Supporting Adult Learners with Special Needs

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Objectives

- Define learning disability.
- Identify some of the characteristics or manifestations of learning disabilities in adults.
- Review the adult education and literacy instructional model.
- Identify and use effective instructional strategies and accommodations to assist adults with learning disabilities to maximize their potential and achieve their goals.

A learning disability:

- Is a disorder in one or more of the central nervous system processes involved in perceiving, understanding and/or using concepts through verbal (spoken or written) language or nonverbal means.

- Can be genetic or acquired and may accompany other disabilities such as deficits in sight and hearing.

A learning disability:

- May be the result of birth trauma, lead poisoning, fetal alcohol syndrome/effect and/or long term chemical dependence.

- Is not the result of visual, hearing, and/or physical disabilities, intellectual disability; emotional disturbance; acquired brain injury; ineffective instruction or lack of motivation to learn; cultural diversity; and/or socioeconomic conditions.

A learning disability:

- Manifests itself with a deficit in one or more of the following areas: attention, reasoning, processing, memory, communications, reading, writing, spelling, calculation, coordination, social competence and emotional maturity.

Common Characteristics or Manifestations of Learning Disabilities in Adults

A person may:

- Fidget, behave restlessly or be easily distracted during interview.

- Not seem to listen to questions/information.

- Interrupt or gets off track during interview.

- Lose things needed for the intake process.

- Talk excessively.

- Be unable to concentrate on task (class or work).

A person may:

- Describe history of making poor decisions.
- Have trouble relating past experience to present situations.
- Exhibit delayed verbal responses.
- Have difficulty transferring learned information to practical experiences.
- Have trouble comprehending.

A person may:

- Have trouble responding to questions related to background.

- Have problems repeating or synthesizing information heard.

- Have difficulty sequencing events such as former job experience.

- Have trouble remembering information that has been read.

A person may:

- Interact inappropriately during interview.

- Exhibit signs of poor self-confidence.

- Be unable to follow "the rules".

A person may:

- Have problems with gross motor functions.

- Bang into desk.

- Have a slow reaction time.

- Confuse left and right.

A person may:

- Use short, simple sentences.

- Have problems explaining things logically.

- Have difficulty participating in staff/team or class groups.

A person may:

- Have difficulty filling out application or forms.
- Have trouble reading information pertinent to the interview.
- Fill out the application with errors.
- Display poor spelling skills.
- Be unable to count money.
- Have difficulty using a calculator.
- Have low level basic skills.

A person may:

- Have difficulty organizing and prioritizing information.

- Have problems identifying and planning the next step.

- Miss appointments or may come on the wrong day or at the wrong time.

- What is the highest grade you completed? (Educational history/background)

- How many years were you in that grade? (Educational history/background)

- Were you ever held back a grade? (Educational history/background)

- Do you like to read? (Educational history/background)

- Do you like to draw or doodle? (Visual-motor processing of symbols)

- Do you like to write? (Visual-motor processing of language)

- Is writing difficult for you? (Visual-motor processing of language)

- Do time limits bother you? (Spatial/time orientation and pressure)

- Do you have trouble following oral directions? (Auditory processing and sequencing)

- Do you misunderstand or confuse what people say? (Auditory discrimination and processing)

- Do you have trouble concentrating? (Attention and concentration span)

- Do you experience difficulties when learning? (Processing disorders)

- Provides a continuous, ongoing process for learning and teaching improvement.

- Enables adult education teachers/literacy instructors to tap into their students' potential.

- Assists adult education teachers/literacy instructors to continuously evaluate progress, investigate what is and what is not working and change or modify instruction to help each adult learner work at his/her optimum level through a diagnostic-prescriptive approach to teaching.

The Adult Education and Literacy Instructional Model (cont.)

- Intake Process/Placement Tests
- Student/Teacher Meeting/Brief Interview
- Teaching/Learning
- Student/Teacher Meeting (Choices)
- Learning Disabilities Screening
- Learning Needs Inventory
- Assessment/Diagnostic Evaluation by a Qualified/Licensed Professional
- Accommodations

- Most adult education programs have an intake process.

- During the intake process, placement tests (i.e. CASAS, TABE, ABLE or some other instrument) are administered to assess a student's basic reading, writing and math levels.

- Both the intake process and placement tests provide adult education/literacy instructors with information that can help them determine a skill level in which to initiate instruction.

Student/Teacher Meeting/Brief Interviews

- Create student-teacher rapport.

- Provide instructors with first hand information on how a student learns.

- Assist instructors in designing effective instructional programs that address the needs and goals of the student.

- A diagnostic-prescriptive approach to instruction involves constant evaluation.

- The teacher and student are partners in investigating how the student learns.

- The instructor evaluates what is working, looks for patterns, and observes how the student accomplishes similar types of tasks.

- The student provides the teacher with feedback about what is working and what is not.

- Meeting frequently and working collaboratively together, enables both the teacher and the student to evaluate progress and monitor improvement.

- If the student shows improvement, the instructional program should continue – as both the teacher and student look for clues that may improve instruction and provide greater gains.

- If there is no improvement, the teacher and student must discuss other possible options (choices) that examine in more depth how the student learns or that looks at the possibility of a learning disability.

Screening and Diagnostic Tools

- Another option is using a screening tool (i.e. Kansas, Washington, etc.) to determine the likelihood of a learning disability.

- Screening tools include questions that, when answered a specific way, suggest a greater or lesser likelihood of a learning disability.

- The tool should be well researched and validated.

- If following the use of a researched screening tool, the likelihood of a learning disability appears to be low, an intensive interview or inventory may help to improve instruction, determine appropriate learning accommodations, ascertain the need for other assessments, or recognize the need for other referrals.

- If the screening tool does point toward a learning disability, the next step is an assessment - a diagnostic evaluation provided by a qualified/licensed professional.

- One option, intensive interviewing, uses a learning inventory (Payne Learning Needs Inventory or other inventory) to provide a more intensive look at the individual's learning styles, strengths, and needs.

- It asks detailed questions about the learner's background in an attempt to uncover the best methods of instruction and tries to uncover how a person learns best (e.g. through auditory, visual, tactile, or kinesthetic means).

The inventory:

- Informally assesses whether further informal or formal assessment is warranted (i.e. whether the student should be referred for professional diagnostic services and what type).

- Is not a standardized diagnostic tool and should never be used to determine the existence of a disability.

- Assists in identifying resources and referrals from which the student could benefit.

- The Payne Learning Needs Inventory (PLNI) is voluntary and based on the student's self-reporting.

- The PLNI is orally administered and takes about one hour to administer.

- The PLNI builds on the Washington State Learning Needs Screening Tool and includes the:
  - Payne Learning Needs Inventory
  - Learning Needs Inventory Summary
  - Student Copy of the Learning Needs Inventory.

- The assessment/diagnostic evaluation should accurately determine a learning disability.

- If the assessment presents no evidence of a learning disability, the student and instructor have a number of options.

- If the assessment provides recommendations to help improve instruction, to seek other types of assessments, or to follow-up with other agencies/programs, the student and teacher must discuss these options.

- If the assessment provides a limited number of recommendations, an intensive interview or inventory may be useful.

- If the assessment leads to the diagnosis of a learning disability, the recommendations should help to improve instruction.

The purpose of the Assess for Success initiative is to assist adult learners in acquiring the following:

- Testing accommodations;

- Service eligibility determination;

- Program assignment;

- Educational planning/accommodations; and

- Employment training accommodations.

OSSE AFE contracts with licensed vendors to offer adult learners in the District the following services:

- Psychological Assessments

- Psycho-educational Assessments

- Personality Assessments

- Feedback/Counseling Session

Assess for Success Referrals

- Providers Eligible to Make Referrals
  - DC Public Schools – Ballou STAY, Roosevelt STAY, and Luke C. Moore High Schools
  - OSSE AFE sub-grantees and previous sub-grantees
  - OSSE AFE Partners (DOES, DHS, REC, etc.)
  - Public Charter Schools serving older youth and/or adults

- Referrals for Assess for Success Services
  - Referrals are made by submitting the required documentation via the OSSE secure file transfer site. The primary contact at each referring provider receives login credentials to the site.
  - Referrals require submission of: Referral Form, Release of Information Form, and the completed Learning Needs Screening Tool.

Adult Education DC Public Charter Schools

- Adult education charter schools maintain the choice to not accept Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funding and, consequently, not offer FAPE and implement students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Under IDEA, a child with a disability [34 CFR 300.8(a)(1)] means a child evaluated as having an "intellectual disability, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as "emotional disturbance"), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, another health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services."

- If an adult education charter school does not accept IDEA funding, it is obligated to notify all students under the age of 22 identified with qualifying disabilities under IDEA (as indicated by a previous IDEA eligibility determination) and students under the age of 22 whose Assess for Success assessment results indicate the possibility of a qualifying disability under IDEA that it does not receive IDEA funding and, therefore, does not offer FAPE and implement IEPs. For students aged 18 to 21, OSSE AFE requires that this notice is provided by sending the letter "Notification of your Educational Rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)" to the student. See Attachment A.

Excerpted from the Assess for Success: Supporting Adult Learners with Special Needs Announcement Letter 2018

Students 18 to 21 years of age

- Adult education charter schools shall inform students 18 to 21 years of age of his/her right to be referred for an evaluation to determine eligibility under the IDEA. The adult education charter school must notify the student of his or her right to be referred to DCPS, but these students may decline to be referred for evaluation. (See Attachment A.) A referral to the student's DCPS neighborhood high school for evaluation to determine eligibility under the IDEA does not require that the student un-enroll from their current school.

Students under the age of 18

- It is important to note that students must be 18 years of age or older to receive services via the Assess for Success Initiative. Therefore, adult education charter schools are **required** to refer students under the age of 18 to DCPS for evaluation. A referral to the student's DCPS neighborhood high school for evaluation to determine eligibility under the IDEA does not require that the student un-enroll from their current school.

Excerpted from the Assess for Success: Supporting Adult Learners with Special Needs Announcement Letter 2018

- The DC Department of Disability Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration (DDS RSA) supports District residents in obtaining the skills they need to obtain employment (educational services, assistive technology, transportation/clothing stipends, etc.).

- Students may be referred to DDS RSA to determine eligibility for services which may include an assessment/diagnostic evaluation by a licensed professional.

- DC Department of Disability Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration (DDS RSA)

  250 E Street SW, Washington, DC 20024

  Phone: (202) 730-1700   TTY: (202) 730-1516

  dds.dc.gov

- The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services program provides vocational and rehabilitative services to individuals with disabilities to help them prepare for, secure, regain or retain employment.

- Persons with disabilities face some challenges in today's modern workplace. We believe that people with disabilities, given the right opportunities, can work and be fully integrated into mainstream society and the workplace. Vocational rehabilitation can reduce or remove barriers to employment.

- An individual diagnosed with a learning disability by a licensed professional qualifies for reasonable accommodations under the [Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)](), a civil rights law.

- These accommodations may be no different than accommodations other adult education students use; however, for an adult with a learning disability, they are a legal right.

- These accommodations place an individual diagnosed with a learning disability on equal playing ground with everyone else when taking GED or pre-employment tests, in postsecondary education and in work environments.

- **Accommodations – Good Fit – Opportunity for Success**
- **Opportunity for Success – Good Fit – Accommodations**

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 (PL 105-17)

- IDEA is an education law that applies to young people with disabilities from birth to 21 years of age (defined as up to the student's 22nd birthday) who require special education and related services.

- The sections pertaining to school-age students apply to young adults under the age of 22 who have not obtained a regular high school diploma.

- All education programs that receive federal funds, which includes all public schools, must adhere to the provisions of this law.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112) Section 504

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act states that: "No individual with a disability in the United States shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or any program or activity conducted by an Executive agency.

- A "program or activity" is defined as including all of the operations of a local educational agency, system of vocational education, or other school system.

- Section 504 applies to entities that receive federal funds.

American with Disabilities Act (ADA) (PL 101-336)

- This Federal legislation requires that: "No qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded for participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity."

<u>American with Disabilities Act (ADA) (PL 101-336)</u>

ADA is divided into five sections (known as titles):

- Title I: Prohibits Employment Discrimination

- Title II: Deals with Discrimination in Public Settings

- Title III: Protects the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Privately Operated Settings

- Title IV: Requires Telephone Companies to Install Telecommunication Relay Services for Persons with Speech and Hearing Impairments

- Title V: Includes a number of miscellaneous provisions.

Adults with learning disabilities can achieve success if we help them to:

- Recognize the full extent of their disability;
- Understand what their specific learning disability is, and how it is manifested in a variety of environments in adult life;
- Accept the full range of strengths and challenges associated with their learning disability; and
- Work with them to develop an educational plan consistent with their strengths and challenges that helps them to attain their goals.

Contact OSSE Adult and Family Education

- Please contact the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Adult and Family Education (OSSE AFE) with any questions.

    OSSE AFE Staff

    OSSE.AFETA@dc.gov

    Phone 202-727-8446 or 202-741-5531