

Learning Disabilities: Need for a Total Effort

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Children with learning disabilities will continue to meet reversals and frustration until such time as a total effort to meet these needs is undertaken by all educators.

AMONG the thousands of children enrolled in schools is a group referred to as the "Learning Disabled" pupils or the pupils with Learning Disabilities. Why are they so designated?

The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare defines learning disabilities in the following manner:

The term "children with specific learning disabilities" means those children who have disorders in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, or do mathematical calculations. Such disorders include such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

Such terms do not include children who have such learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental disadvantage.

Educators refer to this group of children as comprising from 1 to 7 percent of our school population.

Under our presently established formal educational structure is a process that contains preconceived goals and objectives that are designed basically for average pupils. It is within this structure that learning disabled pupils begin to experience social and psychological adjustment problems. The learning disabled pupil, often referred to as one with average or above average intelligence, has difficulty adjusting to the learning styles that the average student utilizes to achieve the established levels of education. As a result of his or her inability to grasp many concepts, the following learning disability characteristics tend to emerge as par-

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ents and school begin to communicate. The child:

1. Seems to have such a short attention span
2. Daydreams and lacks interest
3. Cannot remain in his or her seat, extremely hyperactive
4. Cannot spell the words, talks about it but can't write it
5. Takes all of the teacher's time, forcing the teacher to neglect the rest of the class
6. Is often the class clown, just to get attention
7. Seems quite immature
8. Always has excuses for failures
9. Just can't organize well



Larry Allen

10. Has difficulty in following directions
11. Doesn't do as well as his or her brothers and sisters
12. Has failed most subjects
13. Has a poor self image
14. Is a sweet child but is becoming hostile.

Need for Diagnosis

Probably the first real social and psychological problem arises when a school system lacks the resources and facilities for properly diagnosing the learning disabilities cases within its district. The psychoeducational approach to diagnosing is extremely necessary and a most vital part of the total solution to a complex problem. A well trained

unit acts as a resource to a school system and particularly to parents in the area of learning disabilities.

The diagnostic information is an important factor in approaching the special needs of learning disabled children; however, to the teacher who is untrained in the area of learning disabilities, the securing of such information can seem like an impossible task. This is true if remediation deals largely with individualized instruction.

A second problem develops when a school system does not provide a renewal program that promotes the in-service training of its teachers. Such a program would enable teachers to recognize and meet the special needs of learning disabled pupils. In addition, teachers must recognize the importance of public relations between parents and teachers and its relation to pupil achievement. Unless this is approached in a positive and productive manner, it can frequently create friction within a school community. This friction can cause pressure groups to be created and force parents to seek services to meet the special needs of their children both within and outside the school system.

The third social and psychological problem resulting from learning disabilities is that of the pupil himself or herself. Frequently, more boys than girls seem to appear in this category. Unless proper diagnosis and proper remediation take place in a well structured learning disabilities program, the learning disabilities pupil tends to develop a feeling of inadequacy . . . and all types of questionable behaviors begin to emerge with the learning disabilities pupil in relationship to the home, school, peers, teachers, and administrators.

A fourth social and psychological problem resulting from learning disabilities deals with the institutions of higher learning that continually graduate teachers without expanding their programs to include opportunities for experiences meeting the needs of exceptional children. Children with learning disabilities will continue to meet reversals and frustration until such time as a total effort to meet these needs is undertaken by all educators. □

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