



Learning Challenges Webinar Part 1 – What are they?

For Adult Literacy/ Employment Practitioners

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E-Channel

Welcome to Learning Challenges Part 1 – What are They?

My name is Sara Gill and I will be your facilitator for both parts of this series. The second part of the series will take place on October 6th and will focus on strategy development.

This is the first session of the 2016-2017 Online Community of Practice Webinar Series. The Online Community of Practice is in its second year. It is organized by a committee of the Learning Networks of Ontario and is being organized this year by Literacy Link South Central and supported by Contact North. I am very thankful to have Sarah Stocker with us today from Contact North to provide technical support.

Everyone will be muted throughout the session so that we are not affected by background noise.

If you have a question or comment please type it into the text chat – both Sarah and I will look regularly to see if there are any to share and respond to. We can also give you the microphone so that you can add a comment or ask a question. In this case, please click on the raised hand button. You will be given the microphone. You can press the control button to turn the mic on to speak.

The session is being recorded for future playback.

There are 3 documents that you will need for this session – either in digital or hardcopy format. They were sent to you prior to the session but are also available as handouts here.

1. Learning Challenges Characteristics – Checklist
2. Learning Challenges Pre-Screen – you will need a printed copy for the activity
3. Processing Challenges – Definitions and Markers



Introductions

A little about me...

What do you want to get from this training?



***First – please answer a quick poll to identify where participants are coming from – whether Literacy and Basic Skills, Employment Services, Ontario Works or Other Community Partner.

As I am introducing myself I encourage you share in the text chat what you are hoping to learn from this training. As we have 2 sessions together for the most part, if there are things that I don't touch on I will try to address them next week.

I am the Executive Director of Adult Basic Education Association which is the Learning Network in Hamilton. I have been with the network for 14 years. In those years I was primarily an academic assessor and lead trainer.

I completed my undergrad at Guelph University where I studied English and Family and Child Studies. After working for a few years I completed my Masters of Education through Brock University where I focused on adults with learning challenges.

I am certainly not an LD expert. As an assessor I felt I needed to be able to give people more information than I could around their learning difficulties. So I set out to read all that there was to read. My goal was to develop a comprehensive assessment that identified literacy levels as well as processing challenges and strategies that might be useful in the classroom and beyond.

Through my grad work as well as project work through ABEA I developed the Learning Challenges Assessment Tool for Adult Literacy Learners in 2005. It has since undergone several revisions and has quite recently been updated to correspond to the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework and Essential Skills. The Learning Challenges Pre-Screen that we will be discussing today is one piece of that assessment. At this point this assessment is available for use only through the Learning Networks of Ontario.



Little Red Riding Hood

Wants pawn term, dare worsted ladle gull hoe
 lift wetter murder inner ladle cordage. Disk
 ladle gull worry putty ladle rat cluck wetter
 ladle rat hat, an fur disk raisin pimple colder
 Ladle Rat Rotten Hut.

Wan moaning, Ladle Rat Rotten Hut's murder
 colder inset.

"Ladle Rat Rotten Hut, heresy ladle basking
 winsome burden batter an shirker cockles."

I am now looking for a volunteer to go through a sensitivity exercise with me. Do I have any volunteers?

Please read the following passage from the story, "Little Red Riding Hood."

Once upon a time, there was a little girl who lived with her mother in a little cottage. This little girl wore a little red clock with her little red hat, and for this reason people called her Little Red Riding Hood.

One morning, Little Red Riding Hood's mother called her inside.

"Little Red Ridding Hood, here is a little basket with some bread and butter and sugar cookies."

How did that make you feel?

This is a short but powerful exercise to help us appreciate how someone with a learning challenge has likely felt for most of their lives – in and out of the classroom. As we discuss learning challenges further these feelings and experiences help us begin to understand the frustration that our learners and clients may be dealing with. It makes it all the more important to provide individualized and sensitive interventions to help them reach their goals.



Objectives - Part 1

At the end of this session you will have

- a better understanding of the types of learning challenges and the markers for each
- the ability to utilize the pre-screen with your learners or clients
- an increased awareness of how learning challenges present themselves



Agenda

1. What are Learning Disabilities and Learning Challenges?
2. Learning Challenges Characteristics
3. Learning Challenges Pre-Screen
4. Learning Challenges - Examples and Markers
5. Factors to Consider



What are Learning Disabilities?

Learning Disabilities (LDs) refer to a variety of disorders that affect the acquisition, retention, understanding, organization, and/or use of verbal and/or non-verbal information (LDAO, 2001).

Definition
[def-uh-nish-uh n]

Learning disabilities are commonly evident when there is an unexpected underachievement – considering age, intelligence, and education – in one or more areas of learning (APA, 2000).

Learning Disabilities are very individual. People will have very specific challenges in some areas and strengths in others.



What are Learning Disabilities?

Developmental Disabilities (also known as intellectual disabilities) refer to lifelong conditions, manifested at birth or shortly after, where people grow and develop more slowly than others because of limitations in intellectual functioning (BC Association for Community Living, n.d.).

Definition
[def-uh-nish-uh n]

The major difference between a learning disability and a developmental disability is that challenges related to learning disabilities are specific.

People with LDs can still function highly in other parts of their life, whereas people with developmental disabilities have global intellectual challenges. They typically need to be supported through daily activities and very rarely live independently. Although it is possible for people with developmental disabilities to have learning disabilities, the tools discussed throughout this training are not designed to be used with learners that have developmental disabilities.



What are Learning Disabilities?

Learning disabilities can affect

- language (receptive/expressive)
- reading, writing and math skills
- memory
- reasoning
- coordination
- communication
- organizational skills
- social skills

Language – speaking and listening

Coordination – fine and gross motor skills



What are Learning Disabilities?

Commonly known learning disabilities

dyslexia - reading disability

dysgraphia - writing disability

dyscalculia - math disability

nonverbal learning disability

Characteristics of nonverbal learning disabilities include

- visual-spatial weaknesses
- gross/fine motor issues
- difficulty organizing
- difficulty with time and space
- social and emotional issues



What are Learning Disabilities?

Learning disabilities affect an individual throughout their life.

They

- express themselves differently over time and circumstance
- can be mild to severe

How they present themselves will be different when they are in school then on the job. This is because the skills used are often managed in different ways. In school, oftentimes, students are asked to follow a prescribed set of steps to reach the final answer. At work, the focus may be more on problem-solving their own way to achieve the same result. Although issues can certainly still persist, those with learning challenges typically report that they can find coping mechanisms to complete work tasks.

Do you have any examples of this that you can share about your learners or clients?



What are Learning Disabilities?

Learning disabilities are congenital and/or due to neuro-biological factors.

They are not caused by

- cultural or linguistic differences
- poor instruction
- socio-economic status
- lack of motivation

However, these factors can compound the effects of a learning disability.

A person is born with a learning disability.



What are Learning Disabilities?

Learning disabilities often

- present themselves in groups (eg., a writing disability in combination with reading or math)
- exist with other conditions such as attention, behavioural or emotional disorders



What are Learning Disabilities?

Learning Disabilities can effect success in

- school
- work
- daily life

They can also affect

- friendships
- self-esteem

With friendships they may have difficulty with turn taking, appear as if they are not listening or have difficulty maintaining a topic.

In terms of self-esteem, they may have feelings of inferiority, embarrassment or shame and feel helpless.

As a practitioner, issues of self-esteem can be incredibly detrimental to assisting clients and learners. You may feel like you are fighting an uphill battle. That you are a cheerleader as opposed to an instructor or employment counsellor. I invite you to share some of those anecdotes in the text chat. Examples of those feelings of hopelessness and certainly any words of wisdom or best practices that you have used.



What are Learning Disabilities?

People with learning disabilities can feel

- isolated and insecure
- frustrated, angry and resentful of past educational experiences

They are also at risk for limited employment options because of their literacy difficulties, and the social stigma for people who don't "fit in."

Oftentimes, people with learning challenges have very negative feelings associated with school. They may feel that no educational environment is going to help or meet their needs.

In terms of employment, the social issues or soft skills can certainly affect employment opportunities. We hear this from employers again and again that soft skills are so important to get and keep a job.



What are Learning Disabilities?

Many adults with learning disabilities have strengths in higher-level thinking such as

- reasoning
- imagination
- having the ability to see the big picture
- having original insights
- resilience and the ability to adapt
- persistence

They have had years of developing coping strategies. This makes them divergent thinkers in many ways.



What are Learning Disabilities?

Some Stats

- between 5-10 % of Canadians have a learning disability (LDAO, 2011)
- more than half a million adults in this country live with a learning disability, making it more challenging for them to learn in universities and colleges, and on the job (Stats Can, 2006)

This continues to be a very important issue for literacy and basic skills programs. The stats are likely much higher in LBS because learners were unsuccessful the first time around and likely didn't get the support they needed in school.



What are Learning Challenges?

Learning Challenges (LC) (used today) is intended to mean specific learning challenges (both academic and personal/ social), which are likely due to processing difficulties, which require individualized strategy and accommodation development.

Definition
[def-uh-nish-uh n]

This term emphasizes the idea that through the use of appropriate strategies and accommodations, learners and clients are better able to cope with their difficulties to reach their goals.

Only a psychometrist or psychologist can diagnosis learning disabilities.

As literacy and employment practitioners, this is a more positive description. This definition speaks to people's unique abilities, coping skills, and resiliency.



LC Characteristics

It is important to remember that many people may exhibit a few learning challenges characteristics but that does not mean that they have a learning disability.

A person may also have many learning challenges, as well as other disabilities.

Everyone has different challenges and needs, and they need to be dealt with individually.



LC Characteristics

Discussion

What have you seen when working with your learners or clients that make you think they could have learning challenges?



LC Characteristics

1. Take out/open the Learning Challenges Characteristics handout.
2. As we discuss the characteristics, check off any that you have seen in your learners or clients.



- Show checklist and review
- Discussion/comments?



Learning Challenges – A Video

Robyn's Story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LRNI6mWums>

To 1:03

This is very typical of the interviews I've had over the years with people with the same frustrations. What works is knowing exactly what is happening and being able to design specific strategies for people.

It increases confidence and the motivation to continue.



Pre-Screen

The learning challenges pre-screen is meant to reveal issues in a learner's daily life or history that might be due to learning challenges.

Things to consider

- a. build a rapport before administering
- b. inform the learner of their rights

In terms of rapport, you will likely need to spend some time with the person before completing the pre-screen in order to build trust. Otherwise, they will be uncomfortable answering the questions, possibly question your intentions and it won't result in helpful information to move forward.

Be sure to let the person know that they can refuse answering any question that they are not comfortable with. Or, they can request that it not be written down or included in any reports.



Pre-Screen

Components

1. Contact information, goals, etc.
2. Factors that suggest that the learner does not have learning challenges
3. Factors that need to be examined before the assessment is completed
4. Factors that would suggest the learner has learning challenges
5. Summary

Please take out or open the Learning Challenges Pre-Screen if you have it.

As mentioned at the beginning of the session, the pre-screen is a part of larger assessment which is only available for use through the learning networks.

However, it will give you information about whether your learner has learning challenges markers and may raise valuable discussion.

Section 1. Contact info – this section is for reference only. You very likely have other forms with this information already. Don't complete the contact information section unless you need it for your records.

Section 2 – Factors that suggest that the learner does not have learning challenges

The learner may have enjoyed school or felt that they did well – if the learner has several of these (4+), they likely do not have learning challenges. However, it is recommended that you continue with the full pre-screen anyway.

Section 3 – Factors that need to be examined that are outside of learning

These are medical or situational factors that may get in the way of learning (for example, if a learner has a high level of stress than their learning difficulties may be due to that factor, as opposed to learning challenges) – some of these issues may need to be addressed before or during their time in LBS.

Section 4. Factors that would suggest they have learning challenges

Specific things such as difficulties shopping or taking the bus, and general (e.g., the learner failed a grade, has always had difficulties with reading and spelling, etc.)

Section 5. Summary

If the person has more than 3-4 specific and more than 5-6 general – you likely need to look into this further.

For employment services, this could mean encouraging your client to enroll in an upgrading class. You may already know and refer to the service providers in your region. However, if you are not familiar with all of the service providers, you can connect with your local learning network. You can find them by visiting www.learningnetworks.ca

For literacy practitioners, this means that you will want to find out more information about how this learner processes language and what learning strategies might help.



Pre-Screen

Pre-Screen Activity

1. Take out/open the Learning Challenges Pre-Screen
2. We need a volunteer to be the assessor
3. All - use your pre-screen template to record the person's (my) answers

As we go through the pre-screen, please let us know if you have questions by putting them in the text chat. I will be sure to address those after we have finished.



Processing Challenges

- Visual Processing Challenges
- Auditory Processing Challenges
- Organizational Processing Challenges
- Other
 - Attention
 - Hyperactivity/Impulsivity
 - Personal Characteristics
 - Social Characteristics

Please refer to the Processing Challenges – Definitions and Markers document for this section.

The LBS field typically looks at learning challenges using these 3 processing challenge areas – visual, auditory and organizational.

This is different from the medical terms as they diagnose the subject area, we try to identify challenges in processing that could affect many areas. For example, a learner could have visual processing challenges that affect reading, writing and math. Discussing it this way makes it easier to be very specific in terms of the challenge they are facing and find specific and individualized strategies that could help them cope with the challenges and reach their goals.

There are also other factors such as attention, hyperactivity/impulsivity, personal characteristics and social characteristics that can coincide with learning challenges.



Processing Challenges

Visual Processing Challenges

hinder a learner's ability to make sense of information taken in through the eyes (beyond visual disorders).



Difficulties can be seen in the learner's ability to discriminate between different letters or words, following text while reading, and difficulty remembering the "look of letters or words (visual memory). Visual processing challenges can affect a learner's reading, writing, and mathematic ability.

These learners (from Definitions/Markers resource)

- a. have a physical reaction to print (for example, may get headaches, or get tired or red eyes)
- b. have a lot of difficulty tracking text (text may move or shake on the page)
- c. over rely on sounding out words – they have a poor sight word memory (so they may sound out the same word several times in the same document)
- d. reading substitutions are visually similar (for example, they may say "horse" for "house")
- e. spellings are usually a phonetic alternative to the correct spelling (you can typically tell what they are trying to write but it is not the correct spelling)
- f. mix upper and lower case letters inappropriately (typically in the middle of the word)
- g. may spell the same word differently in the same document
- h. confuses similar numbers or transposes numbers (wrong order)
- i. has difficulty copying
- j. has difficulty with left/right and working in columns



Processing Challenges

Visual Processing Challenges - Example

My plan to reach a goals
is School and Stoping Smoking
but I can do it at once
So I will finish school, ~~F~~
and then ~~stop~~ Smoking

Explain details

- “a goals” – should be “my goals” – word substitution and a grammatical error
- “stoping” – should be “stopping” – which is a rule based error
- “can do it” – “can’t do it” – grammar error, being able to identify errors and self-correcting
- “ones” – “once” – miscue
- “So I will finish school and then smoking” – is a sentence fragment
- “F” – “f” – mixes upper/lower case letters
- “finsh” – “finish” – left out the “I” but is otherwise phonetic
- “smoking” – “stop smoking” – leave out words



Processing Challenges

Auditory Processing Challenges

affect how aural information is interpreted or processed by the brain. This can interfere with speech and language acquisition, and can affect all areas of learning, especially reading and spelling.



An auditory processing challenge is not a hearing problem, but rather a difficulty perceiving aural information. A learner may be unable to recognize or isolate individual parts of speech, or remember spoken language.

They

- a. have difficulty retaining and recalling oral information
- b. Have difficulty explaining themselves to others
- c. dislike or avoid reading, especially out loud
- d. have a lot of difficulty or is unable to use phonics to sound out words (or use the sounds of letters)
- e. may reverse or transpose letters (flip them upside down or switch them)
- f. have difficulty understanding a text on the first reading
- g. do not use good phonetic alternatives when spelling - spellings are bizarre
- h. add or miss letters or they are in the wrong order (reverses or transposed)
- i. have difficulty processing numbers correctly
- j. may say a number backwards or may transpose numbers when doing oral drills

Processing Challenges Explained

Auditory Processing Challenge - Example

19. Spell the following words. Start with the left column.

1. ride _____	1. ^{number} unmbef _____	1. August _____
2. more _____	2. Shode _____	2. Airport _____
3. brck _____	3. Quitie (quit) _____	3. Kinchine (kitchen) _____
4. Sayed (said) _____	4. Reaward (reward) _____	4. Knoeg (knowledge) _____
5. Staicf (stiff) _____	5. lisen (listen) _____	5. Quisome (welcome) _____
6. there _____	6. Grow _____	6. Programeing (program) _____

“sayed” for “said” – rule based (this is interesting because it is a rule-based error but taken with the other errors the auditory difficulties become clear)

“staicf” for “stiff” – bizarre – substitutions/additions

“unmbef” for “number” – transposition, substitution and not a phonetic alternative

“quitie” for “quit” – transposition, addition

“reaward” for “reward” – addition

“lisen” for “listen” – leave out silent letter

“kinchine” for “kitchen” - additions, add silent letter, bizarre spelling

“knoeg” for “knowledge” – lots of omissions – you cannot tell what the word is supposed to be from this spelling

“oasome” for “awesome” – substitution



Processing Challenges Explained

Subject Area	Visual Processing Challenge	Auditory Processing Challenge
Reading	Has a physical reaction to reading - headaches, tired or red eyes, etc.	Typically no physical reaction to reading
	Has a lot of difficulty tracking text - it may move on the page	Typically little to no difficulties in this area
	Over relies on sounding out words - poor sight word memory (has to continually decode familiar words)	Has a lot of difficulty or is unable to use phonics - must remember the look of words (will likely recognize some sight words)
Writing	Spellings are likely a phonetic alternative to the correct spelling	Spellings are bizarre - not good phonetic alternatives
	Mixes upper/lower case letters inappropriately	Typically few difficulties in this area
	May spell the same word differently in the same document	May do this but more typical of a visual processing difficulty
Math	Confuses similar numbers or transposes numbers	Has difficulty hearing numbers correctly
	Has difficulty copying	Says numbers backwards or may transpose numbers when doing oral drills
	Has difficulty with left/right orientation and working with columns	Typically few difficulties in this area

When looking at the markers you may be thinking that many of the markers are similar and that it will be very difficult to distinguish between a visual and an auditory processing challenge.

This chart will help as it looks at the main differences.



Processing Challenges

Organizational Processing Challenges exist when an individual has difficulty managing time and space, and organizing their day-to-day activities.

Similar to Nonverbal LDs

The learner may show difficulties when receiving, integrating, remembering, and expressing information. As well, the learner may have gross and/or fine motor difficulties.

They may

- a. have difficulty remembering things
- b. have difficulty performing under stress
- c. have difficulty following a schedule
- d. have difficulty prioritizing and organizing
- e. have difficulty adjusting to change

Also, their

- f. writing shows poor organization

They

- g. have difficulty with directions
- h. have an awkward pencil grip

Their letters are poorly formed

And they

- j. May appear clumsy or poorly coordinated



Processing Challenges Explained

Organizational Processing Challenges - Example

EXPOSURE

THINKING CANADA NEEDS DEATH PENALTY
 BECAUSE WHO COMMITTED CRIMES TO BE
 FALL TO VICTIMS AND THEIR
 FAMILY
 WHO ENJOY TAKES LIFE OF SOMEONE SHOULD PAY
 WITH IS ON LIFE

Although we typically see these markers off the page and in real life, in this example we see

- missing words
- printing and cursive mixed together
- no organization or structure
- lack of formatting or margins
- no full sentences



Factors to Consider

Learners with learning challenges

- need more time
- typically benefit from part time studies (at least at the beginning)
- may need formal testing (psycho-educational assessment) for post-secondary (accommodations)



Factors to Consider

Ontario Psychologists Association Referral Services have listings of most psychologists in Ontario and they

- can make referral suggestions based on assessment/therapy needs
- make free referrals

1-800-268-0069

Psycho-educational assessments can range from \$1,200-2,600 and beyond.



Factors to Consider

People with learning challenges truly need specialized learning strategies to help them succeed and reach their goals.

Literacy and Basic Skills programs have the capacity to do this with support from the field and their colleagues.

For those that are from employment services or Ontario Works, I encourage you to work closely with your LBS service providers to ensure that your clients have the support they need to reach their education and employment goals.

For the literacy practitioners here today I encourage you to attend the second part of the webinar series next week where we will be discussing specific strategy development. However, all are welcome to attend Part 2.



Evaluation

An evaluation will be sent to you shortly following the webinar. Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation.



The resources shared during the session will also be made available.



Questions/Comments

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