
Editor's Note

Learning Disabilities and Special Education under Attack

Special Education and the field of Learning Disabilities are under attack. Parents, professionals, and advocates of children with disabilities must be alerted to the bashing of special education in the press and the false charges about the failure of special education. They must respond quickly or we will lose all the gains we have made in the last twenty-five years, since 1975 and the passage of Public Law 94-142.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is scheduled for reauthorization in the year 2002. Look at the Thomas E. Fordham Foundation Report, *Rethinking Special Education for a New Century* by C. Finn, A. Rotherham, and C. Hokanson at the website: http://www.edexcellence.net/library/special_ed/index.html While you are at this website take a careful look at Chapter 12, *Rethinking Learning Disabilities*.

To prepare the public for this reauthorization, some rather harsh articles about the value of IDEA and special education are appearing in the press. Bev Johns, President of the Learning Disabilities Association of Illinois, is a proactive advocate and active campaigner protecting the rights of children with disabilities and upholding the law. She argues that these articles are based on a combination of incorrect information and unrealistic expectations, and faulty research. Bev Johns notes the following false charges that:

- IDEA now provides financial incentives to identify children. In fact IDEA 1997 now provides financial incentives NOT to identify children.
- IDEA is subject to huge number of lawsuits. In fact an extremely small percent of students are involved in due process hearings, let alone lawsuits.
- Special education is a failure for almost all or the majority of its students. In fact, the lives of children who receive appropriate special education services are improved.
- Learning Disabilities does not exist. In fact, neurological research and MRI scans offer biological evidence of the existence of learning disabilities.
- Special Education does not produce as good a result as general education. In fact, there is widespread condemnation of general education.
- Simplistic solutions will solve all problems (full inclusion, co-teaching, standardized testing, *accountability*). In fact, these solutions will not make the child's disability disappear and often increase the problems for the child.

Special education has been an incredibly important program for millions of children. Graduation rates have increased, and the number of young adults with disabilities enrolling in college has more than tripled. Special education has helped people with disabilities become independent, wage-earning, tax-paying contributors to our country.

It is urgent that parents, educators, and advocates be alert to this political climate and attempts to eliminate special education and the rights of children with disabilities. We again need a proactive special education community.

The Articles in This Issue

The articles in this issue of *Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal* present important issues in the field of learning disabilities.

Statistical Analysis of the Eligibility Criteria and Procedures for Determining Learning Disabilities by S. Haight, L. Partriarca, and M. Burns examines the eligibility criteria and procedures that districts use to identify students with learning disabilities continues to be a controversial issue. This article reports an analysis of written documents from the Regional Services Agencies in the state of Michigan.

continued on next page

Enhancing the Quality of Mathematics for Students with Learning Disabilities by J. Cawley and T. Foley focuses on mathematics and learning disabilities. The authors use subtraction to illustrate the importance of developing a quality they call *number sense*. They point out that developing the concept of *Big Ideas* plays an important role in helping students with learning disabilities become problem solvers.

The Neurological Basis of Learning Disabilities: An Update by C. Fiedorowicz, E. Benezra, W. MacDonald, B. McElgunn, A. Wilson & B. Kaplan was developed by a team of researchers at the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada in Ontario, Canada. The article brings together the recent neurological research findings in the field of learning disabilities and developmental dyslexia.

The Use of Tobacco, Alcohol, and Marijuana by Mexican American Adolescents with Learning Disabilities: A Longitudinal Study of Selected Risk Factors by D. Katims, Z. Vin, and J. Zapata reports a longitudinal study designed to examine the causal effects of distal (at year one of the study) and proximal (at year three of study) of the risk factors for the use of *gateway* substances by Mexican American adolescents with learning disabilities.

Book Review: Research & Global Perspectives in Learning Disabilities: Essays in Honor of William M. Cruickshank by H. McGrady. This book, edited by D. Hallahan and B. Keogh, is a tribute to William M. Cruickshank. As a pioneer in the field of learning disabilities, Cruickshank has been an important contributor to the foundation and development of the field of learning disabilities. A number of well-known authors have contributed chapters to the book. Cruickshank was the founder of the organization known as the International Agency for Research in Learning Disabilities (IARLD), and many of the chapters in this book report on the international developments in the field of learning disabilities.

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