

PREFACE

Adults with learning disabilities present a number of unique challenges to professionals involved in their assessment or management. Although we have a wealth of information regarding the nature of learning disabilities in children, much less is known about the nature and impact of learning disabilities in older individuals. This issue of *Seminars in Speech and Language* was conceived in an effort to meet this void. The authors of the six articles that appear in the issue offer a comprehensive and interdisciplinary review of current understandings of the nature of adult learning disabilities and provide a conceptual framework for professionals involved in the assessment and management of adults having learning disabilities. Such information is both timely and critical as more professionals are being asked to evaluate adults with complex, diverse, and often subtle learning problems.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, there has been an ever increasing number of adults seeking evaluation and remedial services for their learning and vocational difficulties. This increase in the number of adults seeking services is due in large part to three developments. First, changes in state and federal laws have eliminated many of the barriers that previously prevented many adults with learning disabilities from gaining admission to postsecondary educational institutions or employment in certain demanding vocational settings. Second, increased media coverage of such topics as attention deficit disorders and learning disabilities in adults has increased public awareness that adults may experience many of the difficulties that were previously presumed to be unique to children. Finally, adults are becoming much more aggressive in their

attempt to find explanations for their academic or vocational difficulties. Explanations that such difficulties are due to a lack of "effort" or "attention" or some type of "behavior problem" are now being rejected by many adults. These adults typically seek out second opinions or alternative assessments in an effort to document the source of their problems.

Although the primary focus of this issue is on adults with developmental disabilities, some attention is directed to the assessment and management of adults with acquired learning disabilities. Differentiating between a developmental and acquired learning disability, although desirable, is often difficult to render, particularly in the case of adults. In large part this occurs because many adults suspected of having developmental disabilities present histories that put them at risk for acquired disabilities and no documentation of a previous diagnosis of developmental learning disabilities. Lacking documentation of developmental difficulties and given the presenting symptomatology, an acquired basis must be entertained. For example, the prevalence of head injuries and other neurologic conditions among adults seeking services is substantial. In addition, the prevalence of substance abuse, at least among college students presenting with learning problems, is distressing. In such cases one must question whether the learning problems are related to a developmental disability or whether they are the result of substance abuse, head trauma, or some other neurologic factor.

In the first article, Dr. Chase discusses the neurobiological underpinnings of developmental learning disability. He presents a number of considerations that can be used

to guide the diagnosis and management of adults with dyslexia or language-learning disabilities and describes how knowledge of the neurobiological basis of learning disabilities can help professionals develop remedial strategies specific to this particular disorder.

Dr. Chase's article is followed by a detailed review of neuropsychological assessment procedures. In this article, Dr. Vincent highlights the complexity and subtlety of developmental learning disabilities and the need to rule out other etiologic bases for such learning problems using procedures that assess a range of cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral parameters. Although the assessment protocol she describes was designed specifically for assessing postsecondary students with learning problems, the assessment issues addressed have direct applications to other adults having similar academic or vocational difficulties.

Next, Drs. Kleinman and Bashir address the adult manifestations of developmental language-learning disabilities. They discuss not only the chronicity of the problem, but also how manifestations of the disability may change over time and in different contexts. This article provides a rationale for using an ecological perspective to guide an understanding of each individual's disabilities and the development of assessment and management protocols.

Then, Dr. Ylvisaker and Mark Feeney focus on the management of adults whose disabilities are the result of traumatic brain injury. At first glance, such problems may appear to be quite a divergence from developmental learning disabilities, but the similarities in many of the symptoms and behaviors

manifested by adults with an acquired disability and those with a developmental learning disability are striking. Moreover, many individuals with developmental disabilities also have significant neurologic histories that could produce acquired disabilities as well. Therefore, the intervention procedures recommended may be applicable to adults whose learning disabilities have an acquired, developmental, or combined etiologic basis.

Next, I highlight the importance of assessing both the peripheral and central auditory systems in adults with learning or auditory complaints. Various etiologic bases for the auditory difficulties of adults with persistent hearing complaints are reviewed, as well as the assessment and management of adults who have developmental and/or acquired auditory processing disorders.

In the final article, Dr. Murphy considers the persistence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) into adult life. He discusses the consequences of undiagnosed and unmanaged ADHD and reviews the symptoms that may be shared by a number of other developmental and psychiatric disorders.

I want to thank each of these authors for their invaluable contributions to this issue. I appreciate their willingness to share their expertise and personal experiences in this important endeavor. These eight individuals truly represent an "interdisciplinary team" and have offered readers a multifaceted perspective of the complex nature of the learning problems experienced by adults with learning disabilities.

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Guest Editor