The Social and Emotional Needs of Students with Learning Disabilities

Presented by Mary L. Hebert, PhD
Fairleigh Dickinson University
Regional Center, Florham Campus
A Moment to reflect...

• [http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=youtube+specific+learning+disabilities+&FORM=VIRE4#view=detail&mid=7D5AEFD70715D92B4B4B7D5AEFD70715D92B4B4B](http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=youtube+specific+learning+disabilities+&FORM=VIRE4#view=detail&mid=7D5AEFD70715D92B4B4B7D5AEFD70715D92B4B4B)
Your thoughts

• What is the most helpful strategy/tool your school utilizes to assist students with the impending transition to college?

• What would be on your ‘wish list’ of strategies/tools that you would like to see your school have the time and opportunity to include?
An Essential Dialogue

• College attendance has become increasingly viewed as a viable option for students with LD.

• There has been a significant increase in the last decade of students identified with LD and who are seeking a college education.

• Educational changes, research, earlier intervention and the scope of services all contribute to this trend.
An Essential Dialogue

• Connor (2013) reports that students with LD make up 50% of all students with disabilities attending colleges, and the numbers are growing.

• That’s great news!
An Essential Dialogue

• However . . . even though the numbers of students with LD has tripled in the last 30 years (Stodden, 2003), only 28% manage to graduate.

• We are doing so much better giving the message that college can be a viable option, getting them here. Now we need to assist in a successful transition to optimize chances to complete their education.
Student’s perception of attending college — from the counselor’s office

• For any student transitioning to college it is considered a major life event demanding major tasks of coping and adaptation academically, socially, and psychologically

• Students with LD come with a set of concerns specific to their history of having been challenged by their LD, sometimes social issues, psychological variables related to their LD

• Can I do it?
Student’s perception of attending college – from the counselor’s office

• Dealing with negative messages
• Some have difficulty socially
• Self as needy, not contributor
• Potential impediments to success and a mindset of growth and overcoming challenge
Self-Concept

• Integration of self-concept/self-esteem typical of later adolescent, emerging adulthood

• Critical period during high school to expose students to opportunities to explore and discover strengths, passions, aptitudes, skill sets—things they can pack up and bring to college with them.

• Exposure to career development skills are particularly relevant to students with LD to assist with awareness of how their strength/challenge picture can fit into potential educational/career pursuits.
Self-Efficacy

• Self-efficacy is closely related to self-esteem, self-concept and self-reliance. These provide the beacon to assist the student to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior.

• Research has found that a sound sense of how to utilize resources surrounding them can offset/mediate challenges felt by students with LD. This is an element that assists in mediating challenge.

• Positive self-esteem and self-efficacy powerfully buffered individuals from the stressors of academic life in general but particularly for students with LD
Tasks of Autonomy

• Academic tasks shift from significant support through school, family facilitating accommodations/managing LD needs to independence/autonomy.

• Self-Advocacy becomes one of the greatest risk factors contributing to failure, and one of the greatest assets toward success.
Life Span Developmental Perspective

• This model provides a manner of assessing a student’s potential for success

• Balance of assets and challenges. It is essential that student’s arrive with and continue to develop a sense of their strengths and challenges, how their disability impacts learning and other facets of their life.

• Evaluating mediating variables, adaptive strategies, and social-psychological adaptation to their LD
What are some of the normative developmental tasks of this age group?

- Autonomy (of academics, social skills, self-care, money management, punctuality/attendance, study skills, communicating learning needs and accessing, stress management, frustration tolerance, productive decision-making, resolving conflict, etc.)

- Self-Concept

- What is happening during high school to facilitate these skills and assist with the transition to college?

- What are we doing in the post-secondary educational setting to nurture its development to optimize academic success?
Awareness / Acceptance / Attitude

• Key elements for success

• Research has shown that the three A’s facilitate success and adaptation to college life/demands.

• Recognition

• Acceptance

• Management

• Do not let it define
Awareness / Acceptance / Attitude

• Comfort with disclosure. Some research identifies that only 7% of those with LD in college settings opt to reveal and utilize services.

• Healthy view of accessing services

• Student attitude about attending college, preconceived notions, value placed on attendance.

• Social attitude: risking disclosure to take advantage of accommodations and resources
Persistence / Perseverance

• The two P’s

• Essential for all college students with LD - ‘Grit’

• Essentially prerequisites for success.

• Acceptance that not every situation is going to be a success. Acceptance of challenge
Emotions

• Frustration

• Anxiety (general, specific: ie test anxiety)

• Depression

• These are all risks for success however students with LD are particularly at risk for these emotional challenges as they face the transition to the college environment/demands.
Social Network

- This is a critical element of balancing out the emotional challenges.
- Social resources of family, peers, faculty, campus programs are all critical to facilitating the transition.
- Research has shown that social support is a critical factor in successful coping and adjustment.
Social Network

• Networking, tapping into resources, community is essential

• Teaching appropriate reliance not dependence, there is a difference!

• Identifying where they can ‘serve’
Adaptation: The Balance

• Resources and deficits
• No formula
• Unique to the individual student
• There is great heterogeneity among students with LD.
Adaptation: The Balance

- There is no one size fits all solution. IEP VS IAP?
- Counseling and other services allows assessment and provides the opportunity to evaluate their specific needs, potential barriers, facilitating features and implement a plan.
Here’s what works

• *Strong self-advocacy: a process, not a product*

• Locus of control

• Clarity of one’s disability and its impact on academic/life functioning

• Identification and communication of strengths and interests. Islands of competence (Brooks and Goldstein)

• Parent-school-student triad involvement, while different in high school than college; it is still important.
Here’s what works

• Student — college match
• Student-major match
• Student — career match
• Well developed social and emotional skills
• Personal issues at minimum or treated
• Communication of high schools and colleges
• Faculty understanding, inevitable variation
Here’s what works

• Understanding of differences between high school and college academic demands (transitional plan)

• Adequate reading/math skills, awareness of AT

• Study skills, time management — these provide psychological breathing room . . . ‘just knowing it’s there.’

• Management of test anxiety.
Here’s what works...

• Murray et al. (2000) examined the personal characteristics of students with LD and determined that the following characteristics contributed to postsecondary academic success...

• Motivation: Goal oriented, self-disciplined, determined, work ethic (lack of goals, lack of self-discipline, in school to please others and procrastination.)

• Preparation: Academically prepared, knowledge of study skills, knowledge of learning style, time management skills, belief one can succeed (lack of academic preparation, lack of knowledge of study skills/learning needs, lack of time management, learned helplessness)
Murray (2000) continued...

- Self Advocacy: self-awareness, self-acceptance, knowledge of laws, policies, and legal rights, assertiveness skills, problem-solving skills (unrealistic expectations, denial of disability, lack of knowledge of resources, lack of self-esteem, lack of problem-solving skills, lack of communication skills)
The Seven Core Competencies

• Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

• Self-Awareness

• Recognizing one’s emotions and values as well as one’s strengths and limitations

• Self-Management: Managing one’s emotions and behaviors to achieve one’s goals

• Social Awareness: showing understanding and empathy for others
The Seven Core Competencies

• Relationship skills: Forming positive relationships, working in teams, and dealing directly with conflict

• Responsible decision making: Making ethical productive choices about personal and social behavior

Contribution to the Universal Design, and regard to research, with indicates when students are more socially and emotionally equipped, their academic performance benefits.
Research

• An Effective Model for College Students with LD and ADHD by Elizabeth Getzel, Shannon McManus, and Lori Briel (2004)

• Taking a look at obstacles and overcoming

• Study Skills (writing strategies, color coding, mnemonics, test taking strategies, time management, organization, etc.)
Research

• Self-Advocacy: How to self-identify, communicate with necessary staff and faculty.

• Personal Skills: a better understanding of their disability and its impact on learning. Stress management, Test-anxiety management to preclude cognitive interference

• Career Exploration: Key! Facilitative in motivation and appropriate identification of major and overall gratification
Research

Technology: Never a better time than 2014 to address LD in the classrooms! Initiating AT in High school to transition to college excellent opportunity. Screen reading software, voice recognition, digital planners, (research shows planners enhance academic success)

• Having these tools in place and communicating awareness of what is available when they attend college will enhance psychological readiness, confidence, facilitate transition

• Preparation prevents Perspiration!!!
Words from our freshmen students —
A word about self-advocacy

• “There is a lot of hand-holding in high school. You always have someone there to guide, or force you to do the things you are required to do. There is a big disconnect between high school and college in that in college, you are responsible for yourself and making sure you get done what needs to be done. I feel like high school should serve as more of a transitional phase to give students more of an idea of what college will be like”
More pearls of wisdom

• “It means branching out and speaking up for yourself. You and only you know what you are thinking and what you need. It is important in communicating to professors and even to future employers.”
More pearls of wisdom

• “Self-advocacy plays a vital role in your studies and in your social life. There is a big difference in self-confidence and college success between a student who has a lot of self-advocacy and a student who has little to no self advocacy”
More pearls of wisdom

• Self advocacy has become second nature to me now. In high school I was never really comfortable asking or even telling teachers what I needed. Mainly because I never really knew what I was suppose to tell them. I could never really get the words out. In college you are forced to speak on your own. It is easier I think doing it yourself instead of another person. There is more meaning when a student speak for themselves.”
Who do I want to thank.

• My Mom, for providing me with the tools I need in order to be successful. Knowing you were there helped to get me through.

• My guidance counselor, for teaching me things that I needed to know about college. Thank you for getting me ready.

• Senior year English teacher, for exposing me to so many new views and opinions and for opening my horizons to being able to see the bigger picture. The way you structured your classes were like college classes so it helped me with the transition.
Who do I want to thank.

- My Aunt, for believing that I could be successful and go to college. It was hard to get through school. There were times I went home crying because of how difficult it was. I felt school was going to ruin me. You had faith in me and kept pushing me to do better. I’ve had to fight for everything I did. I will continue to work hard.

- My child study team, really helped me realize that I can succeed just like everyone else and that as a student I really proved to them that I can. The fact that so many people believed in me, really helped me transition to college.
Who do I want to thank.

• Yes, it does take a village.
What they **all share** is a desire to be successful

- From a Freshman student, Biology Major...

- The roadmap to success is to be willing to take responsibility, not being afraid to be self-aware, being a self-advocate, and having a mindset for growth. Having a growth mindset allows intelligence to grow and develop. Stewart B. Johnson wrote “our business in life is not to get ahead of others, but to get ahead of ourselves-to break our own records, to outstrip yesterday by our today.” At the beginning of the semester I didn’t find this quote interesting but now after being a very seasoned freshman, I realize that this is very true, and should be what everyone is aiming for.
Discussion

• Let’s Talk, What’s working? What’s not?

• What’s on your wish list?

• How do we keep this conversation going?

• How can we help each other optimize success of students?
In their own words...

• Reflections from Our Students.... A film created by a Freshman participating in the FDU, Regional Center, majoring in Film.

• Enjoy the presentation...
Questions and Answers

• Any questions?
• Thank you for coming!

Suggested reading:

• College Success for Students with Learning Disabilities by Cynthia G. Simpson, PhD and Vicky G. Spencer, PhD

• Self-Advocacy Skills for Students with Learning Disabilities-Making it Happen in College and Beyond-A Resource for Students, Parents and Guidance Counselors by Henry B. Reiff, PhD