
Preface

The Learning Disabilities Association of America is extremely pleased to publish the findings of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) research programs on learning disabilities, not only because the findings are exciting and provocative, but because of the role the members of the Association played in laying the groundwork for the programs.

In 1977 when the ACLD Scientific Studies Committee (now the LDA Research Services Committee) was formed, the common conception was that learning disabilities was solely an educational problem. However, it was the premise of the committee members that learning disabilities was a brain dysfunction and therefore must be a physiological condition. This supposition was based primarily on the observation that children with learning disabilities, as they were then identified, were growing up to become adults with learning disabilities. If this condition were solely an educational problem, with proper educational interventions, learning disabilities in adults would not exist.

Although research on learning disabilities was being done, most was of it was on therapies, such as special education and psychoactive drugs. There was also a lack of investigation into the physiological nature of learning disabilities, and we were concerned about that point. In addition, the findings were scattered and not easily found by researchers in the field. For these and many other reasons, the members of the Research Services Committee approached Congressman Henry Waxman of California and Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah to explore the possibility of Congress mandating a major effort to target research on this often devastating but invisible handicap - learning disabilities.

It was the committee's intention that the research be multi-faceted. With dogged determination and the leadership of John Wacker, a founding member of the Research Services Committee, committee members pursued this vision, visiting members of Congress and federal agencies. On November 20, 1985, Public Law 99-158, the Health Research Extension Act, was passed.

The following statement, a part of the Senate Conference Committee Report when the bill was being considered, summarizes the situation as committee members saw it at the time.

Over the past years, much of the research into learning disabilities has centered on the educational and behavioral aspects of the problem. Neurophysiological investigations are emerging as crucial to the understanding and treatment of this disorder. Learning disabilities are now seen as among the most complicated of neurological impairments, while the incidence of learning disabilities exceeds that of all other neurologically handicapping conditions, they often go unrecognized and are among the least researched. Many agencies within the NIH are involved in neurophysiological research into some aspects of this dysfunction as are several other government agencies, yet efforts are fragmented and information is neither shared nor integrated among the various research groups.

As a result of the passage of Public Law 99-158, the then NIH Director, Dr. James Wyngaarden, convened the Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities. The members of this committee included representatives of appropriate National Institutes of Health divisions, the National Institute of Mental Health, the Department of Education, the Centers for Disease Control, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Environmental Protection

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