***SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES* STUDY GUIDE**

**Pages 52-54, pages 185-205, links, resources posted on Moodle, handouts**

Begin by writing down your understanding of what a *specific learning disability* is. Also jot down what you think you, as a general education teacher, are supposed to do to support the learning of a student with a *specific learning disability*.



**Before reading your text,** visit at least 3 of the following websites. Keep notes about how the information in these sites expands your understanding of SLD and how you might use the sites as a teacher. See page 187 in your text for descriptions of these sites.

<http://www.ldonline.org>

<http://www.aacld.org>

<http://ww.ldresources.com>

<http://www.teachingld.org>

<http://www.ldanatl.org>

**DEFINITIONS**

**What do the definitions have in common? How are they different?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Commonalities** | **Differences** |
|  |  |

**Here’s how I have begun sorting commonalities and differences. Do you agree or do you see other relationships?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Commonalities** | **Differences** |
| Student has “extreme difficulty in the acquisition of basic school skills despite adequate intellectual ability” (National Joint Committee and National Center) National Joint Committee and IDEIA specify that the difficulties are *not the result* of other conditions (hearing, sight, motor impairments, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, cultural factors, environmental or economic disadvantage, LEP). For example, a person could have hearing problems AND have SLD but the SLD cannot be caused by the hearing difficulties.SLD can exist with other disabilitiesDiscrepancy between the student’s expected achievement and actual achievement  | IDEIA specifies that the determination of SLD “must not require the use of severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement. . .; must permit the use of a process based on the child’s response to scientific, research-based intervention; and may permit the use of other alternative research-based procedures for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability . . .”  |

**Think of a student in your student teaching or practicum experience. How do these definitions reflect, or not reflect, the challenges and experiences of that student? What do you now understand about a *specific learning disability* that you didn’t understand before? What questions do you have?**

**More about defining a *specific learning disability.***

***A* bit of pondering and a little background. . .**

Pondering: Until the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, a *specific learning disability* in reading, writing, math, or information processing was diagnosed by comparing a student’s ability (most often in the form of an IQ score) with his/her academic achievement. IDEIA 2004 states that districts can no longer *require* proof of severe discrepancy but can still use it. Severe discrepancy means that for the student, there is a significant difference in scores between that person’s intellectual status/ability (IQ) and her/his academic achievement in one or more specific areas.

Given IDEIA 2004, districts *must* allow for processes such as RTI to help determine if a student has a *specific learning disability.*

Whydo you think some districts still use the “severe discrepancy” model to determine if a student has a specific learning disability?

Why would others argue for the use of response to intervention models?

Why and how would this discussion matter to you as the classroom teacher?

Explain:

***Background about the severe discrepancy definition:*** Many scientists believe that human intelligence, like many characteristics in nature, is “normally distributed”. The normal distribution or bell curve below illustrates what this means. The tall, white line in the middle of the pink area represents the mean or average score for any trait. On intelligence tests, the mean score or IQ is often set at 100 with a standard deviation of 15 points.

In terms of intelligence or innate ability, the pink area in the curve below represents the percentage of people who are “average” in intelligence, about 68% of the population. Their scores fall within 1 standard deviation above or below the mean. So a person of average intelligence would score an IQ between 85 and 115.

Using the bell curve model, another 13.5% are somewhat above the average range; an additional 13.5% are somewhat below (orange sections). The group somewhat below the average range would score an IQ of 70 to 85 and the people somewhat above the average range would score an IQ of 115 to130.

Only 2.35% of people are high above the average range and 2.35% far below the average range (blue sections). People high above the average range would achieve an IQ score of 130 to145. Those far below the average range would score IQ’s of 55 to 70.

Finally, only a very small percentage (**.**15% - notice the decimal BEFORE the numerals) of people are quite high above or quite far below the mean score of 100. Those quite high above the mean would score IQ’s above 145 and those quite far below would score IQ’s below 55.

Intelligence tests have been created and normed so that people’s performance on these tests falls in these categories. By definition, a specific learning disability cannot be attributed to intellectual disability/mental retardation, which is often confirmed by scores below 75 on an intelligence test. Thus, using the severe discrepancy model, a student would need to score above 75 and show achievement quite different than what would be expected for his/her age group in order to be identified as having a specific learning disability. The cut-off IQ score will vary depending on which test is used.

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**Two Major Indicators of Specific Learning Disabilities**

**(Students may be identified at any age but most are noticed during early elementary grades)**

**Indicators by Age Groups**

**(See page 188 and add notes to chart below.)**

**What is the difference between an *inactive learner* and an *actively inefficient learner?*** Think about students in your student teaching or practicum experience. How do these descriptions relate to those students? Do these descriptions give you any ideas about how you might support these learners? (p. 187)

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**ACCORDING TO IDEIA 2004, WHO DETERMINES (in a school) IF A CHILD HAS A SPECIFIC LEARNING ABILITY? HOW?**

**REMEMBER!! IDEIA specifies that the determination of SLD “must not require the use of severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement; must permit the use of a process based on the child’s response to scientific, research-based intervention; and may permit the use of other alternative research-based procedures for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability** ([http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/,root,dynamic,TopicalBrief,23](http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cdynamic%2CTopicalBrief%2C23),)

**TYPES OF ASSESSMENTS USED TO DETERMINE IF A STUDENT HAS A *SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY***

Your text gives better descriptions of some of these assessments than of the others. I’ve included web resources in this study guide so you can get a better idea of who administers the assessment, what’s in it, why it is used, and whom it is for. Notice the different purposes and be able to explain why an assessment team might think ALL these types of assessments could be helpful in determining specific learning disabilities. You might want to make notes in the chart to support your abilities to advocate for students and families. In some districts, RTI is the first step in identifying a specific learning disability.

**Pause for thought:**

What are some reasons that children up to the age of about 10 might not read, write, and do math effectively, efficiently, and with interest but NOT have a specific learning disability? What do you think your responsibilities should be in these cases? Check your text!

However, if a student has a genuine, neurologically-based specific learning disability and has been unable to learn to read, write, compose, or do math by 5th or 6th grade despite solid instruction, what do you think your focus should be if you teach 5th grade or above? IF reading, writing, and computing become barriers to gaining knowledge and participating in the academic life of a classroom, then what do you think you should do? After jotting down some ideas, see what the text says about compensatory strategies on pages 203-205.

Pages 194-205 should help you think more about the questions above. The authors provide many examples of how to address specific learning disabilities depending on area of need and grade level. Read these pages carefully and make notes of approaches specific to your grade level. Be sure to include the sections on technology supports as you read.

Note: I disagree with the author’s statement on page 194 that, “. . . research results clearly suggest that explicit code-emphasis programs are more effective than implicit meaning emphasis programs . . .” Pertinent research was not included. Meaning-based approaches that include explicit instruction about sound/symbol relationships have been effective. However, other than this statement and the section on phonics and fluency, the other recommendations are solid based on my knowledge of the research in reading and writing.

If you are quite interested in reading disabilities that are neurologically based, you might want to read *Proust and the Squid.* Sections of this book provide very explicit guidelines about steps necessary to help a student with dyslexia actually learn to read.

Besides having difficulty reading, writing, spelling, and doing math, what might be other impacts of having a specific learning disability? Jot down some ideas and then see page 54 for a summary.

For a review of key ideas about specific learning disabilities and teachers’ responsibilities, see the SLD powerpoint on your Moodle site.