effect reasoning and poor temporal imagery. This means that one has trouble imagining the steps that lead to an outcome, and to organize one's time and tasks so that they will culminate in a desired outcome. Since some of the person's experiences appeared to have occurred in the past without an apparently logical cause and effect relationship, such as passing a grade when one hasn't perceived oneself as meriting such an outcome, the tendency to expect magical outcomes becomes reinforced. Additionally, if the person feels that nothing that he/she accomplishes academically, socially, athletically or vocationally is valued by peers, teachers or family, he or she might as well fantasize and indulge in unrealistic aspirations. Alternatively if few past efforts or behaviours have resulted in success, he or she may well be unaware of the ingredients of a successful outcome and the difference between one's wishes and goals.

People with learning disabilities do not have a reservoir of past successes to fall back on after they fail at a task. Failure has almost certainly been programmed into their lives due to the fact that failure is the single most reinforced consequence that they know.

It is important for persons with learning disabilities to appreciate that all of us, in the process of choosing a vocation, must discard many possibilities because we lack the skills and aptitude to succeed in some pursuits.   Undoubtedly, the person with a learning disability has to discard more vocational possibilities than many of the rest of us do, but it is helpful for him/her to appreciate that the process is universal.

You may well feel that some of these needs are remarkably similar to the needs of newcomers to Canada. This similarity has not escaped us. In fact, we feel that while it

would be a great mistake to suggest that there are great similarities between having learning disabilities and being a new Canadian, we feel confident that if you are a successful, sensitive and caring teacher of newcomers then you will probably find it quite easy to transfer some of those skills to teaching students with learning disabilities in your program.

What can be done to help people with such difficulties?

As mentioned earlier, there is no recipe for solving the problems presented by learning disabilities. Neither you nor the person who has them can make the learning disability go away. You must try to understand the strengths, learning styles and learning goals of the individual learner and then use all of this information to overcome or compensate for the difficulties presented. You may want to consider the following list offered by professionals regarding the needs of the learner with learning disabilities.

1. The need to be treated with respect and dignity in a non-threatening environment:

Because of the past patterns of failure, the level of learned helplessness and the often negative attitudes, persons with learning disabilities are often treated quite poorly by society as a whole. Yet experience has shown that if they are treated with respect and are accorded a sense of personal dignity, they are much more likely to be successful.

2. The need to be recognized as an individual, who has abilities and strengths as well as a learning disability:

In the same way that every person wishes to be recognized as a unique individual with a different set of strengths and weaknesses, the learner with a learning disability wants to be seen as a person first, rather than as a member of the learning disabled group. While it is important that the learner accept and understand the difficulties that he or she has and what their implications are now and in the future, the single most important factor for future success is a level of realistic and positive self esteem. Instead of feeling that he or she must be stupid to have the kind of difficulties that they are experiencing, they should be able to feel and state: *" Yes, I have a learning disability, but I am able"*.

3. The need to have coping and compensatory strategies identified:

Learning disabilities are for life. Therefore, it is very important that people with learning disabilities acquire strategies for coping with the effects of their specific learning disabilities. Some people are very good at developing their own strategies. However, many more of them do not really realize that others do not see, hear or do things the same way as they do. It is important that each learner is helped to recognize the difference between coping and

compensation. They must also be helped to accept that coping and compensation for a learning disability is not cheating or getting an unfair advantage.

4. The need for accommodation and the right to receive it:

Each person with learning disabilities will require some accommodation to assist them to be successful in an academic or a workplace setting. Depending upon the specific needs and difficulties present, these accommodations will vary. In some cases they will include access to assistive devices such as calculators or taperecorders, while in other cases they may need an environmental modification such as access to a quiet location in which to carry out demanding tasks. The person who has learning disabilities must be helped to understand that he or she has a right to expect such accommodations under Ontario law and that receiving them is not an unfair advantage that others do not have.

What about testing?

When someone is told they probably have a learning disability, they often ask if they should be tested.

Testing for learning disabilities is complex and expensive. Also, quite often it isn't necessary. For example, the interview style assessment in this book is adequate to help you identify ways to modify your programme to meet most learners' needs. Similarly, if the learner's goal is to get and keep a job, a psychological assessment is probably not needed.

So why test at all?

➢ Testing can reassure the person who has always wondered why he or she was having trouble with learning.

➢ It can provide peace of mind.

➢ If there is great difficulty with establishing how the person who has learning disabilities can be helped to develop coping strategies, testing may provide the clues.

➢ It can also provide the type of verification that is sometimes needed within the law. But nobody should go for testing just because they think or someone told them that it's the thing to do.

What are the issues to consider when someone is thinking about testing?

Since learning disabilities are a type of neurological dysfunction, formal diagnosis of their presence can only be made by a qualified psychologist or an appropriately qualified medical practitioner, such as a psychiatrist or neurologist. This is legislated in Ontario by the Health Disciplines Act. A listing of private psychologists is available from the Learning Disabilities Association. Such testing is not currently covered by OHIP and is usually very expensive.

Educational testing may identify that the person tested functions at an academic level below that expected. However, even with a significant discrepancy, there is no proof that this is necessarily due to a learning disability. Some post-secondary educational institutions will test adults who are enrolled in their programmes. Similarly, some school boards may provide assessment services to adults who have re-entered the educational system as regular students.

Vocational testing is usually available through the various employment centres and vocational rehabilitation programmes. Such testing may hint at the presence of a learning disability, but will not be considered an absolute proof. In many instances, such hints or indicators are adequate to initiate some intervention. If such intervention or accommodation works and the individual begins to learn to cope with the existing demands, then there may be no need to pursue a formal assessment.

The impact of learning disabilities on the learning process

Learning as a human endeavour tends to follow a logical process. Learning disabilities may impact any stage of this process or even several stages. They are described as information processing deficits because they may result in impairments in one or more of the following:

➢ **perception** which is the process whereby the brain recognizes and receives sensory input information;

➢ **discrimination** which is the process whereby the brain sorts out the sensory information received and ensures that it is differentiated from other, similar information;

➢ **sequencing** which is the process whereby the brain organizes the sensory information into some logical order;

➢ **integration** which is the process whereby the brain sorts, organizes, stores and rearranges information;

➢ **memory** both in terms of retention and recall;

➢ **cognitive skills**, which allow the brain to utilize the information for the varied purposes of thinking, comprehension, analysis, evaluation, etc.

➢ the **speed** with which any of these processing tasks are carried out.

The impact of learning disabilities on language learning

The way learning disabilities impact the learning of language is remarkably consistent, whether the language that the individual is learning is a first or second language. What is different in the case of LINC programmes is that the learners are adults and that their language learning is just one of the things that they are involved in, instead of their primary activity.

Children acquire fluency in their mother tongue in a remarkably consistent manner, regardless what that mother tongue is. There are clear cut milestone expectations as to when a child will begin to say his or her first words, sentences, etc. These milestones of course describe the child with an intact ability to acquire and process language and will not always apply to children with disabilities.

It is usually recommended that if a child has not begun to speak in some recognizable form by the age of fourteen to sixteen months, then it is advisable to have a hearing test. If it should be found that the child is hearing impaired, then there are ways to teach the child some augmented or alternative communication skills. Regrettably, for the child who can hear but cannot process efficiently or correctly what he hears and cannot reproduce it as intelligible speech, there isn't the same kind of support system. This creates a major disadvantage for the child who has moderate to severe auditory learning disabilities.

While auditory skills are the most important in the initial stages of language learning, other types of learning disabilities will interfere. In order to listen and speak well, the individual also has to comprehend what has been said to him and how he needs to respond. Therefore, learning disabilities that impact the reception of visual information, organizational skill deficits and conceptual learning disabilities may all impact the ability to acquire language.

Of course, the vast majority of people do learn to speak and process their mother tongue. However, their fluency and diversity of language use will depend on their brain's ability to handle these complex tasks. For some people with language learning disabilities, i.e. a combination of a variety of deficits, such as those described above, listening and speaking will always be a difficult task.

When it comes to the learning of a second language in childhood, many children with learning disabilities will try to avoid this. Much of the available research relating to second language learning has been based on children's experiences in the very popular French immersion programmes and the almost universally compulsory French as a second language programmes in our schools. These research findings simply do not help us with helping adults with learning disabilities to learn English as a second or perhaps third language.

Adults with learning disabilities will find that their difficulties with language learning will have persisted from childhood. For many of them this will be quite a shock, since they may not remember the difficulties that they had with learning their mother tongue. Therefore, given that they are probably quite reasonably comfortable and fluent in their first language, they are likely to interpret their difficulties as a sign of stupidity or poor teaching, rather than the barrier which they had had to overcome before.

In childhood they were of course totally immersed in the language and participated willingly or even eagerly in the games, rhymes, story telling and endless repetition which facilitates language learning. In adulthood, they may be quite reluctant to be part of an interactive or participatory, primarily oral language programme. If their education during their school years focused on memorization, rigorous structure and repetition of what the teacher had to say, then they will be reluctant to shift to a process that they interpret as childish or as play. If this reluctance is then compounded by the presence of an auditory learning disability, then they are even more likely to sit back and not participate in what is going on in the LINC classroom.

For most adult second language learners and in particular the ones who have learning disabilities the teaching process must be highly flexible, allowing the learner to feel comfortable with what is going on and ensuring that each learner can experience some success in some part of the programme. This is particularly important for those who are having really major difficulties.

Obviously there are other factors which come into play for all learners, such as their current level of acculturation, their circumstances in the community and at home, the level of support within their families. These will influence their willingness to engage in the learning task, to take risks by answering questions, sharing information and experiences with their fellow learners. Given the past experiences of learners who have learning disabilities, these may be formidable tasks, which will call for a great deal more modification and accommodation than the teachers have been used to provide.

The impact of learning disabilities on learning to read and write

Practising the skills of reading and writing are an integral part of language learning for adults who are engaged in second language learning. In this section we shall review briefly some of

the reasons why people who have average ability have difficulty with mastering the tasks of reading and writing.

Difficulty with reading is the most commonly recognized sign of a learning disability. Most people have heard of dyslexia and can identify the reversal of letters or words as a common symptom of having a learning disability. In fact, approximately 50% of those who have learning disabilities, i.e. 5% of the general population, have reading disabilities, usually some form of dyslexia.

There has been much debate about the causes of dyslexia, i.e. whether it is a visually based deficit or whether it is language based. It is not particularly important for us to engage in this debate. The fact is that people who have dyslexia have significant difficulties with processing written language, i.e. reading, writing and spelling.

In identifying the signs of learning disabilities in those who have reading difficulties, you will observe some or most of the following:

-   slow rate of reading;

-   trying to decode each word letter by letter or syllable by syllable, but not being able to blend it into a whole;

-   trying to read word by word, without recognizing any phrases;

-   difficulty with discriminating between words with similar letter sequences, such as tractor and attractive;

-   directional confusion for letters such as p, b, q, d;

-   poor visual memory for letters, words, phrases, resulting in mispronunciation or non-recognition of even the most common words;

-   omission of letters or even words in a sequence;
-   poor tracking, i.e. moving from the middle of one line to the end of another, omitting what came between;

-   not reading for sense or meaning and making poor guesses at words;

- not being able to fill in missing letters or words to create sense (failure with cloze tasks)

- decoding but not comprehending what is being read;

- decoding but not recalling what has been read.

As we review this lengthy list, it is not surprising that difficulties with reading are so common among persons with learning disabilities. All five categories of learning disabilities have an impact on the skills of reading and writing.

Visual learning disabilities include difficulties with visual perception, tracking, reversals, visual memory, all of which are components of reading and writing.   Learning to read using flash cards and the whole language method may be quite hard for someone who has visual learning disabilities.

Auditory learning disabilities will impact reading skills in the areas of sound-symbol relationships and the problems of blending sounds to create words. The use of phonics may be very hard for someone who has auditory learning disabilities.

Motor learning disabilities, especially when they impact eye-hand co-ordination, oculo-motor co-ordination and sensory integration deficits, will impact the ability to read and write. In addition to the obvious difficulties in producing written material, the ability of the eyes to scan and the ability of the brain to integrate the information received through both eyes at the same time may be effected. For some persons with motor learning disabilities, printing is the only successful method of writing, while for others, cursive writing proves to be easier from the start and they have significant difficulties with printing.

Organizational learning disabilities create problems with the sequencing of tasks and information, as well as the establishment of right-left laterality. Deficits in both of these areas will impact the ability to read.

Conceptual learning disabilities impact the comprehension of abstract ideas, concepts and figures of speech. Since reading calls for comprehension, thinking, guessing and risk taking, those who have conceptual learning disabilities will often have difficulties in the "meaning" part of the reading process. In other words, they may be able to decode successfully the printed word, but not derive the necessary meaning from it.

Many teachers spend a great deal of their professional development time on learning how to improve their ability to teach reading to students with learning disabilities. In spite of this many students with learning disabilities leave the educational system with limited reading skills. Others have never had their learning disabilities identified. Frequently their enrolment in an adult literacy programme provides the first hint that they may have some problems beyond inadequate education. Then it is up to the literacy tutor with whom they are working to identify what help might be needed to enable the learner with learning disabilities to learn to read.

Many programmes for adults are based on the concept of remedial teaching. This means the reteaching of skills that have been taught before, but have not been learned. Quite frequently, the teaching process used for reteaching is the same as had been used before. For many people who have trouble with reading this works well, especially if the remediation is offered at a slightly slower pace or uses materials which the learner is really keen to learn.

For those who have not regularly attended school in the past, the use of developmental reading instruction may be the most beneficial. This calls for the step by step teaching of basic skills, but utilizing adult materials. Sometimes the learner will reach a plateau or even regress a little bit and then the more traditional remedial techniques of reteach/relearn may be helpful.

In adult programmes, the teacher must function as the "guide on the side" rather than the "sage on the stage." In other words, the role is to facilitate the learner's progress - in learning, coping, and developing a positive self image as an able learner. They cannot lay down expectations that have nothing to do with the learner's interests or goals in life. Programmes should not rely on predetermined curriculum and evaluation methods. Rather they should develop the curriculum to meet the learner's needs and strengths, and assess the learner's progress against his or her own goals.

Teachers may have to try several things before they hit on the best method. That is okay. The best advice is to trust your own instincts and your learner's interests. Don't be afraid to use lots of different materials or assistive devices such as a tape recorder. Learning a new language and skills is ultimately about success in life and achieving goals rather than just about learning to speak or read. Confidence, common sense and the information provided by the learner go a long way in assisting teachers and learners to achieve success together.

The literacy component of a second language learning programme must build on all of these recommendations. It is important to sort out whether the difficulties that a learner is experiencing are due to the differences between written English and his or her mother tongue or whether the individual has limited or no literacy skills in any language. Further, if that is the case, then it will help you and the learner to know whether this is due to limited or no schooling in the past or poor progress due to a possible learning or other disability.

A summary of the key points:

➢ Learning disabilities are a series of information processing difficulties which effect 10% of the population, with males outnumbering females by four to one;

➢ Learning disabilities are now recognized as a neurological disability, i.e. the result of a difference in the human brain structure;

➢ Learning disabilities may occur in people of any ethnic, racial or linguistic background and in any socio-economic group;

➢ People who have learning disabilities are usually born with them and the effects are lifelong;

➢ Learning disabilities may on occasion be the result of an illness, injury, accident or trauma;

➢ People who have learning disabilities are of average intelligence and should not be confused with or viewed as slow learners or lazy or unmotivated;

➢ There are five categories of learning disabilities. These are visual, auditory, motor, organizational and conceptual learning disabilities;

➢ In adults the most common characteristics of the presence of a learning disability are: poor or uneven academic achievement,

difficulty with language usage,

poor organizational and/or sequencing skills,

poor or inappropriate social skills

It is important to understand that second language learners may show some of these characteristics due to their short term problems with acquiring the second language as well as their cultural differences. We must not jump too quickly to seeing a learning disability where there isn't one!

➢ Learning disabilities impact the learning process, including language learning and the acquisition of literacy skills;

➢ People with learning disabilities can learn, provided they have access to a modified teaching process and the requisite accommodation;

➢ People with learning disabilities have areas of strength which can frequently help them to cope with and compensate for the effects of their learning disabilities;

➢ Learning disabilities are not the same as differences in learning styles, nor are they just a matter of strengths and weaknesses. They are real disabilities.

➢ In order to be truly successful, people with learning disabilities need to have a good understanding of their disabilities and what they mean in the various contexts of their lives;

➢ As a successful teacher of learners in second language and literacy programmes, you can learn to be a successful teacher of learners with learning disabilities. All you need to do

is persevere with understanding this material and then use the information with common sense. Listen to the learner, he or she may be the best source of information on what modifications are working.

ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW

Having reviewed the section on learning disabilities, strengths and weaknesses and learning styles, it is now time to embark on the practical application of this information. In this section you will find a step by step process for conducting an interview to determine the probable cause of the difficulty the student has in learning language and literacy skills in the LINC or other programme. The section also reviews how you might interpret the results of the interview and share the information with the student. There is also some discussion about the use of interpreters in carrying out the interview.

Getting started

Adults who enroll in a programme for learning English and literacy skills bring many things from their past experiences with them which may effect or influence their progress. No two people, even if their circumstances are almost identical, will learn in exactly the same way and at the same rate. There is nothing wrong with that. The structure of the LINC and other similar programmes is such as to encourage individualization. Further, Ontario Human Rights legislation mandates the accommodation of individual special needs in programmes such as these.

The important point is that there should be some progress made and that the learner should feel that he or she is making some gains. Similarly, the teacher who is teaching the class should also feel a level of job satisfaction, arising from the progress made by his or her students.

Sometimes, teachers will observe almost immediately that someone in their class has some kind of difficulty. This may be a problem with vision, hearing, speech, mobility or behaviour. They may also have been told right at the beginning, when this person enrolled in the programme, that he or she has some difficulties which may interfere with the learning process. Sometimes the nature of the difficulties is spelled out in some detail, while at other times the information is sketchy or incomplete.

If you are told that someone has certain difficulties or an actual disability, and your observations confirm that this indeed seems to be so, then you may want to consider using right away some of the modifications listed in the section on programme modifications in this manual. It is important for you to know that nothing that is included in this manual can do any harm either to any of the learners or to you as a teacher. Our recommendations all fall into the "good teaching techniques" category

and you may find that they benefit other learners about whom you had no concerns at all. For example, teaching to all modalities is a good practice, regardless of whether there are learners in your programme who have disabilities or not. But there will probably be many more times when you will gradually become convinced that the reason why someone is not progressing as well as you would expect is because they may have some problems with the learning process.

By the time you reach this conclusion, it is likely that this individual will have been in your programme or another similar programme for some time. It would be difficult to establish any absolute time lines, i.e. what "some time" means, since so much depends on the individual's past history, current situation, etc. Nevertheless, the following may be of some guidance to you.

When a learner has recently arrived in the country and started in your programme at level one, he or she will be dealing with so many strange new things that any kind of evaluation or assessment is likely to be premature.   It should be clear to you that the difficulties that you are observing and are concerned about are not due to unfamiliarity with the environment or lack of knowledge of what exactly is going on.   You should have also tried most of the things that you usually do when people are a little slow at starting to learn.   Then, if they have been in a programme for several months, perhaps three to four in levels one or two or two to three months at a higher level, and you have tried the obvious things already and their progress is still severely limited, then you should consider instituting this process.

One of the most common things that you might observe is that the person does not participate in the programme. He or she does not answer any of your questions nor ask any questions of you. Often they seem withdrawn and don't even chat much to the other students in the class. Others who started at the same time might well be several levels ahead. They often don't do any of the seatwork either. They seem really uninvolved or very slow. Yet you cannot observe any obvious reason for these difficulties.

Alternatively, especially when you are dealing with a learner who is in level three and is in fact quite competent in some aspects of the programme, you may suddenly be surprised at their significant difficulties with a task or series of tasks that you expected them to do quite easily, based on your observations of their other competencies. For example, someone whose verbal and written fluencies do not reflect the same level of vocabulary.

At this point it may be helpful to consider talking to the learner about whom you are concerned and ask him or her if they also feel that things are not going well. (Obviously if the learner speaks limited English at this stage and you do not speak his or her mother tongue, then this discussion has to be approached in a more planned fashion than just a casual comment.)   But assuming for the moment, that you can communicate with the learner, then you may get some clear cut indication as to why they are having trouble. If it is something like difficulties with hearing what you say or seeing the board on which you write, well then you can do something about that. If they tell you about other concerns, such as worrying about their children or about what is happening to their family in their home country, then you cannot do too much except encourage them to talk to someone, perhaps a local branch of an appropriate immigrant aid or social service organization which might be able to help them. It certainly is not your responsibility to resolve or get involved in such problems.

If on the other hand they say that they do not know why they are having trouble or do not even seem to know that they are having difficulties, then you may want to think about the possibilities of establishing, with their approval, whether their difficulties are due to:

➢ possibly having a learning disability

➢ or having some other learning problem

➢ or not having the right set of skills which they need to learn language and literacy skills.

It is important to remember that many of these students will have been competent in their previous life. For many of them, their current difficulties are so unusual and alien, that they may well be feeling totally disorientated by them. As they look around, they see others, no brighter, no more capable than they are, being quite successful in learning English. They will often turn their anger and frustration upon themselves, which may interfere even further with the learning process.

Involving an interpreter

Before proceeding to discuss how you might go about this interview process, this might be a good time to discuss the involvement of interpreters, when the individual has such limited English skills that you cannot communicate with him or her adequately to carry out this process.

While it might be tempting to wait until the individual has sufficient skills in English to have this discussion with you directly, this may mean a long frustrating wait for both of you. Provided you are able to find an interpreter that both you and the learner are able to trust and talk to comfortably, there is no reason why you should not proceed. After all, the earlier (within reason) you can offer help, the earlier he or she will begin to learn better.

The ideal interpreter will be an adult, not a child and especially definitely not a child from the learner's family. He or she should speak the learner's mother tongue fluently, either as a first or second language, but also have adequate skills in English to communicate with you. Rather than a professional interpreter, who is used to editing and offering an explanation of what has been said, you are much better off with someone who has in the past been enrolled or involved in some way in the programme where you are or a similar language programme. Even adult members of the learner's family should be avoided if at all possible, since they may well try to shield the learner by not telling you exactly what was said. Some of the immigrant aid organizations listed in this manual will be able to help with finding you an interpreter.

In selecting an interpreter we must also be sensitive to both cultural and gender issues. For example, in certain circumstances you should not have a male interpreter for a female student or vice versa. The student as well as the interpreter should be comfortable with working with you. You should ensure that you talk to the interpreter in front of the student, so that he or she should not believe that there is a "conspiracy" going on.

Once you have the student's and the interpreter's agreement that the three of you will sit down, sometime very soon, to discuss why the student is having difficulties with learning, then you should go ahead, as soon as possible, to use the informal interview style assessment tool. It is important that you tell the student right now, before even setting a time or place, that your purpose is to try to help him or her learn better. Stress that this is only for the two of you, i.e. learner and teacher, and that whatever you might find as the possible reason for his or her difficulties will only be shared with him or her. Further, reassure the student that you are not trying to exclude him or her from the programme. In fact, it is the student who is helping you with this, so that you can do your job better than before.

Before proceeding with the assessment interview, this might be a good time to reiterate that you are not going to test the student, nor are you evaluating their intelligence, their skills or their future potential. All that you are looking for is some

information about them and the reason for their difficulties. Although obviously you are going to have to tell your student what you have found out, you are not going to be called upon to tell someone directly that they have a disability. At the most, you might have to say that in your opinion they appear to learn differently from the way that you have been teaching them. Further, that what you see seems to be similar to what you have read about people who have learning disabilities and who show the same or similar difficulties with learning.

Although you may find this hard to do, you should focus on the fact that this information could be really beneficial to you and also to the learner, especially if his or her future goals include some further formal education or training in a Canadian institution. Clearly this is a time when you have to put your personal feelings behind the importance of helping people understand their own learning styles, strengths, etc.

Remember that your student is probably quite frightened about the whole process and feels quite intimidated by the problems that he or she is having. So your goal clearly has to be to put him or her at ease and to make the whole interview as comfortable as possible. If you focus on this, the chances are that your own apprehensions will simply evaporate.

If you do introduce the term "learning disabilities", then it is important that you immediately dispel any notions that the learner may have about this being a form of mental retardation. Regrettably, many languages do not have a term for learning disabilities and the condition is described as retardation of learning. You certainly want to avoid this interpretation or inference on the part of the learner. For this reason, you may choose to postpone the use of the term learning disabilities and talk about learning difficulties instead. However, make sure that you are clear in your own mind about the causes of those difficulties. Further, do ensure that you recognize the differences between learning disabilities, learning styles and the symptoms of slow learning. After all, they could all be described loosely as learning difficulties.

Generally, the research relating to adults with learning disabilities stresses the importance of ensuring that the person who has a learning disability knows, understands and accepts this. But all of this research relates to English speaking populations, for whom the term should not have such frightening implications as it might have for a new Canadian.

The interview

When the time comes for the interview, you should once again reassure the student, whether through the interpreter or directly, that this is not an exam or a test. There are no right or wrong answers. Further, whatever the answers are, whatever information they share with you, this will not and cannot influence their employment, their status as a refugee or landed immigrant, their funding, etc. It may seem obvious to you and even the interpreter that this is so, but you should not omit mentioning it. If the student is worried about these things, then you will likely get guarded or limited responses to your questions.

This is also the time to tell the interpreter again that all you want during this interview is a direct translation of your questions and the student's answers to them. Have them say to the student that if he or she understands some of the questions and can answer a little bit in English or in writing, that this would be very helpful to you.

Tell the interpreter and the student that at the end of the interview you may ask the interpreter some questions and that these will also be translated for the student. You might also want to explain that you will be jotting some notes down during the interview in order to help you to remember what has been said. But reassure the student that these notes are for you alone and will not be shared with anyone. The form that we have included at the end of this section is merely a suggestion. If you want to use a plain piece of paper for your notes then that is just fine. The less your notes resemble an official form the better it is. But you may find the form useful for developing your analysis of your findings.

If you do not need an interpreter, either because the student can handle the interview in English or you can do it in his or her mother tongue, then it's even better. But the information should still be provided to the student about why this interview is taking place and what you plan to do with the information that you obtain.

In our experience the students that are likely to be interviewed under these circumstances fall into two categories. These are the student who has difficulties with both the language and the literacy components of your programme and the student who is progressing, albeit slowly, with the language learning but has difficulties with the literacy component. The interview is basically the same for both groups. But the programme modifications will be different.

A key component of what follows is the maintenance of an informal conversational style throughout the interview. Your language, voice tone, facial expression and body language should all reinforce the impression that this is a "chat" between two people

interested in the same things and having similar goals. Similarly, you need to be sensitive to the physical surroundings of the interview. Sitting side by side in the classroom or some other room where the student will not sense great formality about you or the setting is really beneficial.

The interview consists of five distinct components. These are the student's background, past schooling, past and present employment experiences, personal and family situation and approach to literacy tasks. Sometimes, the information shared with you will not be neatly divided into these categories and therefore, taking good notes can really help in understanding the relevance and implication of the information.

Step One: establishing the student's background

In this section the focus is on the student's home country and mother tongue. You should ask the following questions and note the answers:

1. **What country do you come from?**

2. **What is your mother tongue?**

3. **Do you speak any other languages?**

4. **Do they speak any other languages in your country and which you know a little bit?** (N.B. in many countries that had been colonized in the past the language of business, commerce or government used to be the European language of the colonizing nation. Residents of the country, even if not fluent, may know a smattering of that language. This could allow you to find out about the way that he or she learned this language and how well they coped with a previous second language.)

5. **How long have you been in Canada?**

6. **Can you tell me the date, in words or in writing when you arrived?** (Here you may want to note the ease with which they tell you or write down the date and the

format for the date, i.e. is it European, North American or another style, for the sequence of year, month, day.)

7. What was happening in your home country when you decided to come to Canada?

In response to this question you may find out about some experiences which will give you a clue to the reasons for their difficulties, such as the existence of a war, being imprisoned, references to torture, etc. We know that some of these experiences will result in difficulties with the learning process, but which can be alleviated once the learner is settled and feels safe in the new setting.

If you do not know anything at all about the language that the student speaks, you may want to find out something about it, such as whether its written format is pictographic or phonetic, and if it is phonetic, whether it uses the Roman, the Greek, the Cyrillic or Russian, the Hindi, the Arabic, the Hebrew or some other alphabet. This information can be helpful to you when it comes to the modification of the process of teaching writing. While people generally learn to use the Roman alphabet quite quickly, sometimes it takes longer for them to remember to read and write from left to right, when their mother tongue is written the other way.

Step Two: the student's past schooling

In order to establish the reason for the difficulties faced by students in LINC programmes, it is very important to identify how much schooling they had in the past, how successful they were in school and what kinds of things they learned at school. The following questions will get you this information:

1. When you were a child in your home country, did you go to school?

If the answer is no, then you want to try and explore the reason for this.

For example, in some countries in the past girls did not attend school at all and especially the oldest girl in the family was expected to stay at home and help to look after the younger children and the household.   On the other hand, in some cases children were kept home or were not allowed to attend school if they were deemed to be "ineducable", i.e. very slow. In discussing the situation, it is useful to find out whether the reason for not going to school was specific to this student, i.e. his or her brothers and sisters did go to school, or was it a systemic issue, i.e.

nobody in the family attended school or no girls did or those who did go to school attended a religious institution rather than a secular or state school. You may also want to explore in this situation if any academic learning occurred in the home. For example, they may volunteer that girls did not go to school, but "we were taught reading and writing by our mother", etc.

If the answer is yes, then you want to proceed to the following questions. As much as possible you want to ask open ended questions, so that the answers call for more than just a yes or no answer.

2. Tell me about your school.

You may need to prompt with supplementary questions about its location, who taught there, how many children attended, etc.

3. How old were you when you left this school?

4. How many years had you been there?

5. Did you go on to high school?

If the answer is no, then you will want to explore the reason for this, e.g. it cost money, it was too far, it was thought that I had enough education, and also ask what happened next.

6a. Did you go to work or did you stay at home?

If the answer is yes to question 5, then you want to go on to the following questions:

6b. What subjects did you learn at high school?

What you are looking for here is whether it was an academic high school where they taught literature, languages, history, sciences, etc. or a basic school where they taught reading, writing, adding, subtracting, etc. or a vocational school where they taught cooking, baking, carpentry, auto mechanics, etc. Such information will

help you to identify what the educational system believed about this student's potential abilities.

7. How old were you when you left school?

8. Why did you leave?

Here you are looking for reasons other than the end of high school or graduation. If they mention graduation, then it is reasonable to ask whether they participated in any post secondary education or training and whether they attended a college, university or an apprenticeship programme. Clearly, the more and higher level education they had prior to coming to Canada, the more likely it is that they should be successful at learning in your programme also.

9. When you were in school, were you a good student? What were you best at?

If they mention that they had some difficulties, explore what those were and whether they ever received any special help? If they had some special help, you want to ask some open ended questions about this.

10. Did you study a foreign language in school ? Did you find it easy or difficult? How did they teach it?

If the student learned a second language before, their experience may be useful to you in figuring out what kind of modification in your programme might help them now.

Step Three: the student's past and present employment experience

Generally speaking most people work. They may work at home, or in a situation where they are primarily with their family, e.g. family farm, business, etc., or in the general field of employment.   By establishing a pattern for past employment, we can establish the student's areas of strength and interest. This in turn can assist with enhancing their learning abilities in your programme. The following questions will be used here:

1. **After you left school (or when you were old enough) did you work?**

2. **Tell me about the kind of jobs that you had? Which jobs did you like best? Why?**

    Here you are looking for the clustering of employment choices relating to the student's areas of strength. For example, did they work in jobs which called for verbal skills such as sales, services, etc. or did they work in jobs which called for visual skills such as mechanical skills, housework, computers, etc. In discussing their past job experiences you may get an obvious or oblique reference to an accident or circumstance which interrupted their employment history and/or resulted in a major change. You cannot assume that they will necessarily identify this directly as a contributing cause to their current difficulties. If there is such a comment, then you may want to explore it further, especially if there is a reference also to some ongoing health related problems. For example, some people will not necessarily see that developing a condition as epilepsy or having a major head injury may have resulted in their current difficulties, even if they were very successful at whatever they were doing prior to the onset of this condition.

3. **Do you work now? What job do you have? Do you like it? Would you like to have a different job?**

4. **What kind of job would you like to have when you have learned English really well?**

    In discussing their future employment goals you want to look for how well formed their opinions are, how realistic they are about what additional training they might require.

Step Four: the student's personal and family situation

People are often uncomfortable with asking personal questions. What you are looking for in this section is an indication of how independent and competent this student is and has been in leading his or her daily life. These questions will also help you in establishing some information relating to the student's stated and actual goals. Very often such personal information will tell you a great deal about how the family views this student. Try to overcome your natural reluctance to seem intrusive or prying. You could perhaps share some information about yourself which will reinforce the conversation image. Also, try to avoid questions which call for answers of yes or no.

These tend to seem a lot more official than the more open ended questions suggested below:

1. **Where do you live now? Do you live with your family? Do you have a large family?**

2. **Are you married? Do you have children? Tell me about your children?**

   Most adults are capable of independent living and establishing their own family. Therefore, information about an adult who still lives with his or her own parents and in particular someone who has never lived independently, will give you some indication of the student's strengths and weaknesses. Obviously, in some cultures independent living is valued less than it is in Canada. What you are looking for is some fairly obvious signs of dependence and symptoms that the family feel the need for providing a sheltered environment and protected life style for this person beyond what is usual or expected.

3. **Have you ever had any particular health problems? What was done about this?**

   What you might find out here is that they had significant problems in childhood with such health problems as ear infections, or they had a major accident with an accompanying head injury, etc.

4. **Do you have to see the doctor about this even now? Do you take any medicines?**

   You cannot assume that the student will correlate the use of medication for epilepsy for example with the difficulties that he or she has in your programme.

All of these questions will have provided you with a great deal of information about the student's past and present experiences. This interview might take quite some time and both you and the student might be quite tired. If that is the case, then you may want to bring this to a close and set another time for the rest. However, before you do that, it is important to do the following:

1. Ask the student if there is anything else that they have thought of in relation to your discussion so far. Give them the opportunity to tell you whatever it is.

2. Make notes for yourself of your observations of how the student dealt with the questions, even if the interview was facilitated by the interpreter.

   For example, did he or she seem interested and animated in dealing with the questions. Even if you did not understand their words, was it your impression that they were speaking fluently or did the interpreter have to offer prompts or clarifications. Given the opportunity to provide information in writing, such as the date of their arrival in Canada or their address now, how did they handle this.

   If there was no interpreter involved or if the interview took place in a mixture of English and the student's mother tongue, make a note of how they dealt with the format of the various questions used. In their English usage, is it your impression that they have picked up the vocabulary but are having difficulty with the syntax and phraseology? Alternatively, do they seem to focus on grammar and syntax even if their vocabulary is quite limited?

3. If it seemed to you that the interpreter did a great deal of clarifying, explaining, editing in eliciting the answers to your questions, then you want to ask the interpreter at this stage to tell you what his or her impressions are.   Can they help you to understand whether the student had significant difficulties in understanding the questions, the language used, formulating their answers, etc. You will want to reassure the interpreter that you are merely asking them for their impressions and that no assessment will be made on the basis of what they say. You are merely trying to ensure that you understand as well as possible how well and easily the student deals with such an interview in his or her mother tongue.

   Any observation that you can jot down may be helpful for you in coming to a better understanding as to why the student has such a difficult time in your programme.

Step Five: the student's approach to literacy tasks

The next section of this interview style assessment zeroes in on the student's ability to read and deal with material that is used in your programme in English.   It may seem premature to ask people whose English usage is quite limited or almost non-existent to

read in English, but in our experience most people by the time they have been involved in an ESL programme for some months and have lived in the country perhaps even longer, will have actually acquired some reading skills even if their comprehension of the words read is quite limited. If their mother tongue is one which uses an alphabet other than the Roman alphabet, then obviously by now they will have learned to copy the twenty six letters of the alphabet that we use for the writing and spelling of English. If they are not yet at that stage, then this assessment may well be premature. Alternatively, if it seems too soon to go on to the next stages, then you may want to ask about their reading and writing facility in their mother tongue and whether they in fact do read at home in either their mother tongue or attempt to do so in English. You might also ask whether they read any newspapers and if so in what language and whether they watch any television. All of this will provide you with some information about their attitude and approach to language usage outside the programme as well as their probable literacy level in their mother tongue.

Oral reading

There are two word lists provided in this manual. These are the Basic Sight Word List and the Schonnell Graded Reading Vocabulary List. They both appear at the end of this section of **Links in Learning**.

In most cases the Schonnell List is the one that you should use. However, if it is clear that this list is just too difficult for the student to handle, especially if the student is and perhaps has been for several months in a level one programme with minimal gains being made, then the other list could be tried. It is important that you explain to the student that you are not concerned about how many of the words they can read, nor are you looking at their ability to comprehend the words. Once you begin the list, do not allow the student to become too frustrated with the task. If they run into difficulties, assist them by starting them off with the beginning sound or even telling them some of the words.

For the words that they do read or attempt to read, what you are looking for is their approach, whether they look at the word as a whole or attempt to sound out what it says. Make notes of the patterns of successes or errors that you observe. You will find that people who have solid literacy skills in their mother tongue will use a similar approach and will likely be quite successful at this task. You will of course find that some words will be outside the experience of the student, e.g. someone who had grown up in an urban environment will have more difficulties with the word shepherd than the words describing the urban landscape. For some learners, words without the

clues provided by context are extremely difficult. These people might do much better at reading a story than just words.

The more thorough your observations are about their word attack skills, the more successful you will be at identifying why they are having difficulties in your programme and what you could do to help them. Even such observations as whether their guesses, if they make them, seem good guesses, i.e. similar length words with similar letters in them or totally wrong. Note whether they are trying to apply rules that apply in other contexts. An example of this would be the pronunciation of the word "conscience" as if it was made up of "con" and then "science". Even though this is not the correct pronunciation, it will give you a clue to their ability to apply information that they learned elsewhere. Also note whether they are capable of routinely using certain known clusters, such as -ing or -tion.

You are also looking for their attitude towards the task. Are they timid or are they risk takers and prepared to guess? Do they look for your approval on a sound by sound basis or do they focus on the task totally?   Do they ask for help or do they try first and then accept the help, if it is offered?

Oral reading and comprehension

Whether you proceed to this component or not will depend on the identification that you have made of the student's reading, i.e. decoding skills. In this task you are looking for the ability to read and respond to questions. The story that is used widely for this task appears at the end of this section of the manual. There is no magic about this story and you can just easily use another one that you prefer, provided it is at a similar reading level and has four or five similar type of questions related to it.

As you ask the student to read aloud the passage, you will want to observe and note if the learner is:

a) reading or decoding the words?

b) using sight words that have been memorized, phonics or a combination of word attack skills?

c) remembers a word that he or she decoded once already in this passage, or decodes it each time?

d) reading fluently or in a halting word by word manner?

e) guessing at unknown words but making reasonable meaningful guesses?

When it comes to answering the questions, you should read the question and allow the student to respond.   Note if they can answer the questions easily and correctly. If they have difficulties with this task, you will want to find out whether the problem is the question or the text.

For example, if you rephrase the question, can they answer it? If they still cannot, then you will want to discuss the passage to ascertain whether they understood it, whether they can tell you in their own words what it says, whether they can pick out key words or ideas from it. You will want to observe and note whether they understand how to go about finding the answer to a question in the text, whether they rely on rereading or memory to find the answer, whether extra time allows them to give a good answer, whether verbal clues will help them.

All of this information will help you to understand the student's learning strengths and weaknesses as well as their approach to tasks which call for certain skill sets, such as paraphrasing, finding the key concepts, identifying the proper nouns, etc.

At the end of the session you should thank the student for his or her co-operation and help. Reiterate that once you have analyzed the information gathered, you will discuss with him or her what you think you have learned. Talk about the fact that the outcome will be that you will be able to teach him or her better, which in turn will allow for better and more efficient learning. Stress again that they don't have to share this information with anyone else if they don't want to.

If most of the interview or even all of it occurred with the participation of an interpreter, then stress the importance of confidentiality for the interpreter as well. Also, ensure that you let the student know when you might have the time to discuss what you have learned from this or these interviews. If it becomes obvious to you that you might have to ask someone else, perhaps a special needs person from your local school board or someone else to help you interpret some of your observations, then please ensure that you ask the student's permission to do this. Similarly, even if you feel that it is really important to find out some more information about some facts or

events in the student's life from a member of his or her family, please remember that you cannot do this without the student's agreement. The chances are that you already know all of this and wouldn't dream of overstepping the mark, but it still bears repeating.

Analyzing the information collected

By now you will have a great deal of information about this student. In addition to your previous impressions, there are all the notes that you made during and immediately after the interviews, the comments shared with you by the student before and during the interviews and the comments made by the interpreter, if you used one.

The important point now is to sort all of this out, eliminate or clarify any contradictions and then begin to see just what all of this means. As is clear by now, you have not been doing any kind of testing. There are no scores to interpret. You are not comparing the student's achievement to any norms or community expectations. What you are looking for is:

1. a pattern which will explain to you the possible reasons for the difficulties that the student has;

2. possible ways that you can modify the programme and eliminate or compensate for these reasons.

Sometimes it seems very complicated to see just exactly what pattern has emerged from the interview. It is important to remember that what you are looking for is a pattern that supports one of the five potential outcomes, i.e. the student who has a particularly pronounced learning style, but no actual disability, the student whose schooling experiences are at odds with the style of learning in your programme, the student who is clearly a slow learner, the student who appears to have a learning disability or another disability.

What usually works for us is to check back into the components that are included as the various steps in this section, such as the student's schooling, employment experience, etc. Then, we mark each point either by using a coloured marker for each component or by using a series of little yellow "stickies". These then will help you to see where the difficulties cluster. At the end you may well suspect that the student has some kind of a disability. But you have **NOT** diagnosed a disability and you cannot tell the person that they have a disability. When you discuss with them the findings of your interview, it is important that you keep reminding yourself of this.

As far as the programme modifications are concerned, the next section of the manual will lay out for you in some detail what you might do to assist the student.

Your findings

The findings of the interview can assist you in sorting out the difficulties that students have in your programme into the following categories:

1. **They may have a particularly pronounced learning style, either visual or auditory.**

    This modality preference may be so strong, that their ability to learn material presented in any other way is quite limited. This may be complicated by a learning disability. However, it is not necessarily a sign of a learning disability. Further, such modality preferences may have been reinforced by the student's past educational experiences.

    An example of this may be a student whose mother tongue is Cantonese and whose education all the way to university level was primarily based on correspondence courses and television. For such a student a verbal language programme calling for well developed auditory skills would be extremely difficult to handle. Such a student may well be mistaken for having an auditory processing deficit. But it is quite possible that she doesn't in fact have a learning disability at all.

Another example may be a student whose education was quite successful in the area of auditory rote learning, although he only attended school for a relatively few years. He is fluent in his mother tongue which is Greek and he is picking up English quite well in your programme. However, when it comes to the literacy component of your programme he has limited skills in his native Greek and has major problems in dealing with them in English. You may be surprised to hear that in fact he had been quite successful at running a small business in Cyprus before arriving in Canada. He sees little value in struggling with learning to read and write, when he had been used to carrying out all of his business dealings with both his clients and suppliers on the basis of talking and a handshake. It is possible that he has a visual learning disability, but it is much more likely that his much preferred modality is auditory, which has been reinforced by his past schooling and employment experience.

2. They may have learned different school based skills in a culture which focused on different priorities, e.g. rote learning rather than comprehension.

Such students would have difficulties with the North American style of handling materials where comprehension is stressed over the accurate repetition of exact words or phrases. They would not be prepared to guess at the pronunciation or meaning of words in carrying out a reading task or asking a question in class.

In many countries early educational experiences favour knowledge and memorization skills over analytical skills. For someone who has been well trained in that mode, making the switch will be hard.

Much has been written about the cultural construct of asking questions. In some cultures the important point isn't to deal with the "who, what, where, when and why" questions, but rather the formulation of phraseology which compliments the questioner or the teacher. For such students the greatest difficulty is their cultural orientation to school based or academic skills. Once they acquire such skills, their progress improves almost miraculously. Since most people assume that their experience is the "standard" or mainstream experience, such students would not be able to verbalize the reason for their difficulties. They would merely observe that they are having difficulties which they did not have in the past. They are quite likely to castigate themselves for their stupidity, rather than recognize that what is needed is a different approach to the teaching-learning process.

3. They may be slow learners, with limited capabilities.

Such students will often have had limited or no schooling in their home country, even if others of the same age or sex will have had quite a bit of education. They may also have had limited exposure to outside experiences, such as a job, and may have lived all their lives in a sheltered or protected environment. It is quite likely that these students will be quite dependent on their family, and bring few experiences and little expertise with them.

In an academic or cognitive sense they will function very slowly, but that does not mean that they will not learn to use English quite reasonably well. Their progress will continue to be slow and they may never acquire sufficient literacy skills to be fully functionally literate. Any goals set by them or by others for them will have to be realistic and reflective of their abilities. When it comes to the concept of cognitive tasks, they will probably be limited to the more basic level skills, i.e. knowledge, comprehension and application.

4. They may have learning disabilities.

By now you will know quite a bit about learning disabilities and how they manifest themselves in a LINC or other ESL literacy programme. In the interview you will have observed that many students with learning disabilities show a discrepancy between potential and performance through a mixture of competencies and areas of difficulty. They may have had adequate schooling and even services for an identified learning disability. Often they will process information more slowly than you would expect or require clarification of the question asked. But once they have understood what you are looking for, then they can give you a well thought out answer, which clearly demonstrates that they have the ability to deal with information. In this way they will be very different from the individual who is a slow learner, who, in spite of clarification, cues and other supports, still will not always be able to formulate a competent, suitable answer to a question asked.

Without a doubt, the student with a learning disability will represent the greatest challenge to your teaching capabilities. But on the other hand, some of your greatest successes will also be with students who have learning disabilities and who suddenly begin to flourish in your programme as a result of the modifications that you have made.

You may find that you have to try a number of different modifications before it is clear what will help. There is no harm in this. And frankly, if it should turn out

that you have tried some modification which helped, but in fact the student doesn't have a learning disability, then that is fine too. Anything that helps is worth doing.

5. They may have another disability such as a physical disability

The section on Programme Modifications will introduce you to what you might observe and how you might help people who fit into this grouping.

Providing feedback to the student

If in fact you suspect that there may be a learning disability, then you will have to consider carefully how comfortable you are with presenting this information to the student. Think about whether the student will be receptive to such information or whether it makes more sense to stop at discussing your observations regarding his or her strengths and difficulties. If you feel comfortable and confident about telling all of this to the student, then it is important to share this information in a careful sensitive manner, not using any jargon or technical terminology. You may find that it will take some time for all of this to be discussed, digested and accepted. Explain that many people have similar difficulties and some of those people have been identified as having a learning disability.

You may also tell him or her about some of the famous people with learning disabilities, who are described in Appendix 6. This should help with reinforcing that learning disabilities do not prevent talented people from achieving their goals and becoming recognized for them. While most of us do not have such talents, we can be successful in spite of having a learning disability, provided we receive the requisite help and get past our negative self image that is so often a part of having a learning disability.

Reinforce the information that the whole purpose of this discussion is to help him or her be more successful in this programme and in his or her future endeavour. Stress that a learning disability doesn't mean that the person who has it is stupid or cannot learn. Emphasize that learning disabilities can be accommodated by changing the teaching materials or process.

Talk about the many strengths that you have observed in the interview with the student. Discuss what changes you plan to make in teaching him or her and what they might find as a result of these changes. Reassure them that if they don't want to, they don't have to tell anybody about any of this.

Encourage the student to feel free to come back at any time to discuss the information you shared with him or her about your findings and any other relevant information. Sometimes it takes several discussions before a student will feel comfortable in asking some of the basic concerns that he or she has. Your goal is obviously to help the

student through programme modifications as well as any other support that will allow the student to help himself or herself now and in the future.

INTERVIEW/ANALYSIS FORM

Learner:	**Date:**
Instructor:	**Location:**
OBSERVATIONS	SUGGESTIONS

General Comments:

BASIC SIGHT WORD LIST

sit	me	to	the
not	of	we	to
red	too	seven	walk
six	start	show	stop
put	round	right	pull
no	on	or	old
yellow	you	your	yes
please	pick	play	pretty
take	ten	they	today
my	much	must	together
own	under	off	over
out	new	now	our
open	one	only	once
try	myself	never	two

us	up	upon	use
with	white	was	wash
shall	she	sleep	small
who	write	would	why
some	very	sing	soon
which	well	work	will
ran	read	run	ride
then	tell	their	them
see	saw	say	said

SCHONELL GRADED READING VOCABULARY LIST

tree	little	milk	egg
book	school	sit	frog
playing	bun	flower	read
clock	train	light	picture
think	summer	people	something
dream	downstairs	biscuit	shepherd
thirsty	crowd	sandwich	beginning
postage	island	saucer	angel
ceiling	appeared	gnome	canary
attractive	imagine	nephew	gradually
smoulder	applaud	disposal	nourished
diseased	university	orchestra	knowledge
audience	situated	physics	campaign
choir	intercede	fascinate	forfeit

siege	recent	plausible	prophecy
colonel	soloist	systematic	slovenly
classification	genuine	institution	pivot
conscience	heroic	pneumonia	preliminary
antique	susceptible	enigma	oblivion
scintillate	satirical	sabre	beguile
terrestrial	belligerent	adamant	sepulchre
statistics	miscellaneous	procrastinate	tyrannical
evangelical	grotesque	ineradicable	judicature
preferential	homonym	fictitious	rescind
metamorphosis	somnambulist	bibliography	idiosyncrasy

STORY TO READ

Hundreds of years ago, most of Europe was a very poor region. But China, a large country in eastern Asia, had many of the comforts of a rich civilized nation. Only a few people from Europe had visited this distant region. One was the famous Marco Polo. He learned some of the languages that were spoken in China and served its great ruler for many years.

Questions to ask:

1. What kind of region was most of Europe hundreds of years ago?

2. What country enjoyed far more comforts than Europe?

3. Who was one of the few people from Europe who visited China?

4. What did Marco Polo learn in China?

CASE STUDIES

The following descriptions of learners are composites of many people that we have known in programmes just like yours. You may think that you recognize some of them as your students. But please remember that any similarities to any actual persons are just that - similarities. We have tried to pick the most typical characteristics of learners who might attend any ESL programme and who have difficulties with learning language and literacy skills due to the presence of a possible disability. It is important to realize that no two people will have the same characteristics, even if superficially their difficulties are the same.

Meet Rahel.

When Rahel's instructor first called, she seemed concerned that perhaps she was overreacting. She said that Rahel was a pleasant and eager participant of her programme. She is 31 years old and this is her second year in a Level One LINC programme. In spite of her regular attendance, she seems to forget almost everything that she learns from one class to the next. The instructor was worried that perhaps she needs to do something differently, but she did not know what or how. Fortunately, Rahel was able to understand enough to be interviewed. This is what we found out.

She was born in Ethiopia. She attended school until she was 15 or 16 - she wasn't quite sure. When questioned about what she learned in school, she could only remember taking cooking, a little bit of science and some maths, mainly adding and taking away. As soon as she left school she was married to a much older man, but did not go to live with her husband. She didn't have a job outside her home, and in spite of being married, continued to live with her mother and father. At the same time her brothers and sister all had jobs, working in stores, offices and using computers. Rahel commented that they could all speak good English, not like her.

From Ethiopia her family moved to Italy where they stayed for three years and then two and a half years ago they all came to Canada. She came with them, rather than staying behind with her husband and his family. She learned no Italian and she had no job. Now she still lives with her parents and again has no job.

When it came to doing some academic tasks, she could not read anything more than the most basic words. She could not write her last name, could not recite or write down her telephone number or full address. In spite of remembering that she learned some maths, she could not carry out any basic tasks.

It is quite likely that Rahel has a developmental disability. Her family has been very supportive and has sheltered her from harm. However, now that she lives in Canada, it is

very important that she be helped to learn certain basic survival skills, including knowing her name, address, telephone number and being able to read some basic words, such as those which appear in the Adult Picture Dictionary, listed in the bibliography at the end of the manual. It may be that Rahel will not be able to progress to the higher levels of the programme for some time if at all. Her instructor needs to learn to stop worrying about this. If Rahel agrees to the instructor talking about this to her family, a referral to an adult programme run through the Association for Community Living may be appropriate.

Rahel eventually moved on to level three in her LINC programme, although as far as her literacy skills are concerned, level two would have remained more appropriate.

Through significant repetition and using materials building on all modalities, she now knows reliably the kind of personal information that is essential for living in a city, i.e. name, address, telephone number, postal code, etc. She also knows what bus to take to her job, for yes, Rahel now has a part time job in a cafeteria, which has certainly enhanced her self esteem as well as her independence. She still carries with her a piece of paper on which all of this information is recorded just in case she gets nervous and forgets, but she is quick to tell you that she hardly ever relies on it any longer.

Her fluency with basic English has improved and she can now cope with the simple directions that she receives at work, where she primarily works behind the scenes and not directly with the customers. Through her involvement at the Association for Community Living she is now learning some new skills and her LINC teacher is focusing on helping her acquire the kind of vocabulary which will help her at work.

Her family are amazed, but most supportive of her newly acquired independence.

Meet Abul.

Abul was not doing as well in the Level Two programme as one would have expected, given his past education. The teacher couldn't exactly put her finger on it, but somehow he just didn't catch on so much of the time and yet occasionally he surprised her with what he was able to do. She believed that he had worked as a mechanic some years ago. It was his hope that as soon as his English was adequate enough, he would be able to do the same work and finally begin to support his family properly. Clearly he was getting impatient with himself as well as the programme.

In conversation he talked about a good basic education which was followed by an apprenticeship in a garage in his native country. After several years of work as a mechanic, he was ordered into the army. He came to Canada from Afghanistan after being discharged from the army. When asked why he was discharged, he said that he had been wounded four years ago and he had been sick for some time after being wounded. Further questioning brought out the fact that his injury was due to a bullet grazing the side of his head, resulting in the loss of hearing in one ear and the loss of vision in that eye.   It had never occurred to him to mention this to his instructor or to ask for any special consideration or accommodation. Yet obviously, some of the time, depending or where he sat in class in relation to the teacher and the board on which she wrote, he neither heard or saw the

information presented. His good basic skills in his mother tongue helped to some extent, but could not compensate fully, when it came to acquiring language facility.

It was suggested that he might consider talking to his doctor about what could be done to help him. He was also made aware of the existence of organizations such as the C.N.I.B. and the Canadian Hearing Society, both of which may have some information about what might help him when he is ready to get a job or if he needs additional training. In the meantime, he and his teacher have worked out a plan for where he should sit in class and how he can indicate to her if he suddenly can't hear her. The teacher also agreed to try some additional programme modifications which may help, including repeating things, using colour coding, writing things down, trying different words to explain what is going on.

There will be a certain amount of trial and error in finding the best way for the teacher to accommodate Abul's difficulties. But at least both of them are committed to trying.

After contacting the Canadian Hearing Society, Abul acquired a hearing aid which has dramatically improved his ability to hear and deal with the information in his LINC classroom. Regrettably, nothing could be done about the lost vision in his right eye, but the use of slightly larger print and a number of visual reinforcers have helped him to deal with visual information more effectively as well. His teacher tried several modifications in terms of using some concrete materials to reinforce certain abstract concepts as well as relying on Abul's excellent tactile learning skills to assist. She also taught him some metacognitive strategies so that he could monitor his own performance more effectively.

His speech and his English fluency improved significantly once he could hear better, and he in fact was able to transfer to a different programme from his first LINC programme. In this programme the focus is also on work related skills as well as language acquisition and literacy. Abul is hopeful that fairly soon he will be ready to move into a work adjustment programme and finally get a job. This certainly seems a realistic prospect for the near future.

Meet Sulejka.

One of the biggest difficulties that Sulejka's instructor noted was that she didn't seem able to figure out what she was supposed to do. Her English was good enough for basic personal communication and therefore, she didn't need an interpreter to help with the interview.

Sulejka was born in Iraq, second of seven children in her family. She attended school for twelve years and did quite well in the highly structured format of the Iraqi educational system. Her studies included maths, history and biology. She did well in maths and in fact after leaving school got a job as a bookkeeper in a factory. She held this job for eight years until just before coming to Canada with her family. She is still unmarried and continues to live with her family. She wants to learn enough English to get a job just like the one she had in Iraq.

Throughout the interview she had significant difficulties with understanding what was asked or expected of her. She read the short story well. When it came to answering the questions she seemed lost, unless very detailed pointed instructions were given about what was wanted.   But once she understood what was asked for, then her answers were good and showed her good understanding of the material. Clearly, Sulejka is not a slow learner.

Her teacher had spoken with Sulejka's sister with Sulejka's agreement. The sister confessed that the family frequently got quite exasperated with her and the long time she took to deal with questions or requests. "She seems stupid, and yet we know that she isn't stupid!" the sister said. "Often she can do things when they are written down." Further questioning brought out that the problem was not with hearing what was said, but rather processing it and then retrieving the right answer. In other words, Sulejka appears to have an organizational learning disability in the areas of receiving, storing and retrieving information efficiently and fast. With clarification, extra time and no distractions in her environment she was able to function effectively.

Bookkeeping was an excellent choice of career for her, especially since she could work on her own most of the time. Her instructor was encouraged to take more time with explaining things to her and to help her with breaking tasks down into smaller more manageable units. She would also benefit from learning some metacognitive strategies around self-monitoring and advance planning. If it were possible to have a volunteer work with her on such skills, including striving for a greater comfort level with the English format of questioning, the chances are that Sulejka will succeed in this programme and be able to resume her career choice.

Once it became clear that Sulejka had major difficulties with dealing with and organizing in her own mind the oral materials presented in her LINC classroom, things began to improve for her.

Her teacher reinforced most of the information presented to her with written point form notes and also focused on teaching her to create such organizing assistive tools for herself. She was also taught to deal with information in small chunks and to learn to question her own comprehension of the last step as well as the next task, before going on to this.

A volunteer was found through a community agency who worked with Sulejka on the format for questions and directions in English and these skills were also reinforced in the top level LINC classroom to which she progressed relatively quickly, once all of these supports were provided to her.

The next stop for Sulejka, she hopes, will be a job, doing bookkeeping or accounts, just like she used to do before coming to Canada. There is no reason why this should not be possible for her.

Meet Jose.

Jose was born in Nicaragua. He went to elementary school but dropped out soon after starting high school to get a job. He had a series of quite successful jobs, mainly in the service sector. His teacher in the LINC programme was concerned, because although his English fluency was excellent, in fact he spoke with almost no accent, he was making virtually no gains in the literacy component of the programme. In fact, he often tried to talk his way out of having to do the reading and writing tasks.

During the interview it became clear that he indeed had major difficulties with reading and writing. With simple words based on regular patterns, he was able to use a sounding out process. But with non-phonetic words or long complex words he was lost. So, in spite of his excellent verbal facility, he couldn't pass the entrance test for a job training programme. This frustrated him very much, since the job for which he was hoping to be trained required minimal reading and writing, in his opinion.

He was quite concerned that if he couldn't pass the test then he would have to resort to a totally unskilled lower paying job, given his limited expertise in using his hands. "I am not good with my hands and I don't like to read in any language. I'd much rather talk or watch TV." he commented.

It seems quite likely that Jose's difficulties are due to the presence of a visual processing difficulty. This is unlikely to be eliminated, regardless of what he or his teacher does. But by implementing some of the programme modifications recommended, including the learning of making guesses, scanning, skimming and using assistive resources such as taped materials, a hand held speller, etc., he may be able to get into the training programme. It might be helpful to explain to Jose just what is going on and that he could get some help for his difficulties. When it comes to getting a job he might benefit from some on the job accommodation to allow him to fulfil the essential components of the job, without having to read or write more than is absolutely essential.

Once Jose understood that his difficulties were not due to the fact that he was stupid, but rather due to the presence of a visual processing problem, he began to accept some of the suggested modifications.

He found the use of taped materials particularly helpful, since, as had been noted before, he has an excellent auditory memory. Having the text that he was trying to read available on tape and listening to it as well reading it was quite beneficial. His spelling continues to be rather poor and his patience with the complexities of English spelling is quite limited. He cannot fully understand why he cannot simply learn the common rules and then apply them every time. The chances are that writing and in particular spelling will always be tasks that he will avoid.

But given the fact that his future employment goals in the service sector, perhaps sales, call for the skills of listening and speaking rather than reading and writing, Jose will be successful, especially if he becomes more comfortable with explaining to a future employer his difficulties and how he compensates for them. He is already quite comfortable with using

a small dictaphone type tape recorder as his way of remembering complex information that he has to recall exactly. If he should get a job in a sales type position, then he can always ensure that his written notes for orders are reinforced with his taped notes to himself. With such accommodation, he is likely to be successful.

Meet Tran.

Tran was born in Vietnam. He was enrolled in a LINC programme, where his instructor was very concerned that he was not learning to speak English. He hardly participated in class and definitely seemed a lot slower than the others in his class. If questioned he seemed really confused by what had been asked and his standard response was "not know". While his written work was not too bad, he just didn't seem able to grasp enough information in class to move to the next level.

Although it seemed hard to believe that he really needed it, we used an interpreter for his interview. Another student from the next level of programme agreed to translate. Tran welcomed the help. Although he clearly was not someone who enjoyed talking, even in his mother tongue, we learned the following:

In Vietnam Tran worked as an engineer in a mid-size factory, where he was in charge of several other workers. He had a good education and completed a four year technical course after high school. In his position at the factory he not only maintained but also designed new equipment. He wasn't much of a talker before and now he avoided talking as much as possible. With lots of lulls and silences, it emerged that he couldn't remember how English words sounded or what was the right phrase in a given context. It is easier for him to say little or nothing.

When it came to the reading tasks, he did much better. His sight vocabulary was better than his spoken one and in spite of his difficulties with English spelling, he preferred to provide written answers rather than spoken ones.

It seemed rather likely that Tran's problems stemmed from having an auditory processing deficit. The instructor was encouraged to implement some programme modifications, including strengthening his visual skills and learning to compensate for his auditory problems.

Since Tran is hoping to re-enter the field in which he had worked before, he should be encouraged to learn as much as possible about the source of his difficulties and what can be done to help and accommodate him in the workplace.   In this case, he stands a good chance of achieving success.

Some time has elapsed since it was first identified that Tran has major difficulties with processing auditory information. He and his instructor have worked together on a number of modifications which have helped him to make significant progress, although it is clear that he will always deal with auditory information more slowly, and especially when he is stressed or tired, less effectively.

The modifications introduced focused on two key areas. Firstly, he augmented his learning in the LINC classroom with written materials, notes, etc. so that he did not have to sit and listen without some visual reinforcement being included. This way his strong visual skills supplemented his much weaker auditory ones and prevented him from losing his concentration, when he lost the thread of what his instructor was talking about.

Secondly, he was encouraged to practise some basic activities, such as responding somewhat more fluently to some basic questions about himself and about his knowledge of engineering concepts. This will be very helpful when he starts applying for jobs. The chances are that he will always have some difficulties with participating in group discussions and in some social situations, since his auditory skills will always be weaker than usual. However, he can learn strategies to compensate for this by teaching himself to listen to one person at a time and to ask for clarification if he is really lost. Future employers and fellow workers will likely ascribe this to his difficulties with English and the complexities of the language. But once they see how well he does his job and how willing he is to work hard, then there should be no major difficulties for him.

PROGRAMME MODIFICATIONS BASED ON THE ASSESSMENT RESULTS

This section reviews a series of programme modifications which will benefit the students who are having difficulties with learning language and literacy skills in your programme due to their pronounced learning style, their different schooling experiences, the possible presence of a learning or other disability.

For those of you who have been trained as teachers, this section on programme modifications will serve as a review of what you already know. For others who have had a great deal of experience in this field, it may offer validation of things that you have been doing. You may have done these things because it seemed common sense to try them and then you found that they worked. Alternatively, you may have observed others and then thought that some of these things might work for students in your programme. It could also be that the recommendations that follow are brand new to you.

It really doesn't matter what has gone on in the past. What counts is what you do from here on in. As stated before, all of the suggestions that follow can be useful to one, some or even most of the students in your programme. None of them can possibly do any harm or hinder the learning process for any student. Pat Hatt uses many of these strategies in her programme in the North York Board and often refers to them as her "chicken soup" approach. What she means by that is an approach that cannot harm anyone and will benefit probably more people than you would suspect.

Before embarking on the specifics, there are a few points that we want you to remember.

Firstly, your job is to teach the students in your programme as well as you can. But you are not responsible for their whole lives. Therefore, you are not expected to assume responsibility for what occurs outside the classroom or whether your suggestions are followed by the student and his or her family.

Secondly, if in spite of your best efforts at providing programme modifications and accommodation to a student who is having difficulties, the student is still not progressing, then it is fine to seek out other help. Obviously, if you need to use identifying information about a particular student in getting such help, then you must discuss this with the student in question and get his or her approval. But if you are looking for more generic information or guidance on how to meet certain identified or suspected needs, then please don't struggle alone. It is not a sign of failure to ask someone to help you.

Thirdly, we have been very careful to select suggestions which we believe are possible, given the limitations imposed by finances, the format of LINC and ESL programming, etc. In other words, we have tried to be very realistic. We believe that our suggestions are within your capabilities to try. After all, if you were not interested in helping people to acquire much needed functional skills as well and as quickly as possible, then you would not be working in this field at all.

Lastly, we want to remind you that in implementing programme modifications you should consider what you found out in the interview process and especially the student's personal goals. They are adults and even if you feel that they are unrealistic in their future goals, you can only discuss this with them but not change it.   There are resources available which will help new Canadians with understanding the expectations of the job market in Canada. An example of this is the video Looking for Work in Canada - strategies for new Canadians, which should be accessible through your LINC co-ordinator.

We have confidence in your ability to help the majority of students in your programme who are currently having difficulties with learning. And in the process we are sure that you will enhance your own job satisfaction as well.

Strategies for creating a positive learning environment

➢ Establish a climate of mutual respect, remember you are not teaching children.

➢ Eliminate any external sources of stress, such as unrealistic expectations of progress or comparisons among learners.

➢ Focus on the learners' strengths, rather than on what they cannot do at all or do well.

➢ Discuss your expectations of the learner honestly and realistically.

➢ Encourage a reciprocal discussion by allowing the learner to focus on and share with you his or her expectations of you, as their teacher as well as of themselves.

➢ Discuss the learner's goals and objectives and programme to these goals.

➢ Discuss progress regularly and honestly with the learners, ensuring that you both recognize and understand any problems that arise.

➢ Use diverse materials, including things which are of direct interest to the learner.

➢ Deal with problems such as absenteeism, suddenly observed lack of effort immediately and honestly.

➢ Ensure that you start from the premise that people, including the learners in your programme, are essentially competent and that you are both committed to eliminating any barriers to demonstrating their competence or acquiring some new competencies.

➢ Ensure that both you and the learner are having a good time. Learning should be enjoyable.

Modifying the pace, the process and the product

When people are taught certain skills, especially academic or so called school based skills, the components of the teaching-learning interaction that can be modified are:

1. the pace at which the teacher proceeds and expects the student to learn the material offered;

2. the process used for teaching, i.e. whether the teaching is teacher centred or learner centred, whether knowledge and repetition are stressed or whether comprehension and application are aimed for, whether the strategies used are primarily cognitively based or whether metacognitive strategies are used as well, so that the student can be more aware of learning as an active or participatory process rather than the passive process of being taught;

3. the product, which includes the outcome for the learner as well as the evaluation technique used to demonstrate the outcome achieved. Modifying the product may mean allowing some people to do everything on paper or in the form of concrete materials, if talking is very difficult for them or allowing people to use materials that they are really familiar with as a resource.

Very often teachers in a number of situations, not just programmes like yours, are very concerned about allowing or even encouraging significant modifications of one or more of the above. They are justifiably concerned about the integrity of their programme and the impact of modifications on others who do not need such modifications and may view their provision to some students but not all of them as unfair. For example, we often hear people saying that if only they had extra time to carry out a task, then they would have done better also. It is interesting to note that research does not bear this out. Allowing extra or even unlimited time for examinations does not improve the marks received by most students. In fact, the majority of students do not even tend to take advantage of the extra time. On the other hand, for a student for whom the speed of processing is a real issue, i.e. someone who reads, writes or retrieves from their memory learned information more slowly than most other students, the availability of extra time is really important. You will also find that the majority of such students will take advantage of such an opportunity.

The more flexible you are as a teacher about the pace at which you expect students to progress, about the expected product of their learning process and the more student centred you can be, the more likely it is that all of your students will do better. This is as beneficial

as ensuring that you do not favour one teaching modality over the others, just because it happens to be your preferred learning modality.

Coping and compensatory strategies

It is also important that you learn to value the development of coping and compensatory strategies in each and every one of your students. This means:

➢ encouraging them to verbalize and reflect upon their learning;

➢ helping them to recognize that their particular difficulties may call for some coping and compensatory strategies which are more obvious than those used by other students;

➢ ensuring that they recognize that the use of coping and compensatory strategies is not "cheating" or unfair, but merely allows them to make the most of their learning potential;

➢ encouraging them to use, as effectively as possible, any available accommodations including adaptive and assistive devices.

We are not suggesting that you are responsible for identifying and providing adaptive and assistive devices or for training people to use them. But ensuring that they are aware of the availability of such supports can be something that you can help with and which will make a dramatic difference in their lives.

Now let us focus on some specific ways that you can modify your programme.

1.   Helping the student who has a particularly pronounced learning style

As stated earlier, your interview may identify for you that the reason why some people are having difficulties with learning is because their learning style and your teaching style are at odds with one another. There are two distinct tasks here for you.

Firstly, you should strengthen your teaching to the student's modality.

For example, for the student from China discussed earlier who is such an extremely visual learner, you should always provide visual materials that back up what you are providing orally to the class. In other words, use handouts or overheads or audiovisual materials.

Encourage him to make notes when you are speaking. At the same time you also want to encourage him to strengthen his auditory skills by using some of the strategies listed later in this section under teaching strategies. A good example might be to encourage him to listen to a taped book at the same time that he is reading the text. Later on he could read some of the material on to tape and then proof his spoken material by listening and reading. He could also benefit from reading a particular news item from the newspaper and jot down the highlights for himself. Then, without looking at the article or his notes, he could listen to someone read the article to him and jotting down the highlights once again. If he then compares his two sets of notes he will be able to see how efficiently he listens in comparison to his reading.

Obviously there are people who have become used to functioning almost exclusively in their preferred modality and may even claim that they cannot acquire skills in the other one. Unless this is actually due to having a learning disability in the other modality area, then encouraging a more balanced level of functioning would be helpful.

2. Helping the student whose difficulties are due to the type of schooling he or she had received

In many countries, schooling and the whole process of education are quite different from the approaches used in Canadian schools and educational programmes. As a result, the difficulties that some of the learners will have in your programme will relate to the fact that they are thoroughly uncomfortable with the activities of an interactive participatory type of second language programme, where they are apparently expected to be part of an active learning process. In many cases, they will have been used to the student either being a passive recipient of the teacher's efforts at teaching them or to their participation being limited to rote memorization or the chanting of responses to questions asked of the class by the teacher. In many cases their experiences of learning a second language were the rather old-fashioned ways of memorizing lists of vocabulary and grammatical rules.

The key factors in a second language programme in Canada are the ability of the student to acquire and understand the material presented and apply it in a relevant context. In order to encourage this, you have to focus on tasks of comprehension rather than memorization. Whether you are dealing with auditory or visual material, the activities are similar. You would, for example, encourage the retelling of a story in different words, such that the meaning is the same. Then you could get the student to substitute new words one at a time, such that it still means the same or a similar thing. Then you can alter the task by introducing a word that alters the meaning in a pre-agreed manner.

Introducing students to the process of asking questions and responding to questions is an important part of this process. For some students you will also have to stress the importance of looking back into the material to find the answer to a question instead of relying on their

memory. Such concepts as key ideas, looking for headings, proper nouns, which will start with capital letters all assist in acquiring the kind of school based skills that favour learning in a Canadian language, literacy and citizenship programme.

It is important that you do not entirely dismiss the value of rote learning as a skill, especially since in preparation for a citizenship interview some rote learning capability will be beneficial. What you are stressing is the diversity of learning skills, rather than relying on any one particular way of learning.

You may also need to use your personal judgement as to how far you and the student should pursue the acquisition of North American style academic skills. If this student has had success in the past in working in a particular environment and it is his or her intent to pursue the same or similar employment in Canada, then you may want to limit your emphasis on this. For a future employment situation where academic skills are unlikely to be needed, you may choose to focus primarily on practical language acquisition, rather than enhancing the learner's academic abilities.

3.   Helping the student who is really slow

Students who have developmental disabilities deal with most tasks slowly. Further, the kind of help that assists the student with learning disabilities so much, such as cues or the rephrasing of questions, will not alter this student's capability in dealing with the tasks at hand. This does not mean that such students should not participate in the programme. On the contrary, being included is particularly important for them, since very often their opportunities for incidental learning on the street are likely to be quite limited. The important point is to accept that their progress may be very slow and that they may take much longer to progress from one level to the next than others. But they will learn things that are taught to them directly and that are structured and presented in a way that they can deal with them.

They will like a highly structured environment, with very few surprises. For many students who progress very slowly there is tremendous security in doing things the same way each time. Very small amounts of new information, presented slowly with lots of repetition allow the learner who fits into this category to begin to make some progress. Because their progress will be very slow, it is particularly important that what they learn is practical to their daily lives. For example, learning their name, address, telephone number, the name of their nearest subway stop or major street intersection are the so-called survival information that these learner require.

It is important to ensure that the student, the teacher and the student's family have realistic goals and expectations for this student. You might want to consider what it is that they need to know from a survival point of view and secondly what they will need in order to be able to work. It may well be that they will not have many ideas about what kind of work might be

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suitable for them.   For these students, just like the others who are enrolled in your programme, their strengths and interests may determine a future direction to follow.

You may find that many students with developmental disabilities are reluctant to participate in such things as class discussions. They are likely to show significant signs of learned helplessness, especially if their past experiences have been particularly limited and sheltered.

4.   Helping the student who you suspect has learning disabilities

As described earlier, students with learning disabilities have average to above average intelligence and difficulties with processing information.   Without a doubt the most important thing in deciding how to help such a student is to have a good understanding of what tasks they have difficulties with when it comes to processing material. Once you and the student have an idea about this, then it is not that hard to figure out what will help. In developing such modifications it is important that both you and the student accept, without guilt or blame, that a learning disability does not go away. Therefore, you are not looking for a cure or a quick fix, but rather for strategies that the student can learn to use, with your help, in order to cope with and compensate for the learning disability.

Teaching strategies and modifications which will benefit learners with auditory learning disabilities or learning difficulties:

➢ Eliminate outside as well as classroom noises as much as possible.

➢ Make eye contact and if at all possible call the student by name when addressing him or her. Encourage the student in turn to make eye contact with the speaker and/or augment comprehension with lip reading.

➢ Preface important points or announcements with the comment "This is really important for you to know" or something similar.

➢ Ensure that your pronunciation of complex or difficult words is extremely clear.

➢ Repeat words which may be ambiguous or have unaccented syllables in them.

➢ Teach the student the skills of selective listening e.g. listen carefully, write down important points, ask for clarification, ensure that you have understood what the task is before beginning it, etc.

➢ Encourage the student to repeat verbal information.

➢ Encourage the student to participate in a "buddy" system, whereby he or she can ask a fellow student for clarification instead of always having to ask you.

➢ Deliver verbal information in small units, checking periodically that the student has heard and understood the information delivered.

➢ Encourage the use of a tape recorder as a self checking device for pronunciation, sentence structure, etc.

➢ Encourage students in listening to the radio or taped material.

➢ Use visual and concrete materials to reinforce verbal information.

➢ Use games, songs, rhymes, etc. to encourage the student in listening and repeating sounds heard.

➢ Encourage the student to develop the skills of inner or metacognitive language to reinforce activities and at the same time get used to using language for tasks other then direct communication.

➢ Provide the student with a written outline of what you are going to present orally.

➢ Use overhead transparencies, write on the chalkboard or a flip chart, reading aloud what you are writing.

➢ Ask students to tell you in their own words what has been said and/or what is written.

➢ Ensure that the student knows how to formulate questions to find out the information that he or she needs to know. This means the teaching of alternative question formulation in addition to the traditional who, what, where, when, why and how questions.

➢ Label items in the classroom, such as door, window, chalkboard, cupboard, etc.

➢ Encourage small group discussions rather than paired groupings in order to ensure that each person has to talk.

➢ Reinforce the understanding of sound-symbol relationships through a variety of exercises, such as tongue twisters, the use of charts, concrete materials such as sandpaper letters which the learner can trace repeatedly, use visual cues to reinforce the sounds that certain letters or letter combinations make.

➢ Repeat blended sounds over and over again to help the student differentiate among these.

➢ Do not allow the learner to struggle when trying to deal with information in their area of difficulty. Help them out by providing a cue, a question, a reminder of the last time that this information was used. As mentioned earlier, stress does not improve the effectiveness of the learning process for learners with learning disabilities.

➢ Remember that sometimes the person merely requires some extra time to process the question asked and to integrate and formulate the right answer. Therefore, try to reduce the impression that speed of response is very important. One of the most useful accommodations for learners with learning disabilities is the availability of extra time, without accompanying pressure.

The above list contains many suggestions. It is not expected that you will try all of these suggestions or that you do not use a particular modification which you believe to be useful, just because it does not appear on this list. The purpose of the list is to share with you modifications which other teachers have tried and found useful from time to time.

Teaching strategies and modifications which will benefit learners with visual learning disabilities or learning difficulties:

➢ Reduce visual distractions when the student is expected to focus on visual material, e.g. show one paragraph or one picture at a time, encourage the student to focus on the book, paper, etc. and not keep looking round.

➢ Provide auditory cues to engage the learner's attention, as he or she is expected to deal with visual material.

➢ Encourage the use of visual cues, such as highlighting, underlining, drawing arrows or other picture cues.

➢ If the problem relates to tracking, encourage the learner to use his or her finger, a ruler, a cut out frame to guide the eyes and allow them to focus on the words, picture or other visual material.

➢ Encourage the use of concrete material and tactile cues, such as sand paper letters, tracing letters on one's hand or in the air.

➢ Provide as much auditory support as the learner needs. In extreme cases, people with learning disabilities do not read printed materials at all and utilize taped texts and materials exclusively.

➢ Teach directly the necessary visual symbols relating to safety and survival, such as road signs, medication symbols, etc.

➢ Teach directly the necessary survival words relating to the learner's daily life, such as bus stop, fire alarm, ladies, etc.

➢ Encourage the use of activities which enhance visual perception, cutting, pasting, the use of jigsaw puzzles, etc.

➢ Encourage the learner in identifying visual patterns in words, numbers, pictures.

➢ Teach the student the skills related to talking himself or herself through visual tasks.

➢ Introduce colour coding to aid in carrying out visual tasks.

➢ Encourage the use of a computer to reduce the incidence of writing and spelling errors.

➢ Encourage the use of a calculator to reduce the incidence of mathematical errors due to visual problems.

➢ Reinforce the use of visual cues in giving directions with concrete cues, e.g. instead of just saying that in order to find the office, look for the door that says office, tell them to turn by the drinking fountain and the door immediately before the office is the red door with windows in it, etc.

➢ If reversals are a problem, utilize tactile reinforcement to learning the directionality of the letters.

➢ Focus on writing tasks which interest the learner, e.g. a journal rather than essays, birthday cards, short rhyming poems rather than lengthy sentences.

➢ Introduce the learner to using lined paper or graph paper to improve the placing of letters or numbers in carrying out tasks.

➢ Directly teach proofreading skills.

➢ Introduce the learner to visual concentration games, especially the kind that they can practice by themselves, e.g. card games.

➢ Pressure and stress aggravate the situation. Extra time and a relaxed atmosphere are among the most important accommodations needed by learners with visual learning disabilities.

The above list contains many suggestions. It is not expected that you will try all of these suggestions or that you do not use a particular modification which you believe to be useful, just because it does not appear on this list. The purpose of the list is to share with you modifications which other teachers have tried and found useful from time to time.

Teaching strategies and modifications which will benefit learners with other kinds of learning disabilities or learning difficulties:

Difficulty with short term memory
jotting down notes or other reminders of tasks to be done.

using a tape recorder to keep reminders

provide visual and/or auditory cues to aid recall

allow ample time for recallencourage the student to employ memory aids

Difficulty with organizational skills
teach the learner to break tasks into smaller units

encourage the learner to create an outline or plan, asking someone else to review the sequence

	encourage the development of a regular sequence or routine for tasks
	teach the learner time management skills
	encourage the use of visual and auditory cues in organizing time, space and tasks
Difficulty with writing	encourage the use of a computer with a spellcheck system
	using a tape recorder for notes
	balance the need for writing with allowing oral presentations
Difficulty with mathematics	using a calculator or computer
	ensure that any mathematical tasks are of direct relevance to the learner

Difficulty with concentration

ensure that the material being used to teach the various skills is of interest to the learner	encourage the learner to break down tasks into small units
stop frequently during the teaching process to check that the learner is attending to as well as comprehending the material being presented	encourage the learner to learn metacognitive skills, as described in the next section
	encourage the student to use visual and auditory cues as much as possible

Difficulty with abstract concepts

use concrete materials as frequently as possible	ensure that abstract concepts are reviewed and revised regularly
use physical demonstration of abstract concepts such as left and right	do not introduce several abstract concepts at one time

Focusing on metacognitive skills

The key to success for persons with learning disabilities in any learning situation is their ability to utilize or develop the necessary metacognitive skills. This means helping them to understand how they approach learning tasks, how they can make this approach more efficient and more suited to their learning strengths, how to monitor and evaluate their own participation, attitude and progress. The more able they are to do these tasks, initially with your help and later on their own, the more successful they will be at compensating for their areas of learning disability.

Examples of successful metacognitive strategies include the following:

➢ **training oneself to listen more efficiently and selectively.**

What this means is being aware of the key phrases that precede important points in what is being said, such as "today we are going to deal with..." , "a key point in this is...", "if you only remember one thing about this, it should be...". In turn, as a teacher you can assist all your students, not just those who may have a learning disability, by using such phrases when you are about to present some really important points to your class.

➢ **monitoring one's performance during the performance of learning tasks.**

What this means is checking whether what is being written or said is correct in terms of what one wants to say as well as language usage, grammar, etc. Similarly, second language learners will benefit from being aware of the importance of self-monitoring for comprehending oral language. In other words, ensuring that if they do not understand what has been said by someone, whether that is their teacher or a fellow student, they know how to ask for clarification and are prepared to do so. Teachers can facilitate this process by stopping to ask their students to interpret what is being said and discussing whether there could be another meaning for the statement under discussion. This is particularly important when it comes to the use of English idiom. For example, discuss the fact that in English the expressions "slim chance" and "fat chance" mean the same thing, depending on your tone of voice.

➢ **training oneself to evaluate the performance of a learning task.**

Spending time on a particular task does not mean that adequate learning has taken place. An important outcome of the self-monitoring process is the ability to evaluate one's performance, i.e. checking whether one has understood and learned the expected

information, skills and tasks. If there is some doubt about this, then the student must develop a process for review and possibly relearning the material. Being aware of one's learning style and possible processing deficits is particularly important for this process. Then the student can ask to have the information explained again or presented again in a manner which suits his learning mode better. Being aware of the importance of coping skills and compensatory strategies is a key component of such self-evaluation.

➤ **training oneself in the skills of planning and organization.**

Students with learning disabilities often find that their difficulties with advance planning and organizational skills make it difficult for them to be efficient learners, even if they follow the strategies listed above. Being well prepared for a class by previewing some of the skills that will be required or the information that will be presented, can be extremely helpful for all students, but especially those who have learning disabilities. A good teaching strategy that favours this approach is telling students at the end of one class what will be done at the next one. For example, letting the students know that next time they will be asked to write some sentences about the country where they came from, or read a particular newspaper article or discuss some international event. You can then also recommend that it might be a good idea to think about this before they come to class. You may find that for some students their past schooling experience will get in the way.   They might think that preparing for such a task by practicing it beforehand would be seen as cheating. As their teacher, you could reassure them that people do this all the time.

The more you can help your students in understanding these skills and their value for their current and future learning process, the better off they will be. This is particularly important for those for whom future post-secondary education and training are a likely prospect. While most institutions handling such programmes in Canada are quite willing to accommodate the needs of learners with learning disabilities, the better learning strategies the individual has before approaching such an institution and its special needs office, the more likely they are to succeed.

Emphasizing instructed learning

By now I am sure that you will all remember that one of the components of learning disabilities that can interfere with successful learning is the difficulty that so many persons with learning disabilities have with incidental learning. What this means for you is that you cannot take for granted the fact that your students will be able to apply and transfer skills or

information learned in one situation or context to another. In other words, there will be situations where you may think that a reminder or an explanation is overkill, because after all you explained this already this week. Nevertheless, reminders, references to the previous time when the material was taught before, clarifications as to how this skill or information relates to other things already learned, will benefit many of your students, not just those who have learning disabilities.

Alternative or controversial strategies

Before we leave the subject of programme modifications for students with learning disabilities, we should say a couple of words about what are referred to as controversial or alternative strategies or therapies.

As a teacher, you are certainly not in the business of providing therapy. But if you are a person who watches TV or reads the newspapers, then you will be aware that there are certain interventions which are claimed by their inventors and others to eliminate learning disabilities. Most of these relate to things such as medication, biofeedback, etc. which will not have a direct impact on what might turn up in your programme. However, in recent years there has been a great deal of public debate about the use of coloured overlays and/or glasses for those who have difficulties with reading. There is no definitive answer from research as to whether this should work and why it makes a difference for some people. The bottom line is that some people who have visual learning disabilities which results in difficulties with reading, do say that the use of these overlays and/or lenses helps them. To the extent that people benefit from something, especially when that is as non-intrusive as coloured paper or coloured glasses, then they should be allowed to use them. No doubt researchers will carry on studying this and may well establish some clearcut rationale for why it works in some cases and not in others. But in the meantime, if people want to try to use different coloured paper or a coloured overlay to help themselves, then that should be allowed. For example, the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario provides written information to its Consumer Advisory Committee on yellow paper instead of white, since many of the members of the Committee feel that this makes it easier for them to read the material.

Changing expectations

There will be some students who, in spite of your best efforts at programme modifications, will not be able to learn some of the skills that they and you hoped for. This may relate to their language use or fluency and more frequently to their literacy skills. Since your expectations for each student were established on the basis of their goals and your observations, any changes to these expectations should also reflect collaborative decision

making.   For example, they may decide to remain at the conversational proficiency level and postpone trying to move on to cognitive and academic proficiency. Or they may realize that they have to focus on knowledge, comprehension and application as their primary goals in learning. Similarly, they may have to abandon the achievement of decoding and accept that they have to use taped or picture cued material to replace reading in the conventional manner.

If such a decision is appropriate for a student, it is important that you support him or her in accepting this decision as a form of coping with his or her difficulties. Please stress to them that this is not giving up or cheating, but merely making a realistic and practical decision.

5.   Helping the student who may have some other disability

As mentioned earlier, there may be situations where you have been told about or you observe the signs of certain other disabilities in your students. You are of course not responsible for either identifying the type or extent of such a disability, nor is it expected that you will eliminate its impact. Nevertheless, having some idea of what you can do to assist such learners will make your job easier and you may well find that even some slight changes will help such a student to be much more successful.

You may find that it is difficult to raise the question of why the student does certain things and what has been done in the past, if anything, to get some help for him or her. You cannot do any harm nor can you be seen as overstepping the mark if you suggest to the student that he or she may wish to see his or her family doctor or a doctor at a local medical clinic to look into the difficulties that the student has with learning and the possible causes for it. People who are newly arrived in Canada or who have come from a really traumatic background may not think about having their eyes or hearing tested. Yet we still see adults who are believed to be really slow and turn out to be hearing impaired.

As stated earlier regarding assistive and adaptive devices, we know that most of the programmes where people enrol to learn basic English skills will have limited availability of computers, taperecorders, etc. Nevertheless, there may be such devices available from some of the community based agencies listed in the section on resources. Your responsibility is merely to have the information available about the agencies and allow your students who have access to such devices and wish to use them in your programme to do so. Alternatively, you may be able to access additional funding for meeting the needs of learners with disabilities through the special LINC fund available for this purpose. You can access this by contacting the CIC project officer for your programme.

Students who are **deaf** often miss much of what has been said in a language programme. They will frequently turn their head to assist with hearing but may not use their cupped hand next to their ears to help them hear more clearly. This may be because they haven't figured out that this will help or because they feel uncomfortable to do so. Encouraging a visit to a doctor for a hearing test and for a possible hearing aid if it is deemed suitable, can help here. In addition, if you are sensitive to the needs of such students when you speak to them, ensuring that you turn towards them rather than away from them, facing their back or a chalkboard at the front of the class, they will catch more of what you say. Many people who are deaf also augment their hearing with lip reading without even necessarily realizing that they are doing so. For them seeing your mouth can be very helpful also.

If you use both visual and auditory materials to augment your teaching, this will help both deaf and blind students.

The term **blind** tends to be used quite loosely. The majority of people who are described as blind are actually visually impaired and will have some residual vision. Their difficulties may be related to the size of the print that they are trying to see, the location in their particular field of vision or the contrast between the colour of the paper and the ink. Quite often such students will squint at the material or hold it extremely close to their eyes. It may be some time since they have had their vision tested. They may benefit from stronger glasses, which could be prescribed after an eye test. They may also find a magnifying glass or a magnifying sheet placed over printed material quite helpful. For those who have quite limited or no vision, the use of auditory materials to the exclusion of visual materials may be necessary. Such an exemption is quite reasonable, given the needs of the student.

Students who have **physical disabilities**, whether they use a wheelchair to get around or not, usually do not have difficulties with the learning process. If they do, then this will be due to another reason, not the physical disability itself. For them, getting into the building where the class is located and into the classroom itself, often presents the greatest challenge. Similarly, the availability of such things as accessible washroom facilities is very important. However, even if such accessibility issues have been adequately addressed, you may still need to be sensitive to certain issues which may interfere with the learning process. The student may be in pain at times, he or she may be prone to great fatigue and therefore require more frequent breaks than you might expect. They may also be reluctant to participate in class activities or discussions if   as a result of their particular condition they have difficulties with their speech. Your and their fellow students' acceptance of them as they are is a key component towards achieving success.

There will be students who have a **speech impairment** that manifests itself in stuttering or other articulation disorders. Allowing such students adequate time to speak as well the opportunity not to do so at times is the key component of their success. Providing you with a written answer, in point form if necessary, when a spoken answer was called for should be acceptable.

Occasionally your observation or the interview with the student may identify some **illness, accident or trauma** which has resulted in the difficulties that the student has with learning. It is possible that given the circumstances of the event, there had been limited medical intervention. In other cases, the correlation between the condition and its outcomes and the difficulties with the learning process have not been made. For example, a head injury or the onset of epilepsy may impact the learning process. Implementing the modifications discussed earlier in this section will probably assist most of such students. In discussing such a course of action with the student or his or her family may present you with information of a private nature, including what had been done in the past, the use of medical intervention including medication, etc. Respecting their privacy and encouraging them to seek medical and professional advice is the way you should proceed. Whatever your personal opinions or experience is in this matter, it is not for you to provide information or guidance or interpret professional advice already given.

It is important that you consider in this general category the devastating impact that torture can have, both physically and psychologically. Many survivors of torture will suffer from **post-traumatic stress disorder**, sometimes for years after the event. This condition is usually identified formally by a psychiatrist, according to the criteria established by the American Psychiatric Association. While clearly it is not your job to identify the condition or to treat it, it is helpful if you know that some of the psychological effects of this condition will manifest themselves as learning disabilities.

Your task in this context is to assure that your classroom setting is recognized and accepted by all learners as a safe setting, where nobody will be forced into activities that they cannot handle. The literature on torture and its long term after-effects focuses on the need for safety, real and perceived, sensitivity and above all, lack of coercion. Many of the suggestions relating to programme modifications for learners with learning disabilities will also be of benefit to these learners, especially in terms of reducing stress.

In many respects the most complex issue that you will be presented with is the student whose **behaviour** is inappropriate in the programme setting. Such behaviours may include aggression towards you, the other students or themselves, inappropriate and unacceptable social interactions or even constant interruptions, which interfere with the learning of others. Such behaviours may be due to temporary or longstanding psychiatric conditions, past trauma or abuse or conditions such as developmental disabilities or autism. Your responsibility as a teacher is to assure the safety of your students. The programme administrators also have a responsibility to assure your safety as a teacher. Therefore, it is important that a process is established in each programme for dealing with potentially violent or aggressive students. Such plans should include both short term and long term directives for what the teacher can do immediately, if such a situation arises and who will be available to help them defuse a situation. There also should be plans for the longer term support of such students through the availability of behaviour modification programming and the involvement of community based mental health services.

It may be that at the end of this process, you will not feel that your efforts to modify the programme have been adequate to meet the needs of the student. It is important for us to reiterate that you are not responsible for all that is happening to a student in your programme. Further, you and/or the student may choose to approach one or more of the organizations listed in the **Resource** section to provide guidance and advice on how to proceed.

The most important point is never to close the door for any student and not to give up on anyone, including yourself. Trust your instincts and rely on your common sense to give you the necessary confidence. We know that you can do it!

RESOURCES

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Welcome to Canadian English, a basic handbook for students living in Ontario, Parts 1 & 2, Teacher's guide, Toronto, Ont. Ministry of Citizenship, 1990

DISABILITY ORGANIZATIONS

There are many organizations throughout Canada which have information, resources, speakers, advocacy services and other supports available for persons who have disabilities, their families and those who work with them. In many cases these organizations may have chapters right in your community. Feel free to contact them and refer your students to them. While some of these organizations may not have services in your student's mother tongue, they will probably be able to find someone who can help and translate the relevant information into quite a variety of other languages.

Autism Society Canada
129 Yorkville Ave
Toronto, Ont. M5R 1C4
(416) 922-0302

Barrier Free Design Centre
2075 Bayview Ave.
Toronto, Ont. M4N 3M5
(416) 480-6000

Blissymbolics Institute
Augmentative Communications Systems
250 Ferrand Drive
Don Mills, Ont. M3C 3P2
(416) 421-8377

Bob Rumball Centre for the Deaf
2395 Bayview Ave,
Toronto, Ont.
(416) 449-9651

BOOST
Blind Organizations of Ontario with Self-help Tactics
597 Parliament St.
Toronto, Ont. M4X 1W3
(416) 964-6838

Canadian Association for Community Living,
The Roeher Institute
Kinsmen Building, York University Campus
4700 Keele St.
Downsview, Ont. M3J 1P3
(416) 661-9611

Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
P.O. Box 5559, Station F
Ottawa, Ont. K2C 3M1

Canadian Hearing Society
271 Spadina Road,
Toronto, Ont. M5R 2V3
(416) 964-9595

Canadian Mental Health Association
Ontario Division
180 Dundas St. West
Toronto, Ont.
(416) 977-5580

Canadian National Institute for the Blind
1929 Bayview Ave.
Toronto, Ont. M4G 3E8
(416) 480-7416

Canadian Paraplegic Association
Ontario Division,
520 Sutherland Drive
Toronto, Ont. M4G 3V9
(416) 422-5644

Centre for Independent Living
2075 Bayview Ave.
Toronto, Ont. M4N 3M5
(416) 480-4260

Disability Information Services of Canada
(DISC)
(519) 884-2989 voice and TDD

Epilepsy Association
950 Yonge St.
Toronto, Ont. M4W 2J4
(416) 964-9095

Learning Disabilities Association of Canada
323 Chapel St.
Ottawa, Ont. K1N 7Z2
(613) 238-5721

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario
124 Merton St.
Toronto, Ont. M4S 2Z2
(416) 487-4106

Low Vision Association of Ontario
263 Russell Hill Rd.
Toronto, Ont. M4V 2T4
(416) 921-6609

Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada
250 Bloor St. East
Toronto, Ont. M4W 3P9
(416) 922-6065

Ontario Association for Community Living
180 Duncan Mill rd.
Don Mills, Ont. M3B 1Z6
(416) 447-4348

Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy
1630 Lawrence Ave. West
Toronto, Ont. M6L 1C5
(416) 787-4595

Ontario Friends of Schizophrenics
885 Don Mills Rd.
Don Mills, Ont. M3C 1V9
(416) 449-6830

Ontario Head Injury Association
P.O.Box 2338, Station B
St.Catharines, Ont. L2M 7M7
(416) 641-8877

Ontario March of Dimes
60 Overlea Blvd.
Toronto, Ont. M4H 1A8
(416) 425-0501

Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association
35 McCaul St.
Toronto, Ont. M5T 1V7
(416) 979-5514

ORGANIZATIONS FOCUSING ON PROVIDING AID TO IMMIGRANTS

GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

In order to find out what information, programmes and services are available to help people with disabilities, the following are your best sources of information:

Federal government:

Status of Disabled Persons Secretariat
25 Eddy St.
Hull, Quebec, K1A 0M5
(613)953-5280

Toronto Office for the Secretariat
(416)973-1170

Provincial Government - Ontario:

Disability Issues Group
Ministry of Citizenship
700 Bay St.
Toronto, Ont. M5G 1Z6
(416)326-0200

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Definitions

LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION DEFINITION (1984)

Learning disabilities is a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders due to an identifiable or inferred central nervous system dysfunction. Such disorders may be manifested by delays in early development attention, memory, reasoning, co-ordination, communication, reading, writing, spelling, calculation, social competence and emotional maturation.

Learning disabilities are intrinsic to the individual and may affect learning and behaviour in any individual, including those with average, potentially average or above average intelligence.

Learning disabilities are not due primarily to visual, hearing or motor handicaps; to mental retardation, emotional disturbance or environmental disadvantage; although they may occur concurrently with any of these.

Learning disabilities may arise from genetic variations, biochemical factors, events in the pre-to post-natal period, or any other subsequent events resulting in neurological impairment.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION DEFINITION (1984)

Disorders in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language. The disorders result in a significant discrepancy between academic achievement and assessed intellectual ability, with deficits in at least one of the following areas:

- receptive language, e.g. listening, reading;
- language processing, e.g. thinking conceptualizing, integrating
- expressive language, e.g. talking, spelling, writing
- mathematical computation

Such deficits become evident in both academic and social situations.

The definition does not include those learning problems which are primarily the result of impairment of vision or hearing; motor handicaps; mental retardation; primary emotional disturbance; or environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (1975)

Learning Disabilities - Disorders in which the main feature is a serious impairment in the development of other learning skills which are not explicable in terms of general intellectual retardation or of inadequate schooling.

Appendix 2: Learning disabilities in context

The World Health Organization recognizes that there are three distinct levels at which we can define the problems that people may have with normal functioning and carrying out the tasks of daily living. These are impairment, disability and handicap.

Impairment is defined as "any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function." In practice this means that the impairment is intrinsic to the individual and may be either functional or medical in nature. People with learning disabilities have a neurological impairment.

Disability is defined as "any restriction or lack (resulting from impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being." What this really means is that disability describes the functional difficulties people face when they try to carry out certain specified tasks of daily living.

Learning disabilities represent such functional difficulties in five distinct areas. These are visual, auditory, motor, organizational and conceptual categories of learning disabilities. In each of these areas of functioning there are numerous types of specific learning disabilities. For example, auditory memory differs significantly from central auditory processing or auditory distractibility, although all three represent a disability in the auditory category.

People often mistakenly use the terms disability and handicap interchangeably. Adopting the terminology of the World Health Organization would allow us to clarify this confusion.

The WHO defines handicap as "a disadvantage for a given individual resulting from an impairment or disability that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal (depending on age, sex, social or cultural factors) for that individual." Handicap usually results from society's or an individual's inability or unwillingness to provide accommodation and/or support for the person who has a disability. For example, unemployment or underemployment may be the handicap that a person with a learning disability might have to face, in spite of the fact that with appropriate accommodation people with learning disabilities are quite employable.

A learning disability should not be allowed to become a handicap at any time. Suitable identification of the specific disability, the necessary coping strategies, accommodation and compensation, (if needed), can ensure that the person with the learning disability is an able individual in terms of fulfilling his or her normal role.

Appendix 3: The statistical basis for the identification of learning disabilities

It is generally accepted that the incidence of learning disabilities within the general population is 10%, with males outnumbering females by a ratio of four to one.

This incidence rate, first used in the U.S. and considered as the low end of the range, was confirmed and cited by a number of Canadian studies. These included the CELDIC Report (Children with Emotional and Learning Disorders In Canada) in 1972 and a follow-up report of the Canadian Paediatric Society published in 1974.

The 1989 Statistical Profile of Disabled Persons in Ontario, published by the Government of Ontario and based on the previous census, reported an incidence rate of 16%.

The most recent figures available from the Ministry of Education report a total of over 80,000 students within the schools of Ontario, who are formally identified as having a learning disability. This represents 4% of the school age population, but Ministry staff estimate that at least another 6 to 10% of the population has learning disabilities, ranging from mild to severe problems.

The U.S. educational system reports a 7% figure for those who are formally identified within the school system as having a learning disability.

While most of these statistics are based on the number of children and adolescents identified and are extrapolated to the adult population, it is interesting to note that a recent article in the New England Journal of Medicine cites the incidence of developmental dyslexia in the general population at over 5%.

Finally, it is worth noting that both the American Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities, which reported to the U.S. Congress in 1987 and the report of the Ontario Inter-ministerial Working Group on Learning Disabilities published in October 1992, have used the 10% incidence rate for the development of their recommendations.

Appendix 4: A historical review

In spite of the fact that the correlation between the brain and learning had been made centuries ago, the assumption was that the human brain functioned in the same consistent way as other organs of the human body. In other words, those who were bright and had good ability learned effectively and were able to utilize what they had learned in an efficient manner. Those who were not bright and had limited ability, learned little and lived their lives depending on other people.

I often relate the experience of persons with learning disabilities to that of persons who are left handed. Not that left handedness is a learning disability, but rather that it reflects a variation in the way the human brain handles certain tasks. It is not clear how it was determined that people who were left handed were witches. However, we can read in stories dating from the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, that that was the common belief. The way our ancestors dealt with witches was simple. You threw the person accused of witchcraft into a body of water. If the person floated, then he or she was indeed a witch, since the devil was supporting them from below. The only recourse was to hang them or burn them alive. If they sank in the river or the lake, then they were innocent, but unfortunately they had drowned.

While we no longer treat people who are different this way, the level of understanding of learning disabilities and support for those who have them, is not that far removed from these historic practices.

The first record of a learning disability in the literature appears in the 1890s in Scotland, where a physician described what must have been dyslexia in one of his patients. He called it "congenital word blindness" and recommended that the patient avoid all experiences which demand the ability to read. Obviously, this was not the first appearance of a learning disability. However, back in the days when the majority of people did not need to learn academic skills and there was always somewhere for the slower or differently functioning person to work, there would have been little interest in a condition which interferes with the brain's capacity to process written information.

Without a doubt, there have been people with learning disabilities for as long as there have been people. For example, you will find reference to the mirror-writing practiced by Leonardo da Vinci being described as a symptom of a probable learning disability. The pattern of spelling errors observed in some of the written material contained in the U.S. archives and attributed to George Washington imply a form of dysgraphia. While we have no way of testing such individuals, we can and do accept the inference.

The provision of special education has only been available in most places for the past few decades. Teaching blind and deaf children was the first step in this form of service delivery. While most of this teaching focused on vocational skills initially, it still brought about a gradual change in the attitudes of society towards the educational needs of disadvantaged children. Instead of limiting the availability of education and especially higher education to those who were very bright or wealthy, we began to focus on the creation of a universally accessible educational system.

For a long time this did not include children who were developmentally disabled or even developmentally different. In Ontario for example, as recently as the 1960s children with developmental disabilities were still excluded from most school boards and the only class for children with perceptual handicaps, the forerunner of the term learning disabilities, was organized in the City of Toronto.

As for the idea that adults may require some special teaching or support in learning such things as a second language or reading or writing, this was simply unheard of.

We have come a long way since then. The term "learning disability" was first introduced in 1962 at a conference in Chicago. As so often happens, once there is a term to describe something, then it suddenly appears everywhere. Today we readily accept the incidence of one in ten persons having a learning disability. We also know that when it comes to issues of education and training, persons with learning disabilities represent the single largest group of people with disabilities.

For a long time our level of knowledge and understanding about the causes of learning disabilities was quite limited. Also, until as recently as 1984, there was quite limited acceptance of the fact that learning disabilities are chronic, i.e. that they persist throughout a person's life. This was related in part to the belief that while learning disabilities probably were neurologically based, the maturation of the brain during adolescence usually eliminated the problems resulting from this condition. This created tremendous problems for adults who could not understand why they had such difficulties in adulthood with certain information processing related tasks. For some of them the concept of having a learning disability was brand new and it was often accompanied by significant fear that it was a sign of mental illness. For others who had the requisite identification made during their childhood, the persistence of learning disabilities into adulthood created a high level of guilt, since so much of the time they were told that if only they tried a bit harder, then they could do a lot better. Further, that if they really persevered, then the learning disability would disappear by the time they left school. You can imagine the feelings of those who realized that in spite of their best efforts they still had learning disabilities.

Appendix 5: Some terms that you might find helpful

Accommodation

In order to assist people with learning disabilities to reach their potential, there are two key requirements. These are:

1. The development of coping skills on the part of the person with learning disabilities. In order to acquire these, the person must be aware of his/her strengths and weaknesses, individual learning style and level of ability in the best conditions.

2. The availability of appropriate accommodation to match the learning disabled person's coping skills.

The issue of accommodation usually arises in two specific areas: educational settings and in the field of employment.

It is usually not too difficult to deal with the issue of accommodation, if the concerns of the employer and/or educational institutions are identified. These concerns tend to focus in the following areas:
- safety,
- cost,
- effects on co-workers or fellow students,
- industrial relations or union implications,
- impact upon the integrity of the institution.

For example, in an educational setting, lowering the pass mark for a course by 10% clearly interferes with the integrity of the course. On the other hand, allowing the student to tape lectures is a minor modification that is unlikely to be considered "unfair" by others.

It is often very helpful if the individual with a learning disability is able to identify the required accommodation and put it forward before any problems arise.

Accommodations for learning disabilities may include:

assistive devices, such as calculators, word processors, tape recorders,
extra time for the completion of tasks, including examinations in an educational setting
information and direction provided both orally and in writing
a working environment that is reasonably free from distractions
a clear indication of the skills required to carry out the tasks or job in order to avoid surprises
a learner/employee support and guidance programme, in case problems arise

The Ontario Human Rights Code requires organizations and institutions to provide physical modifications and appropriate accommodation for people with unusual or special needs. Whether it will happen depends on the institution or organization being staffed by empathetic, informed and caring individuals. All the legislation in the world cannot replace that component.

Advocacy

Advocacy is defined as the ability of an individual to speak out on behalf of himself or on behalf of someone else to assure that equitable services are provided and that the vulnerable individual's rights are not eroded or contravened.

Bill 74, the Ontario Advocacy Act received third reading in late 1992. This Act mandates the provision of advocacy services to all vulnerable individuals who require them and who are over sixteen years of age.

Assessment

The verification of the presence of a learning disability is done through the administration of a series of psycho-educational tests. Such tests must be carried out by or under the supervision of a registered psychologist. Ontario legislation restricts the diagnosis of medical and psychological conditions to medical practitioners and registered psychologists.

A good assessment will identify the individual's strengths, weaknesses as well as the possible presence of a specific learning disability. It will also delineate the ways in which this person will learn most effectively, what modifications would prove beneficial both in training and on the job facilities, as well as what accommodation is recommended to benefit the individual.

Sometimes it is sufficient to identify functional deficits through non-psychological testing. Such tests will not offer verification of a learning disability, but will assist in helping individuals to become more productive or competitive in the workplace.

Compensation

This is another word to describe accommodation of the learning disability by finding alternative ways of doing things. It may include assistive devices or different ways of demonstrating acquired knowledge, for example, telling people information instead of writing something down. Compensation generally relates to external or interpersonal functions.

Coping Strategies

These are methods, systems and behavioural strategies that people might use to help themselves to do what they want or need to do. Writing a shopping list is a coping strategy. Coping generally relates to the individual alone.

Decoding

This term is used to describe the process for identifying a word through the sounding out of letters, letter patterns or blending of sounds. Decoding is the first step in the reading process. Decoding problems include difficulties with analyzing a word into its component parts or blending its components into a whole. Decoding difficulties do not relate to comprehension.

Dyslexia

Dyslexia refers to a difficulty with processing written language, which includes reading, writing and spelling. Individuals with dyslexia may also have difficulty with some aspects of expressing themselves. They may find it hard to remember or understand words, grammatical rules or other aspects of language. They may also find mathematics difficult.

The World Federation of Neurology defines dyslexia as "A disorder manifested by difficulty in learning to read despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence and socio-cultural opportunity."

The majority of people with learning disability have some degree of dyslexia and in some countries the term is used instead of learning disabilities. However, we must not assume that all non-readers are dyslexic. Because of the widespread, sometimes inaccurate use of this term, people may identify themselves as having dyslexia, when they are in fact excellent readers but have other, specific learning disabilities.

Encoding

This is the reverse of the decoding process, i.e. the building of words from its components. Difficulties with encoding create writing and spelling problems.

Exceptional

This term is used as an umbrella term within the Ontario educational system to alert educators to the fact that the student who is so designated has some different or unusual learning needs. It is defined by the Education Act, Section 1, Subsection 1, 21, as a pupil whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he is considered to need placement in a special education programme. It is generally not considered acceptable to have the designation stand alone without further clarification.

Incidental Learning

This term describes a person's ability to learn through observation, modelling, drawing generalizations from specific instances and applying specific rules to more general situations. Incidental learning is particularly important for things like social interaction, which are not instinctive, but which are usually not taught in a structured fashion. Many people with learning disabilities have major problems with incidental learning.

Inner Language

Most of us, even without thinking about it, use language in our cognitive processes. We "talk" ourselves through a task before doing it or question ourselves about what we are doing as we go along. Since people with learning disabilities usually have a problem with language processing in general, they often don't know how to do this and are amazed when they are

shown how others do it. Teaching the skills of inner language can be very helpful for those who don't know how.

Learned Helplessness

This is a term that we use to describe persons who attribute their success or failure to outside sources, and who feel that they have no control over anything that happens to them. They allow others to act for them and state quite often that they are helpless. Many people with learning disabilities were allowed to feel helpless as children and were not encouraged to take control of their lives as they grew up. Learners who show this kind of an attitude will have trouble assuming responsibility for their own lives, unless they are actively helped to do so. It is important that they are helped to understand the link between their own efforts and their success.

Metacognition

This word means "thinking" or "knowing about thinking" - in other words, knowing how we can regulate our own learning and thinking processes. Many people know this instinctively. Others, including many with learning disabilities, need to be helped to understand how they can assume responsibility for their own learning. Once they understand how they can learn, then they must be encouraged to get into the habit of applying such metacognitive techniques to all aspects of their daily lives.

Print-handicap

An individual who is unable to read as a result of a physically or neurologically based disability is traditionally considered to be print handicapped. The term usually excludes individuals who are unable to read as a result of developmental disabilities. Individuals who are identified as print-handicapped are able to access taped books as a form of accommodation.

Remediation/Rehabilitation

This term means the reteaching of what has not been learned at the usual time and in the usual way. Remediation is usually meant for those who have been exposed to formal instruction in the past, but have failed to learn. The reason for this failure may or may not be known and may include learning disabilities. It is often noted that the individuals have learned "something". However their level of knowledge and their skills may be so patchy, that it will be hard to build upon such shaky foundations. It is then very important that diagnostic techniques be used to identify what they know, what areas of learning they cannot handle at this time and what learning style(s) suit their needs best. Remediation, coping and compensation are complimentary strategies that can be used together. Remediation is sometimes called rehabilitation, especially in non-educational settings.

Undue hardship

The Ontario Human Rights Code requires that the special needs of individuals with a handicap, which includes learning disabilities, be accommodated. Such accommodation may be denied if the individual or organization of whom the accommodation has been requested can prove that the requested accommodation would cause undue hardship in terms of cost, financing or health and safety requirements.

Appendix 6: Can people who have learning disabilities become famous?

Most people think that a learning disability would prevent someone from becoming really successful or famous. This is not so! Many people have been highly successful in spite of a learning disability. For example, Winston Churchill failed grade six and yet went on to become one of the best known Prime Ministers of England, while Louis Pasteur was rated as mediocre at best in chemistry because of the problems he had with mathematics.

How is it that these people were able to overcome that invisible roadblock? Let us consider some examples:

Virginia Woolf, a great writer of the 20th century, was unable to speak until she was over three years old. In her writing she concentrated on presenting the thoughts of her characters, rather than using extensive amounts of dialogue. This may well have been due to her personal discomfort with speaking.

Another person who did not speak until age 3 was Albert Einstein. Even as an adult Einstein found schoolwork, especially arithmetic, difficult, and was unable to express himself in written language. He was thought to be simple minded, until someone realized that he visualized his ideas rather than using language. His work on relativity, which revolutionized modern physics, was developed in his spare time.

Auguste Rodin was a world famous sculptor who found it almost impossible to learn to read or do mathematics. His family and teachers decided that he was clearly ineducable. Although he was able to draw very well by age 5, his family destroyed his efforts because involvement in art seemed inappropriate for their only son. Many people with learning disabilities face such problems throughout their lives. Other people focus on their weak areas rather than looking for their strengths or talents.

The list goes on:
Thomas Alva Edison was unable to read until he was twelve years old and his writing skills were very poor throughout his life.
Paul Ehrlich, the well known German Bacteriologist and biochemist, had such difficulty with writing that he took all his school examinations orally. His thesis for his degree in medicine was dictated to a friend.
George Patton was unable to read until the age of 14 and even then he was almost illiterate. His memory was extraordinary though and he got through West Point by memorizing all his lectures.
George Washington was unable to spell throughout his life and his grammar was very poor. His brother suggested that perhaps surveying in the backwoods might be an appropriate career for young George.
Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States and Nelson Rockefeller, Vice-President, were both severely dyslexic. Wernher Von Braun regularly failed his high school mathematics examination.
Jess Oppenheimer, a highly successful T.V. writer, has virtually no eye muscle control and is severely perceptually handicapped. He claims that a difficult childhood, with many obstacles, gives comedy writers a better understanding of other people's weaknesses.

Stephen Cannell, creator of such highly successful TV shows as 21 Jump Street, has quite severe learning disabilities, which have not prevented him from achieving success. Actors Susan Hampshire and Tom Cruise both have severe dyslexia. Though they cannot read well, they are able to memorize their lines to perform on stage and screen. Cher only discovered the reason for her own difficulties when her daughter was identified as having a learning disability.

There are many successful athletes with learning disabilities. They include Jackie Stewart, racing car driver, Bruce Jenner, track star, Magic Johnson, basketball player and many others.

We aren't suggesting that all people with learning disabilities must match these achievements. But these success stories show that a learning disability need not get in the way of talent, if the individual develops some coping or compensatory skills.

The biographies or interviews given by these people all stress the importance of having the causes of their difficulties identified. Further, most of them stress the value of having people around them who believe in them and value them as people. This is what we want to assure for all persons with learning disabilities.

Appendix 7: Assessing your own learning style

You may be a visual learner, if you tend to do the following:

- enjoy doodling and unconsciously do so a lot of the time
- use visual enhancers in notes, such as arrows, balloons, etc.
- write things down to remember them
- use visualization of the numbers to try to remember a telephone number
- can visualize the page in a book or directory where the information is written
- make lists
- look at the face of the person who is speaking
- remember things better if they are said face to face rather than on the telephone
- describe things according to colour and shape rather than how many there were
- work better in a quiet environment
- find background noise or music distracting
- get lost when a story or joke is told to you, especially if is accompanied by lots of laughing
- use underlining, highlighting, etc. to assist in learning material

You may be an auditory learner if you tend to do the following:

- read aloud to yourself to reinforce comprehension or memory
- repeat a telephone number two or three times and then remember it
- talking something through with people helps you to clarify and comprehend the issue
- remember who said what, without writing it down, but forget what the person wore or the arrangement of the chairs in the room where you were
- listen to taped books in your car or when going jogging
- prefer to listen to a lecture rather than read the same material in a book
- follow one or even several conversations, even if it looks like you are not really listening
- prefer to have someone give you directions, rather than use a map
- talk yourself through tasks
- prefer to talk to people rather than show them things using visual materials

You may be a kinesthetic learner, if you tend to do the following:

- prefer to do things by looking at them, rather than being told how or reading the directions
- view yourself as a hands on person
- learn best in unconventional circumstances, e.g. lying on the floor and having lots going on around you
- prefer a trial and error method rather than establishing the best way before beginning a task
- prefer a globe to a map
- reinforce learning by writing things down over and over
- prefer to dance to music rather than listen to it

- use your hand when you speak, e.g. can't describe a spiral staircase without using both hands
- prefer games that are movement based e.g. charades
- fidget or shift your position frequently
- remember things by recalling who did what rather than by who said what

Obviously, no one learning style is better than the others. There are no rights or wrongs in this context. It is helpful, however, to understand your own particular modality preferences and what can be done to enhance your learning abilities, given your particular learning style.

Notes