

## LEARNING OUTSIDE THE LABELS

Teaching Learning Disabled  
Children In The Regular Classroom

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**“You are not normal. How many people have been told, regardless of who they are, you’re not normal? But where did the idea of normalcy come from? How many lives has that idea screwed up? And how do people learn to reject the message that they have to conform to this way of being?”**

~Jonathan Mooney *The Short Bus*

### WHAT IS IT?

- o (LD) is defined as any type or kind of various cognitive, neurological, or psychological disorders that impede the ability to learn.
- o Learning disabilities (LD) are conditions that are 75% hereditary.
- o Many are associated with slight anatomical differences in the brain as well as slowed development of the brain.
- o MRI scans show a brain volume slightly less in frontal lobes, corpus callosum, caudate nucleus, and the vermis or the cerebellum. All portions of the brain associated with symptoms of LD.

### LEARNING DISABILITIES

- o Dyslexia (language processing)
- o Dysgraphia (Written Expression)
- o Dyscalculia (Mathematics)
- o Dysnomia (Word Recall)
- o Dyspraxia (Fine Motor Skills) or Clumsy Child Syndrome
- o Auditory Processing Disorder
- o Visual Processing Disorder
- o Articulation Disorder
- o Expressive Language Disorder
- o Reflective Language Disorder
- o Nonverbal Learning Disorder
- o Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

### CO-MORBID: CONDITIONS THAT CO-EXIST WITH LD

- o Mood Disorders
- o Impulsivity
- o Depression
- o Bipolar
- o Addiction and Substance Abuse
- o Suicidal Tendencies, Thoughts, Attempts
- o Anti-Social Behaviors
- o Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- o Conduct Disorders
- o Anxiety Disorders
- o Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Behaviors
- o Anorexia/Bulimia
- o Self-Injury

### MEDICAL SYMPTOMS

- o Abnormal Brain Activity. These children often function primarily with the right side of their brain. They require things to be done quickly.
- o Many have problems with transferring short-term memory into long term memory. Long term memory tends to get 'lost' and is difficult to retrieve when needed.
- o Difficulty with sequencing and following directions.
- o One out of four children have some sort of LD. One out of five children have Dyslexia.

**SOCIAL SYMPTOMS**

- o These are the kids who are tapping pencils, doodling, not staying in their seat, shouting answers, constantly moving, and not waiting their turn.
- o Mind is constantly 'on-the-go'.
- o Excessive distractibility, impulsivity, restlessness, and impatience.
- o Trouble remembering, planning, and anticipating.
- o Lack of inhibition, will say/do whatever come to mind without considering the consequences.

**SOCIAL SYMPTOMS (CONT.)**

- o Tendency to repeat the same mistakes without learning from them because they don't remember that it didn't work or why it didn't work.
- o They feel the need to change their inner state often; cannot stand regular, unchanged life for too long.
- o Poor self-image, very hard on themselves but don't understand how to fix it. They want to pay attention and concentrate, they just can't.
- o Often unable to pick up on social cues.

**SOCIAL SYMPTOMS (CONT.)**

- o Struggle with organization and have poor handwriting.
- o When older they tend to become sexually promiscuous and criminals.
- o Ability to hyper-focus if they become interested.
- o Low tolerance for frustration.
- o High anxiety and unnecessary worry.
- o Difficulty maintaining relationships due to distractibility and impulsivity.
- o Procrastination.

**SOCIAL SYMPTOMS (CONT.)**

- o Risk takers, often to the point of self destruction.
- o Intuitive thought process: Can get to a solution but are unable to explain to you how they got there. Also tend to skip steps in a process but end up with the correct answer.
- o Drawn to self-medication as a means of control over their life.
- o Put themselves in dangerous situations because the adrenaline helps to focus.
- o Difficulty with time. Estimation and keeping track.

**SOCIAL SYMPTOMS (CONT.)**

- o Compensate with other skills as to appear 'normal'.
- o Excessive clumsiness.
- o Complain about being bored.
- o Incredible creativity, originality, energy, and humor.
- o Poor digit span. Meaning inability to store short sequences of letters or numbers in short-term.
- o Thrive on instant gratification.
- o Difficulty learning how to drive/driving.

**TREATMENTS**

- o Medication: (stimulants) amphetamines stimulate focus, insomnia as side effect.
- o Subtle meds adjustments can make very big differences.
- o Lifestyle Changes: positive human contact, diet changes, exercise, therapy, and sleep.
- o Dietary Changes: omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants, proteins, vitamins, water.
- o Cerebellar Stimulation: physical exercise, 'brain gym' program.

**MYTHS/MISUNDERSTANDINGS**

- Many people believe LD is over diagnosed and used as an excuse for poor performance.
- While some people 'out-grow' LD during puberty, 60% continues on into adulthood.
- Their surroundings may appear chaotic, but we usually know where everything is.
- The mind may seem to quickly skip around to random topics, but there is a full thought process behind it.
- Frequently told that they're not working up to their potential, but they need help to do that.

**WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?  
BEHAVIOR**

- Multisensory Integration: playing with little toys. Squishy, Stretchy, Pliable, Fuzzy.
- Tying exercise bands to chair legs gives kids who kick something to do with their feet.
- Have them release impulses by telling them to someone or writing them down.
- If attention is wandering, tap their desk or ask a simple question. Purpose is not embarrassment.
- Allow them to listen to music during lectures and independent work to help them to focus.

**WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?  
BEHAVIOR (CONT.)**

- Let kids get up and move around occasionally, as long as it doesn't distract others.
- Work in small spurts, with lots of breaks so kids don't become restless.
- Promote self-esteem by using goal-setting, and small, easy rewards.
- Keep a consistent environment, no rule variations at certain times or for certain people.
- Sit them closer to the teacher, not near other easily distracted students.

**WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?  
ORGANIZATION**

- Break down big projects and assignments into smaller tasks.
- Organize *everything* into folders/files and label a section for each class, or portion of a class. Occasionally clean out folders to make sure documents are in the right places.
- Write instructions on the board instead of or in addition to saying them aloud.
- Use step-by-step procedures to reduce confusion.
- Student driven ideas.

**WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?  
ORGANIZATION (CONT.)**

- For materials used only in one class, let them keep certain items in the classroom, like a class set of books, or a second set of books at home.
- Color coding is very beneficial, match the color of notebooks, binders, and book covers for each class.
- Use an assignment sheet/calendar to monitor due dates. Dry-Erase boards work well because you can erase and use different colors.
- Let them write notes/assignments with different colors to separate thoughts, ideas, or topics.

**WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?  
ACADEMICS**

- Recognize the strengths and talents of the student, focus on those instead of their detriments.
- Use games to teach things, or to review them/make it stick.
- Provide opportunity for individuality. Let them present their knowledge with free expression of what they have learned.
- In lectures and discussions use visuals. It gives them something to focus on that is relevant to what is going on.
- Allow students to retake tests and quizzes.

**WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?  
ACADEMICS (CONT.)**

- o Follow discussions/lectures with a hands-on activity.
- o Allow students to isolate themselves when they become overloaded with distractions.
- o Don't use timed tests, emphasize accuracy rather than speed.
- o If a test becomes too distracting, allow students to take it orally or if it is a scantron test let them circle it directly on the test.

**WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?  
ACADEMICS (CONT.)**

- o To increase student participation, have students write on the board or teach a lesson that they enjoy.
- o Copying notes from an overhead can be difficult because their brains cannot follow it sequentially, words get mixed up and entire sections may be omitted.
- o Allow students with good note taking skills to provide copies of notes to those who have difficulties.
- o Students lose interest in subjects when they lose relevance to their life.

**WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?  
ACADEMICS CONT.**

- o Don't do or fix things for them, help them to reach their own solution.
- o Provide a reason for every grade, no F's without an explanation and a suggestion to improve.
- o Doing something physical while working towards memorization (like times tables) makes it stick better, because they are using both sides of their brain.
- o Making up silly songs can also help with memorization. Make different lyrics to simple tunes you already know.

**WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?  
ACADEMICS CONT.**

- o Partner activities promote new learning skills as well as social skills.
- o Print copies or e-mail notes to students for them to read over and highlight.
- o Use rubrics to fully explain what is expected from an assignment.
- o Connect multiple subjects together, it makes it more relevant. Also, if a student enjoys a certain subject, tying it into the others may help motivate them.

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