

Article summary



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What's the Primary Approach to Diagnosing LD An Overview of the

Discrepancy Approach Learning disability is a broad term that describes specific kinds of learning problems. A learning disability can cause a person to have trouble learning and using certain skills. The skills most often affected are: reading, writing, listening, speaking, reasoning, and doing math. Indeed, almost 3 million children (ages 6 through 21) have some form of a learning disability and receive special education in school. In fact, over half of all children who receive special education have a learning disability (Twenty-fourth Annual Report to Congress, U. S. Department of Education, 2002). It's important, though, to realize that learning disabilities (LD) vary from person to person. One person with LD may not have the same kind of learning problems as another person with LD. One may have trouble with reading and writing. Another may have problems with understanding math. Still another person may have trouble in each of these areas, as well as with understanding what people are saying.

The diagnosis of learning disabilities is often a sticky issue. Of particular concern are the various methods used to test children suspected of having a learning disability and the differing eligibility criteria that states apply to decide whether or not a child qualifies for special education and related services. A lot rides on those decisions. Depending on the diagnostic process used, the resulting picture may vary as to the child's abilities and difficulties. And based upon the picture that emerges of the child, decisions are made about the education and special assistance that the child will receive (or not) and the resources that the state will commit to provide the child with special education (or not).

This article reviews the historical basis and rationale for identifying children

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as learning disabled on the basis of a discrepancy between scores on measures of intelligence and achievement. In addition, to a historical perspective, recent studies that address the validity of classifications of children with learning disabilities (LD) according to the presence or absence of discrepancies between IQ and achievement are reviewed. Throughout this article, the role of IQ testing in the designation of children as learning disabled for research and public policy is addressed. The authors conclude that IQ tests have limited utility for the identification of children with LD. Alternative approaches to classification that incorporate the idea of a discrepancy between aptitude and achievement are discussed. Further the article summarizes recently acquired information about a specific set of linguistic-cognitive markers for reading disabilities, and it also describes efforts to develop measures of these markers in the areas of phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming, and verbal short-term memory. In addition, implications of this new information for the diagnosis of reading disabilities are considered.

My own experiences have led me to believe that the testing of IQ indeed is not a proper method of evaluating the learning disability. It not only disenfranchises the child from believing that he or she can learn, it crushes the spirit of the parents as well!