

Supporting Preschoolers with Learning Disabilities based on Children's voices

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Overview

This study investigated current issues of learning disabilities in preschoolers through a literature review. Also, I looked at the studies about children with learning disabilities to determine how they are viewed, and how their voices should be used followed by examining B.C.'s system. Moreover, based on these findings, I developed guidelines that early childhood educators in B.C. can use in helping children with learning disabilities at early ages. **"Preschoolers"** I used "preschoolers" as children who are 3 to 5 years old and those that are eligible to attend child development centres governed by the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

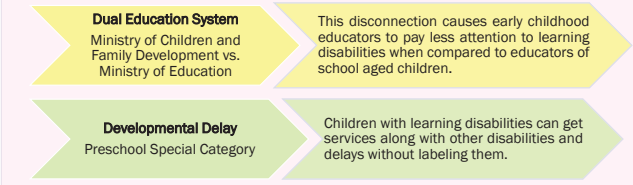
Learning Disabilities in Preschoolers

- There are arguments of categorizing preschoolers with learning disabilities as a subgroup of children with disabilities since development in these young children is characterized by broad variability in rates and patterns of maturation.(National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2006)
- There are many researches that show the existence of learning disabilities in preschoolers, and its effect on their lives especially their social/emotional area. (e.g. Vaughn et al.(1990), Margalit(1998))

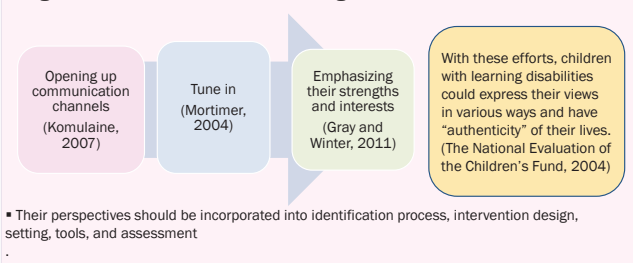
Issues Facing Preschoolers with Learning Disabilities

Determination issues	The discrepancies between IQ and their performance are not proper for preschool children, and there are the difficulties to separate children with learning disabilities from other low achieving students (Haring et al., 1992).
Labeling issues	Labeling enhances the opportunity for funding and it seems to make it easier for professionals to communicate with one another. On the other hand, there is very little to gain and a great deal to lose from labeling a preschooler as having learning disabilities. It tends to lower the expectations of teachers who are delivering services to the special learner. In this case, children are less likely to be treated normally, their opportunities for normal schooling are reduced, and the main focus tends to be on the students' weaknesses instead of their strengths (Haring et al., 1992).
Various delivering services/support by different service providers.	According to Snyder et al. (1994), each state had their own system to determine and categorize. (date collected in 1992, USA)

Responses in B.C.



Images of Preschoolers with Learning Disabilities



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Guideline - Learning Disabilities in Preschoolers for Early Childhood Educators in B.C.

What are the learning disabilities?

Learning disabilities refer to a variety of disorders that affect a person's ability to obtain, remember, recall, understand, and organize the use of information taken in through their senses. Learning disabilities can also vary in degrees of severity and how they affect people throughout their lifetimes. They're not caused by cultural or language differences and they're not due to social economics (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2006).

Learning disabilities in preschoolers?

It is hard to determinate learning disabilities in children before schooling because of their broad variability in rates and patterns of maturation. However, learning disabilities are life long disabilities and many research studies have shown evidence of the existence of learning disabilities in preschoolers especially their social/emotional impact. They also reported that preschoolers who were later identified with learning disabilities were already rejected by their classmates at these early stages. Therefore, early identification, and intervention are of the utmost importance.

What are the indicators?

We need to look carefully if the child showing the following attributes:

- (1) Lack of concept development;
- (2) Speech delays;
- (3) Receptive and expressive language delays;
- (4) Directionality problems;
- (5) Gross and fine motor delays;
- (6) Attention problems;
- (7) Hyperactivity;
- (8) Immature reasoning abilities;
- (9) Visual and/or auditory perceptual problems;
- (10) Lack of academic readiness skills (i.e., alphabet knowledge, quantitative concepts, etc.);
- (11) Social and/or affective skills deficits.

(Haring et al. 1992)

Assessment based on observation should be Child-centred. It should arise naturally from familiar situations in which the child is able to show off his or her best as well as their level of need. This is most likely to happen in spontaneous play arising from the opportunities that have been set up in early year settings, rather than the practitioner isolating a child for 'special testing'. Moreover, to increase reliability and validity, it should be conducted multiple times and in varying contexts including risk indicators and protective factors. Family involvement is a key component of special education, especially for younger children. Also, one of the characteristics of learning disabilities is comorbidity. Children can show two or more learning problems simultaneously, and many times this is with ADHD.

If these indicators are present...

- (1) Document it.
- (2) Consult with your supervisors
- (3) Talk to parents in a respectful manner
- (4) Contact proper early intervention service providers
- (5) Cooperate with other professionals

Early intervention services providers

In B.C., the term, "developmental delay" is used for any type of learning disabilities in preschoolers. The Ministry of Children and Family Development provides early intervention services which are tailored to the specific needs of each child with the goal of furthering development and enhancing the child's potential for growth and development. Depending on the needs of a child, they provide five different early intervention programs to including the Infant Development Program, Aboriginal Infant Development, Supported Child Development, Aboriginal Supported Child Development, and Early Intervention Therapy Program.

Quality early childhood education

When children are exposed to high quality learning opportunities prior to kindergarten, they are less likely to experience school failure and be misidentified as having learning disabilities in their early grades of school. Therefore, providing quality early childhood education is the most effective way to support children who have learning disabilities without labeling them as learning disable.

Remember

Along with their parents, we are the primary care givers for children. We are responsible for providing a nurturing learning environment for all children including those with learning disabilities. We should put effort into having professional development opportunities related to this topic in order to provide proper support to all children.