

Sequoyah High School Special Education

“Honor the SPEAR – Success, Perseverance, Excellence, Acceptance, Respect”

Listen up: Understanding the truth behind learning disabilities

By Susan Winebrenner

Can you remember when you tried to learn something you really wanted to know how to do? And it didn't work the first time. Or the fifth time. Or even now – years later.

For me it has been sailing, which is my bliss and which I have been trying to master for decades. But I still don't get it intuitively, because you learn sailing by doing it. And I now know I don't easily learn that way.

expected you to keep them folded this way while I spoke the content I wanted you to learn, you would not be distracted by your folded hands, unless you wanted to write something down.

Now, unfold them and refold them with the "other thumb" on top. Yikes! That feels really weird! If I expected you to keep them folded that way, the discomfort would eventually interfere with your ability to concentrate on my words.

“There is no greater disability in society than the inability to see a person as more.” ~Robert M. Hensel

If, over the years, someone had taught me logically, step by step, combined with spoken guided practice, I would have achieved the label "skipper" by now.

In essence, the underlying problem for students with learning difficulties is that the methods most of their teachers use make their brain uncomfortable and even scared. The amazing truth is that when you decide to teach them the way they learn – instead of the way you have always taught – improvement can be dramatic and can happen quite quickly.

So please humor me for a short time and fold your hands.

You always fold them this way because it feels comfortable. If I

You would be distracted by thoughts such as these: "I hate the way my hands feel right now! Does the teacher know they are still folded? Will I get into trouble if I unfold them?" Slowly, you become aware that you are not following the lesson, and eventually, you are unable to figure out what to do to catch up on what you have missed.

Through all my years of working with students with LD's, I have concluded the following:

1. Most students who do not do well in school do *not* learn by listening. Instead, they are more successful with tasks that tap their visual, tactile and/or kinesthetic learning preferences. Their

What are Learning Disabilities?

Learning disability is a general 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. “Learning disabilities” is not the only term used to describe these difficulties. Others include:

dyslexia—which refers to difficulties in reading;

dysgraphia—which refers to difficulties in writing; and

dyscalcula—which refers to difficulties in math.

All of these are considered learning disabilities.

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. Sara, in our example above, has trouble with reading and writing. Another person with LD may have problems with understanding math. Still another person may have trouble in both of these areas, as well as with understanding what people are saying.

Researchers think that learning disabilities are caused by differences in how a person's brain works and how it processes information. Children with learning disabilities are not “dumb” or “lazy.” In fact, they usually have average or above average intelligence. Their brains just process information differently.

There is no “cure” for learning disabilities. They are life-long. However, children with LD can be high achievers and can be taught ways to get around the learning disability. With the right help, children with LD can and do learn successfully.

learning challenges do not come because they are less intelligent than students who learn easily by listening.

They are quite simply "less lucky" than their successful classmates who have always experienced a match between their learning needs and their teachers' methods. Our job as educators is to find the right match for all our students and provide choices for learning tasks so students can learn targeted standards by selecting the activity that feels the most comfortable to their brains.

2. People who learn best by hearing are most comfortable with tasks that require logical, analytic and sequential thinking. Think back over something you taught today that some students just didn't understand. Please notice that most school tasks require those three kinds of thinking. Although that is changing with STEM and STEAM activities, there are still many students who struggle to understand the way something is being taught.

3. Visual, tactile and/or kinesthetic learners are usually not comfortable with the three types of thinking described in No. 2 above. Their preferred brain work is what we call "global" thinking. The most significant part of that truth is that

they struggle mightily with understanding isolated pieces of information without being able to see how all the parts are related to a meaningful general idea.

4. The work of David Ausubel – who created the concept of "advance organizer" – can work miracles with formerly unsuccessful students who may actually come to the realization that the learning content is now more meaningful to them by declaring, "Oh, now I *see* what you are talking about."

Upcoming Events

April 8 ACT Test

April 11 – 12 US History
Spring State Test

April 13 Jr/Sr Prom

April 14 No School – Good
Friday

April 17 No School –
Professional Development

April 18 – 21 English
Language Arts Spring State
Test

April 25 Entrepreneurship
Day

April 26 – 27 Math Spring
State Test

May 3 – 4 Senior Semester
Tests

Special Education



Equal access to the curriculum for all students
in the least restrictive environment

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