



Supporting Learners with Learning Challenges

November 20, 2025 2 – 3:30 pm



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STATEMENT OF RECOGNITION

While we meet today on a virtual platform, let's take a moment to recognize, respect and acknowledge the importance of the lands we occupy and from which we benefit.

Today, let's reaffirm our commitment and responsibility to improve relationships between nations -- and our own understanding of local Indigenous peoples and their cultures.

Let's remind ourselves that, wherever we are, we live on the ancestral and unceded territory of Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people.



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YOUR HOST



PRESENTER SARA GILL has been involved in the adult literacy field since 1996 and has worked as an instructor, assessor, trainer and researcher. She is the Executive Director of the Adult Basic Education Association – the adult learning network for Hamilton.

In her career, Sara has focused on assessment, Clear Writing and learning challenges and developed the Learning Challenges Assessment Tool in 2005. She has since adapted it into the Learning Exploration Tool (LET).



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**Learning Networks
of Ontario**

Learning Exploration

Strengths, Challenges, and
Strategies

November 2025



Agenda

1. What We Know
2. An Overview of Learning Challenges
3. The Learning Exploration Tool (LET)
4. Learning Strategies



Photo by [The Jopwell Collection](#) on [Unsplash](#)



What We Know Let's Zoom out for a Sec



What We Know

- LBS is built for this.
- You're awesome.
- Everyone is unique.
- Learning is dynamic.
- Learning is for everyone.
- The “how” matters.



An Overview of Learning Challenges



Let's Start with Strengths

(Raskind, n.d.)



Everyone has a lot they're bringing to the table. These are as diverse as the people themselves but may include

- self-awareness
- proactivity
- perseverance
- goal-setting
- use of effective support systems
- emotional coping strategies



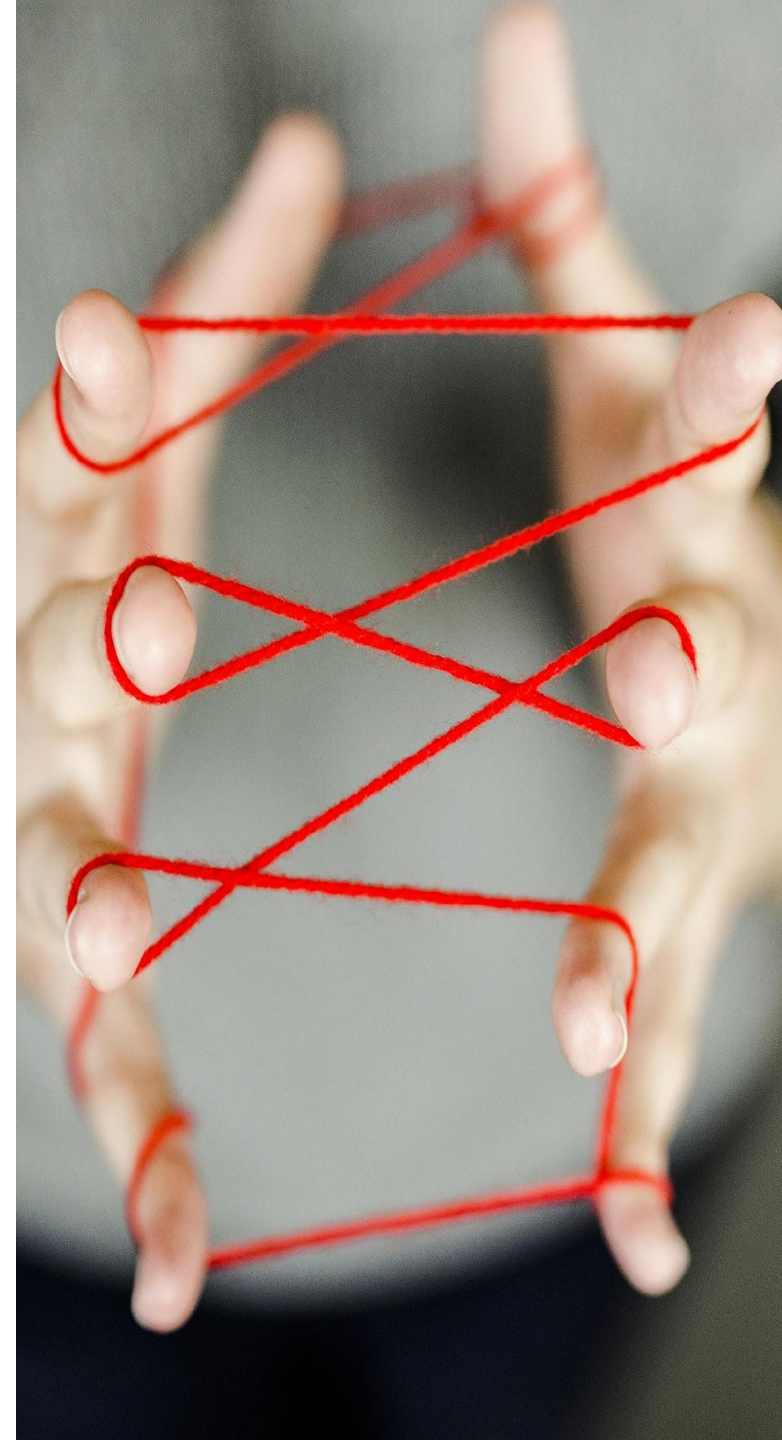
Let's Start with Strengths

(CADDAC,
2024)



Also

- **bravery**
- creativity
- enthusiasm/energy
- empathy
- problem-solving
- imagination, divergent thinking,
wide range of interests
- understanding the big picture
- resilience and the ability to
adapt
- hyperfocus



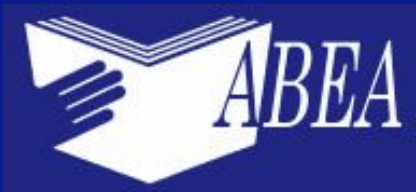
What Else?

What other strengths
have you observed
in your learners?



What are learning disabilities?

(LDAO, 2024)

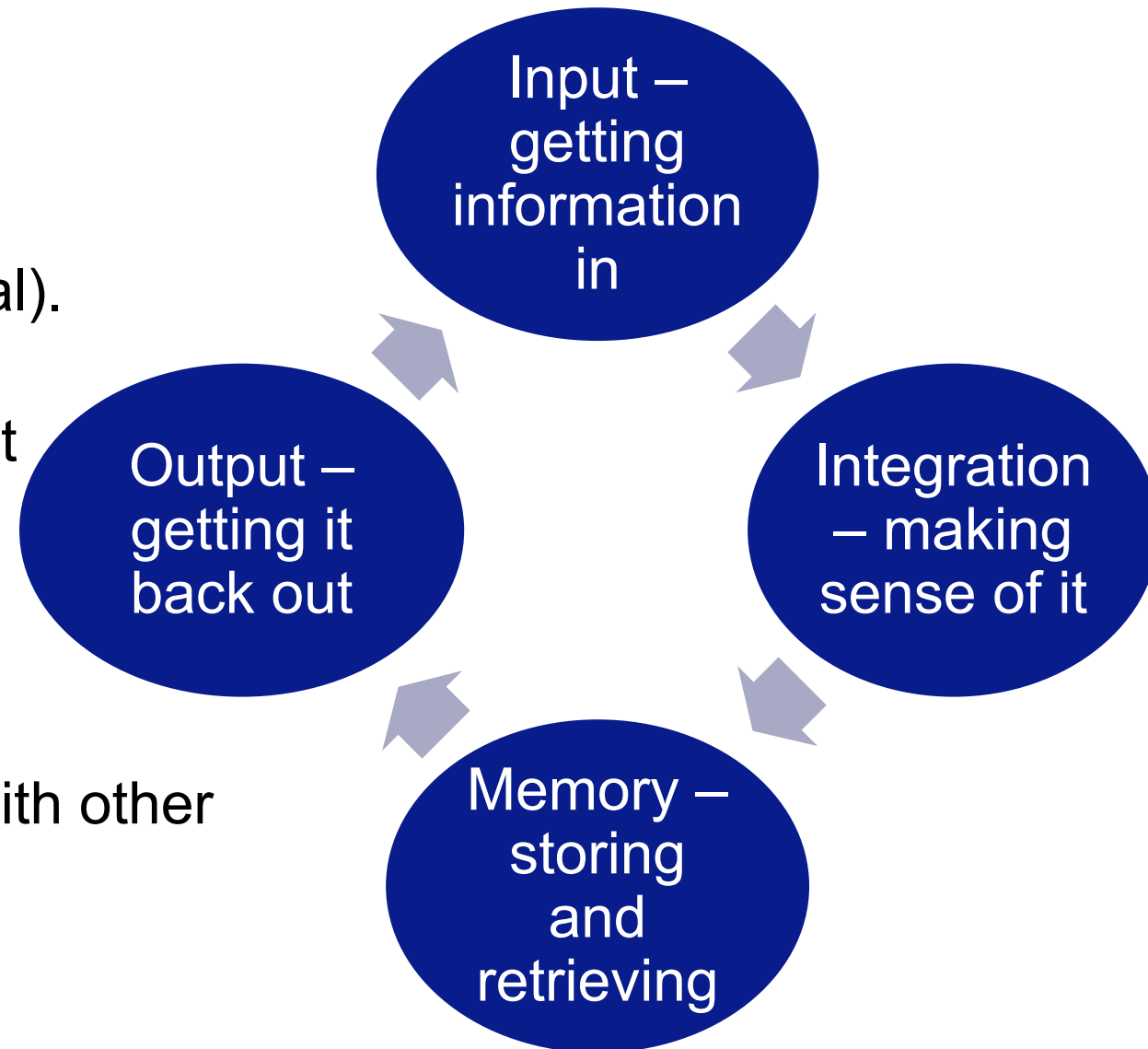


Learning Disabilities (LDs) affect the way a person takes in, remembers, understands and expresses information.

They are due to neuro-biological factors (congenital).

They may present themselves in groups.

They may exist with other conditions.



Affects

Learning disabilities can affect success in

- education
- work
- daily life

They may affect

- relationships
- self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy

Can be associated with feelings of isolation, frustration, anger, resentment and negative past experiences (how is LBS different?).



(LDAO, 2024)



Diagnosing Learning Disabilities

(LDAO, 2024)



Assessments must be done by a qualified member of the College of Psychologists (a psychologist or psychological associate).

[Ontario Psychologists Association Referral Services](#) have listings of most psychologists in Ontario.

Psycho-educational assessments can range from \$2,000 - \$3,500 and beyond.

A screenshot of the Ontario Psychological Association's website. The header includes the OPA logo and navigation links: Contact, Find a Psychologist, and a search bar. A purple navigation bar contains links: About Us, Public, Members & Students, Become a Member, Continuing Education, Careers, and a LOGIN button. The main heading is 'Find a Psychologist', followed by the instruction 'Use this search tool to find a psychologist or psychological associate in Ontario'. Below this are two search fields: 'Location' with a placeholder 'City or Province' and 'Area of Concern' with a dropdown menu currently set to 'ALL'.

Let's Try Something...

Little Red Riding Hood



Let's Try Something

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.”



What Dyslexia Can Look Like



The second big
house of the
on by the
The big
Do you remember
little pig? The
who did a
half blew
house down. He
The big
house of straw
he blew
the straw
house down.

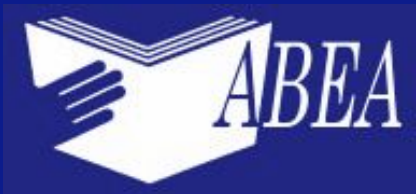
(Proper Course,
2011)

(Boland,
2022)

is created without copying or mirroring shapes. The repeated shapes in a text is decreased. This results in a visual distortions (swirl-effect). The aim is to create interest that will maintain the readers' interest and will prevent boredom or frustration. Diversity in text knows many variations. The fact that typography for a novel is different from a newspaper education. Even so a novel has the potential to be educational. This can be achieved in any level of creativity, thinking about the amount of words on a sentence and the character/paper

Learning Challenges – Working Definition

(ABEA, 2005)



Learning Challenges (used today) is intended to mean

- specific learning challenges (both academic and personal/social)
- likely due to processing difficulties
- require individualized strategy and accommodation development



A Few Notes

- It's important to remember that many people have a few learning challenges characteristics. It doesn't mean that they have a learning disability.
- A person may have many learning challenges, as well as other disabilities.
- Everyone has different challenges and needs, and they need to be supported individually.

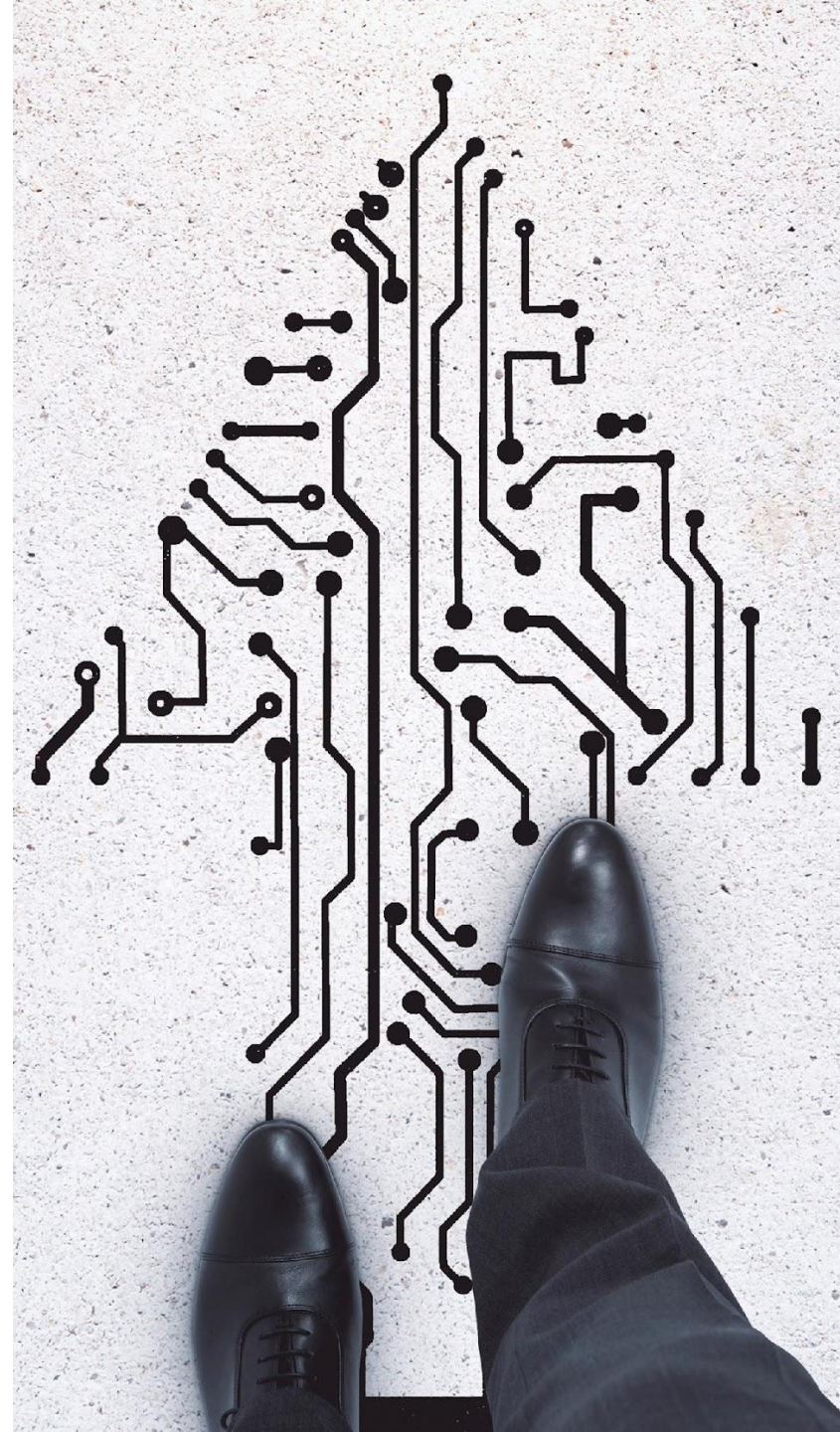


Specific Processing Challenges

(LDAO, 2024)



- Visual Processing Challenges
 - Auditory Processing Challenges
 - Organizational Processing Challenges
- Other
- Difficulties Directing Attention



Visual Processing Challenges

(LDAO, 2024)



Visual Processing Challenges

make it difficult for a learner to make sense of information taken in through the eyes.

These challenges are not because of visual disorders such as myopia, astigmatism, etc. They can affect a learner's reading, writing, and mathematic abilities.



Visual Processing Challenges - Markers

(LDAO, 2024)



- has a physical reaction to print (for example, headaches, tired or red eyes)
- may be sensitive to light (will likely have a lot of difficulty working under fluorescent light)
- text may move or shake on the page – learners may see rivers of white down the page
- difficulty discriminating between different letters or words
- has a lot of difficulty tracking text

Visual Processing Challenges - Markers

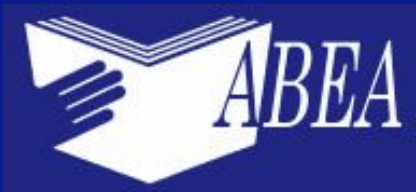
(LDAO, 2024)



- difficulty remembering the “look” of letters or words (visual memory)
- over relies on sounding out words – poor sight word memory
- reading substitutions are visually similar (for example, “horse” for “house”)
- spellings are usually a phonetic alternative to the correct spelling
- mixes upper and lower letters inappropriately

Visual Processing Challenges - Markers

(LDAO, 2024)



- may spell the same word differently in the same document
- confuses similar numbers or transposes numbers (wrong order)
- has difficulty copying
- has difficulty with left/right and working in columns



Visual Processing Challenges - Example

My plan to reach a goals
is School and Stoping Smoking
but I can do it at ones.
So I will Finsh School, ~~Finsh~~
and then ~~School~~ Smoking.

(ABEA, n.d.)



Auditory Processing Challenges

(LDAO, 2024)



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

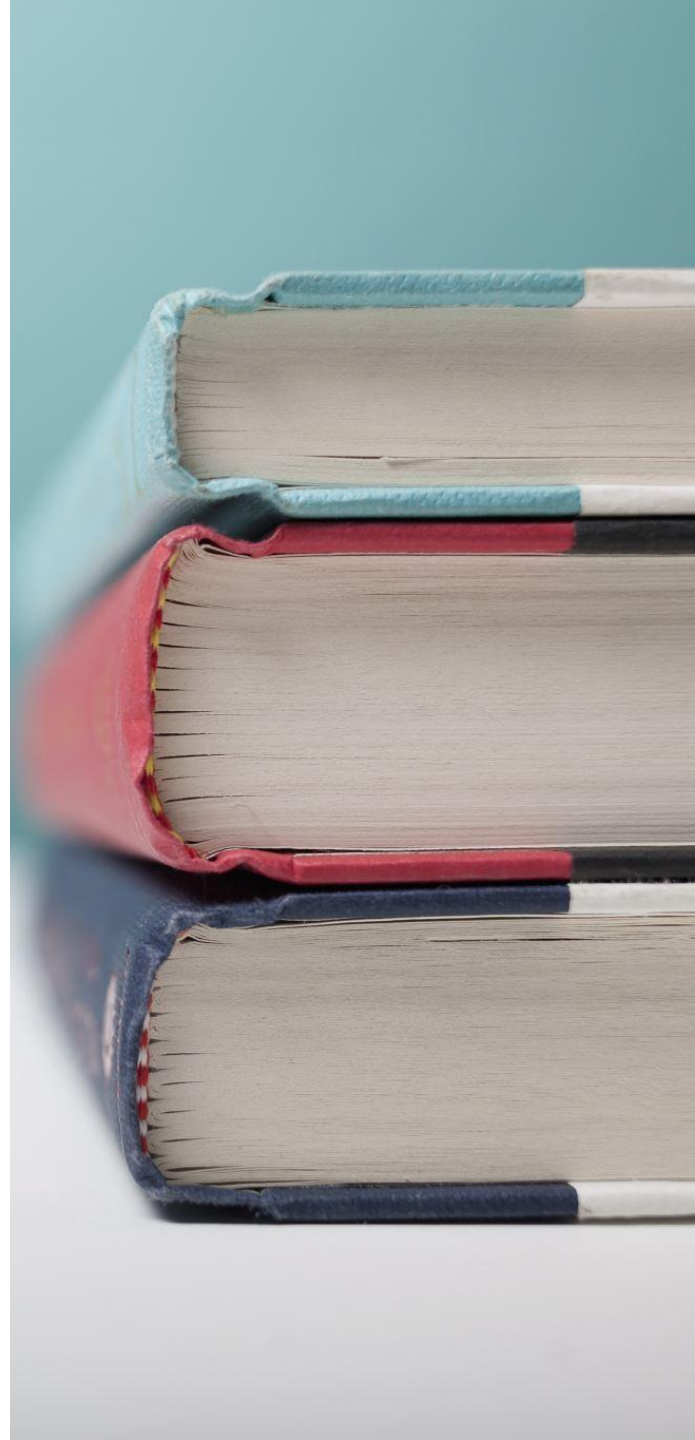
- not a hearing problem – difficulty perceiving aural information
- may not be able to recognize or isolate parts of speech or remember spoken language
- difficulty with auditory sequencing and blending

Auditory Processing Challenges - Markers

(LDAO, 2024)

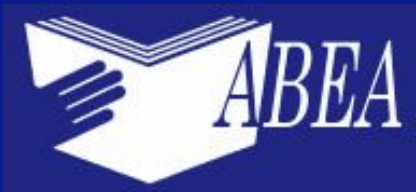


- has difficulty retaining and recalling oral information
- has difficulty explaining themselves to others
- dislikes or avoids reading, especially out loud
- has a lot of difficulty or is unable to use phonics to sound out words
- may reverse or transpose letters



Auditory Processing Challenges - Markers

(LDAO, 2024)



- has difficulty understanding text on the first reading
- spellings are not good phonetic alternatives
- letters are added or missing or in the wrong order (reversed or transposed)
- has difficulty processing numbers correctly
- says a number backwards or may transpose number when doing oral drills



Auditory Processing Challenges - Example

(ABEA, n.d.)



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

- | | | |
|-------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. <u>ride</u> | <div>✱ (number)</div> <div>1. <u>unBef</u></div> | 1. <u>August</u> |
| 2. <u>more</u> | 2. <u>Shade</u> | 2. <u>AirPort</u> |
| 3. <u>Back</u> | 3. <u>Quit (quit)</u> | 3. <u>Kinchine (kitchen)</u> |
| 4. <u>Sayed (said)</u> | 4. <u>Reward (reward)</u> | 4. <u>KNOWS (knowledge)</u> |
| 5. <u>Stait (stiff)</u> | 5. <u>listen (listen) lisen</u> | 5. <u>Awsome (awesome)</u> |
| 6. <u>there</u> | 6. <u>Blow</u> | 6. <u>programeurs (program)</u> |

What's the Difference?

Visual Processing

physical reaction to print

difficulty tracking text – text may move on the page

over relies on phonics

misspellings are phonetic

mixes upper/lowercase

spells the same word differently

transposes numbers

difficulty copying

Auditory Processing

typically no difficulty

typically no difficulty

unable to use phonics

misspellings are not phonetic

typically no difficulty

significant difficulty with all spelling

difficulty hearing numbers

difficulty with oral drills



Organizational Processing Challenges

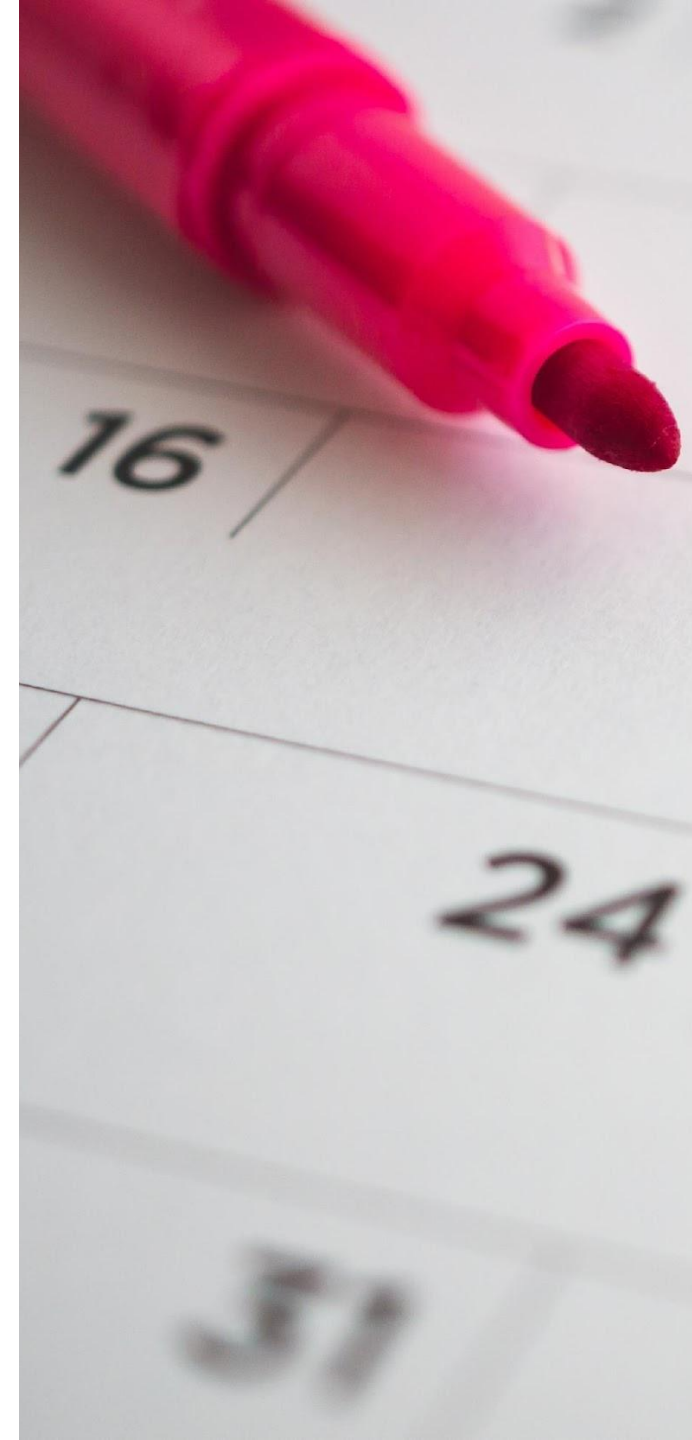
(LDAO, 2024)



Organizational Processing

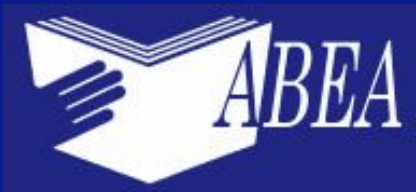
Challenges make it difficult for a learner to manage time and space and organize their daily activities. The learner may have difficulties when receiving, integrating, remembering, and expressing information. The learner may also have difficulty with gross and/or fine motor skills.

Similar to Non-Verbal Learning Disabilities.



Organizational Processing Challenges - Markers

(LDAO, 2024)



Difficulty

- remembering things
- performing under stress
- following a schedule
- prioritizing and organizing
- adjusting to change



Organizational Processing Challenges - Markers

(LDAO, 2024)



- writing isn't organized well
- has difficulty with directions
- has an awkward pencil grip
- letters are poorly formed
- may appear clumsy or poorly coordinated



Organizational Processing Challenges - Example

(ABEA, n.d.)



~~I THINKING~~
THINKING. CANADA NEEDS DEATH PENALTY
BECAUSE WHO COMMITTED CRIMES TO FREE
FARE TO WECTOMB AND THERE
FAMILY
WHO EVERY TAKES LIFE OF SOMEONE SHOULD PAY
WITH IS ON LIFE

ADHD

- chronic neurodevelopmental disorder that affects approximately 3% to 5% of adults
- it's highly hereditary – up to 75%
- girls are frequently not diagnosed until later in adolescence or adulthood because they often present as inattentive which is harder to spot

There are 3 types of ADHD

- Hyperactive
- Inattentive
- Combined (most common)

(CADDAC,
2024)



ADHD Markers

(CADDAC,
2024)



Attention Regulation

- difficulty focusing attention for a period of time, especially when doing things that are repetitive or boring
- easily distracted by sounds, sights and thoughts
- unable to pay close attention to details (may make mistakes)
- hyper focus, unable to break focus and refocus attention, especially if what they're doing is very interesting to them
- forgetting to complete tasks, even if they're common
- frequently losing things
- tuning out, excessive daydreaming

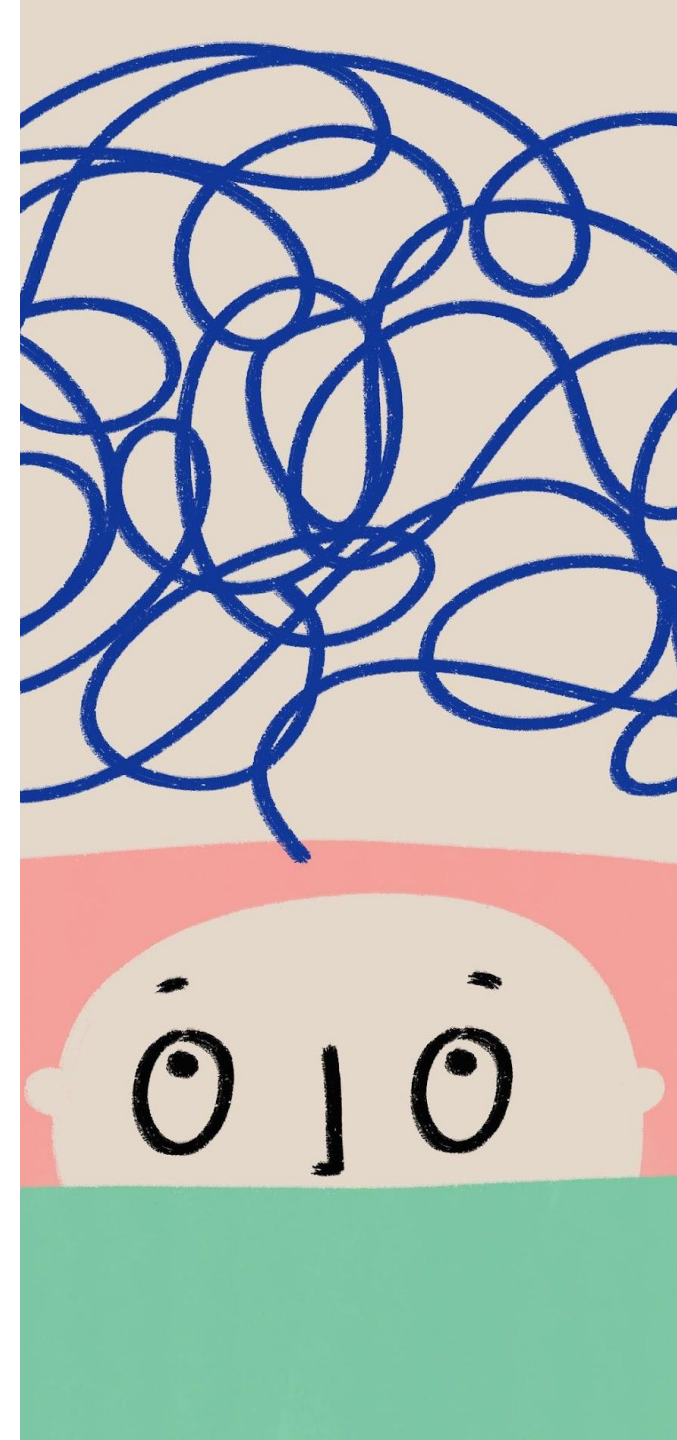
ADHD Markers

(CADDAC,
2024)



Hyperactivity

- fidgeting
- internal restlessness
- mind races or switches
focus frequently
- unable to relax
- talking too much too fast
- doing too much at once
- craving excitement and/or
risky activities



ADHD Markers

(CADDAC,
2024)



Impulsivity

- acting before thinking
- making impulsive decisions without thinking them through
- spending first without considering if it's a good idea
- talking at the wrong time
- interrupting others
- speaking without thinking
- reckless without considering the consequences
- quick to react to emotions in unacceptable ways

ADHD Markers

(CADDAC,
2024)



Executive Functioning

- difficulty prioritizing
- difficulty organizing
- procrastination
- trouble starting and finishing projects
- difficulty managing time (late, doesn't complete work)
- difficulty planning
- starts many projects but doesn't complete them
- depends on others for organization, household duties, paperwork, etc.

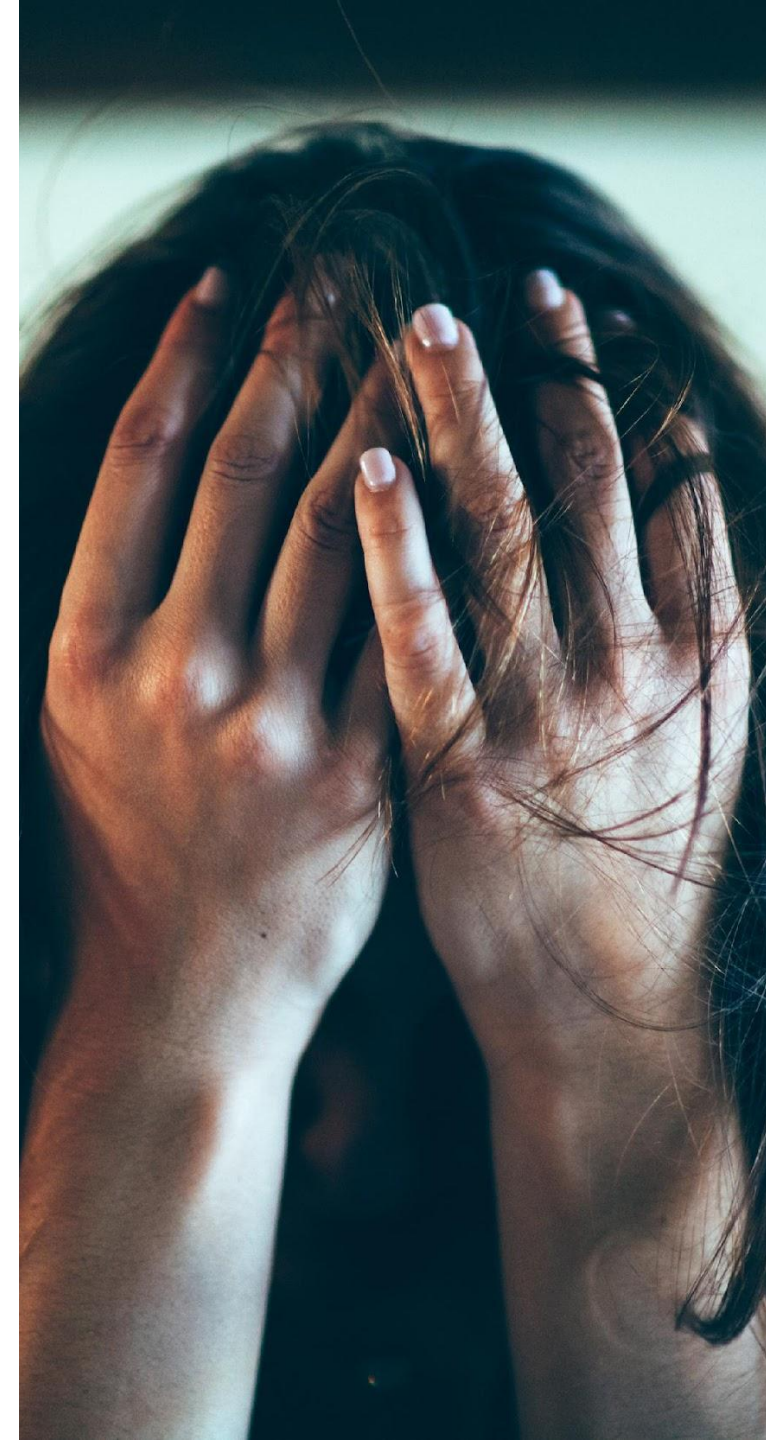
ADHD Markers

(CADDAC,
2024)



Regulating Emotions

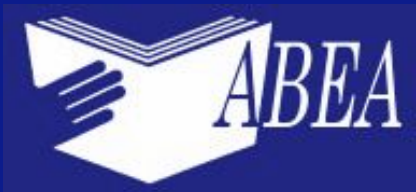
- reacting emotionally
- emotional outbursts
- impatient
- irritable
- oversensitive to criticism
- becomes easily
frustrated
- mood swings



What about in
your classes?

What % of your learners
may have learning
challenges?

Are
attention/hyperactivity
challenges prevalent with
your learners?

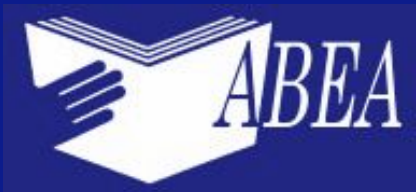


Learning Exploration Tool

**Educational Interview for work with
Learners**



The Learning Exploration Tool (LET)



This is not a diagnostic tool – we’re not psychologists. 😊

We use this tool as a comprehensive educational interview to better understand a learner’s

- goals
- past experiences with learning
- strength and challenge areas related to language processing

We use this information to develop a learning plan and identify learning strategies that might be helpful.

Full Training Jan 22 and 29, 2026



Learning Exploration Tool (LET) Training

The LET is an educational interview tool. It includes background information, learning strengths as well as a learning challenges pre-screen and background interview. The tool becomes the template for a report with learning strategies they could try in the classroom and beyond. Or, it can be customized to fit your existing intake and assessment tools.

The training will include an overview of

- ✓ learning challenges and markers
- ✓ the Learning Exploration Tool (LET)
- ✓ learning strategies



Virtual Training Dates (total training = 5 hours)

Thursday January 22, 2026 (9:30 am - 12:00 pm)

Thursday January 29, 2026 (9:30 am - 12:00 pm)

Register Here

For more information please
connect with Sara Gill -
sara.gill@abea.on.ca.



Learning Strategies



Big Picture

(LDAO, 2024)



- **Learn** as much as you can about the learner and how their processing challenges affect them so you can set clear and realistic expectations together.
- **Recognize** that behaviour may be the result of feeling confused, anxious and overwhelmed.
- **Give** the learner direction and **explicit instruction**.
- **Manage the environment** with predictable schedules as much as possible. Prepare the learner for changes in routines and give them notice about transitions.

Some Definitions

Learning Strategies are specific techniques that can be customized to fit a learner's strengths and learning style.

Learning Accommodations are considerations made for the learner that take nothing away from the skill being learned but accommodate their learning needs.

Assistive Technologies are accommodations that utilize technological resources.



Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

(CAST, 2024)



The goal of UDL is to create learning environments that work for all students and gives learners agency in their learning. It's based on 3 principles.

Engagement – the learner drives what they learn.

Representation – teaching through multiple methods and perspectives.

Action and Expression – provide choice and flexibility in how learners express their learning.



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In General

(Centre for
Diverse
Learners, 2024)



- consider your learning spaces – sensory inputs – noise, light, other distractions that could be decreased
- encourage learners to explore how they learn and discuss strategies that might work for them
- provide lots of structure and notice of transitions
- encourage and support learners to use technology for learning



In General

(Centre for
Diverse
Learners, 2024)



- offer instructions in at least 2 ways – verbal and in writing and offer examples
- break things down into parts or chunks with checklists, schedules and graphic organizers
- encourage learners to take their time with their response, they may need more processing time



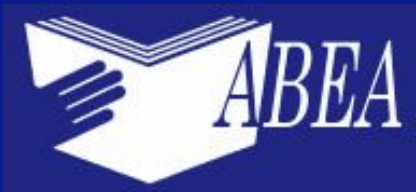
Direct Instruction

- instructor directed, explicit, in steps
 - best teaching method for learners with learning challenges
1. **Explanation** – what is the intention of the strategy?
 2. **Modeling** – how is it used effectively?
 3. **Self-Instruction** – have the learner explain the strategy and how they can use it.
 4. **Practice** – various opportunities to practice on different tasks, repeated explanation, instructions, modeling.
 5. **Feedback** – from you as the instructor and the learner.
 6. **Implementation** – independent and routine use of the strategy



Auditory Processing Strategies

- **Communication** – typically have very good visual processing skills, give visual directions, give oral directions slowly, repeat and allow learner to process them and respond
- **Reading** – phonics may not work, use a whole word approach (dictate stories, copying, remember shape)
- **Spelling** – use word patterns/families (similar shape) and assistive technology
- **Math** – colour code steps of a math problem
- **Accommodations** – visual aids, apps

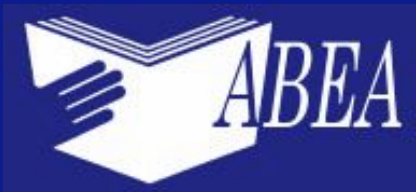


Visual Processing Strategies

- **Problem solve physical reactions** – particularly lighting, text/background contrast of documents
- **Communication** – give step-by-step verbal and written directions
- **Reading** – use a structured phonics program
- **Writing/Spelling** - phonics-based approaches like break words into syllables or chunks
- **Math** – use graph paper to assist with working in columns



Organizational Processing Strategies



- **Communication/Interpersonal Skills** - Give the learner verbal direction and explicit instruction. Use the learner's verbal strengths to help them learn what other people learn implicitly, with kindness and patience.
- **Instructions** – Repeat and give in multiple formats.
- **Reading** – Use pre-reading questions.
- **Writing** – Teach printing, cursive or typing explicitly as needed.
- **Math** – May benefit from graph paper to practice working in columns.
- **Accommodations** – Routine, scheduling support.

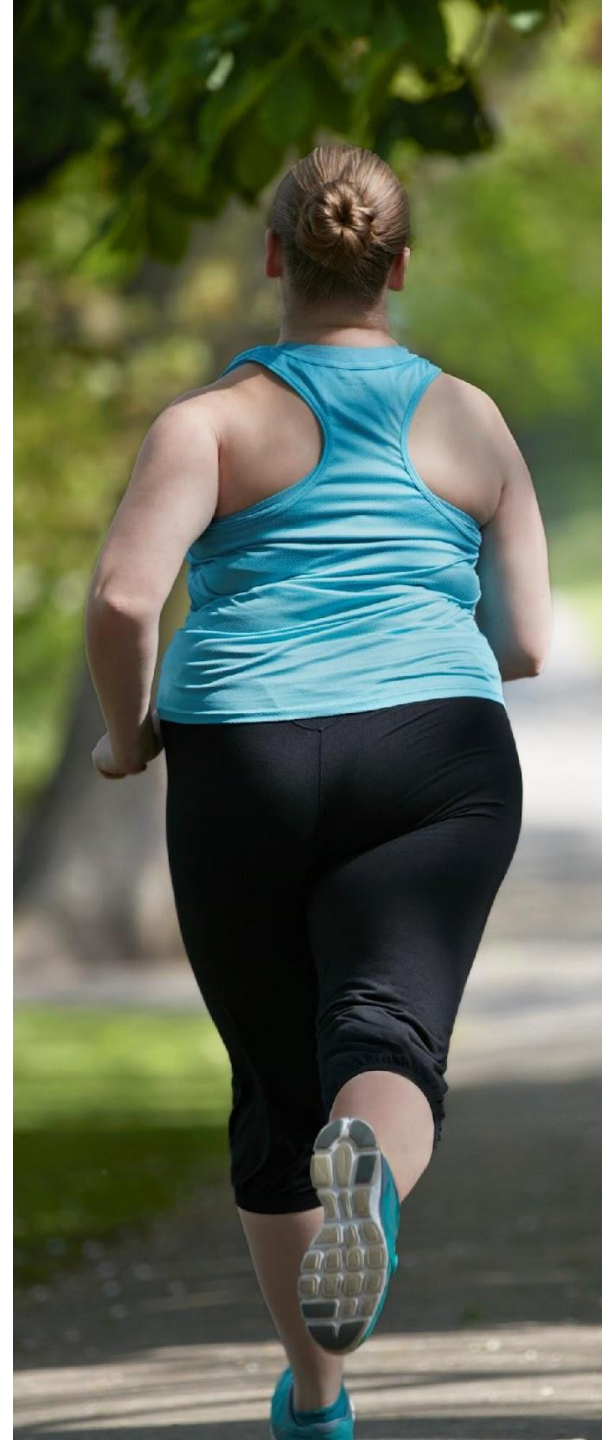
Directing Attention Strategies

(CADDAC,
2024)



Encourage

- regular exercise
- a healthy, balanced diet
- good sleep patterns



Directing Attention Strategies

(CADDAC,
2024)



- reduce distractions
- encourage frequent breaks
- get the learner's attention before giving instructions (1-2 at a time) – repeat and allow time for processing
- ask them to repeat instructions for understanding
- give frequent, specific and immediate feedback, encourage positive self-talk
- break activities into small chunks (checklists, graphic organizers), help them develop plans/steps, help them get started
- check-in with them to make sure they're on the right track

Directing Attention Strategies

(CADDAC,
2024)



- work with them on self-monitoring their attention and learning about themselves (when can't I focus?)
- give advanced notice about transitions
- teach and use reminder cues, teach time management
- help them to identify what is priority
- find out what works for them to focus – earphones, quiet places, preferential seating
- encourage things that will help them focus – movement, chewing gum, other fidget devices
- use multi-sensory approaches
- use assistive devices like text to speech, speech to text

Strategy Lists for Learners

- Auditory Processing
- Visual Processing
- Organizational Processing
- Attention/Focus



905-527-2222 pathways@abea.on.ca www.abea.on.ca

Learning Strategies

Auditory Processing Challenges

These challenges make it difficult to make sense of information that you hear. You may have trouble sounding out words or spelling words from the sounds in the word. You may have difficulty understanding what you're reading. You may also have difficulty remembering things that you hear.

For help with any of these, connect with your instructor, tutor or us!

Here are some things you could try:

1. When it's time to learn, make sure you have a good space to work. What works for you? Quiet, with music playing, lots of light, not so much light? Find the way you learn the best.
2. Take breaks – be sure to get up and walk around every 10-15 minutes so you don't get too tired.
3. Take notes about what you're learning. Keep some paper nearby. Or maybe use a note app on your phone or computer. Even writing down a few words will help you work through the material and remember it.

Wrapping it all Up



Photo by [Priscilla Du Preez](#)  on
[Unsplash](#)

What do you think?

What resonated with you the most from the training? What will you take with you?

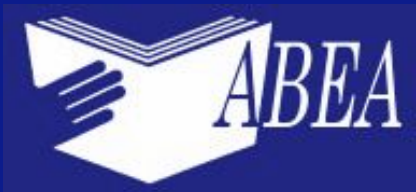


Key Takeaways

Learners with learning challenges

- have a lot that they're bringing to the table – identifying their strengths, talents and interests will be invaluable
- truly need specialized learning strategies to help them succeed and reach their goals

You are LBS's greatest strength – knowledgeable and passionate practitioners are the key to supporting learners to increase their skills, feel confident and transition to their next step.



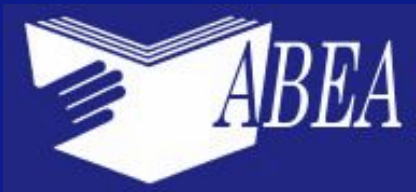
Further Resources

[Centre for ADHD Awareness, Canada \(CADDAC\)](#)

[Centre for Diverse Learners \(CDL\)](#)

[Learning Disability Association of Ontario \(LDAO\)](#)

[Universal Design for Learning Guidelines](#)



References

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Questions /
Comments?

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THANK
YOU

Webinar resources: [Pop Up PD Resources for LBS Educators](#)

Webinar evaluation: completed post live webinar



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