

Resources

Adults and Learning Disabilities: Recent Publications

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Introduction

There is a growing recognition of the need for greater understanding of adults with learning disabilities (LD). This is profoundly so in the field of adult education, as many of our students continue to struggle with educational challenges that while typically understood and accommodated in childhood/adolescence, are often dismissed or overlooked in maturity.

Steven Horowitz, Director of LD Resources & Essential Information at the National Center for Learning Disabilities, notes that “39 percent of students with LD drop out of high school without a general diploma. Only 13 percent of students with LD (compared to 53 percent of non-disabled students in the general population) attend a 4-year post-secondary program within 2 years of leaving high school” (Horowitz, n.d., p. 1). These figures indicate that regardless of context, developing a greater understanding of the educational challenges and opportunities for these adults is of critical importance.

The following are some recent publications that address various disabilities common amongst adult students. While limited, it provides a starting point for those interested in this growing area of research and practice.

Barkley, R.A. & Benton, C.M. (2010). *Taking charge of adult ADHD*. New York: Guilford Press.

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Barkley, R.A. (2013). *Taking charge of ADHD: The complete authoritative guide for parents* (3rd Ed.). New York: The Guilford Press.

Russell Barkley's work on children with ADHD is well established. Now in its third edition, *Taking Charge of ADHD* (2013) is not only a useful guide for the parents of ADHD children, but is rich with insights that mentors and teachers of adults with ADHD will find enlightening and helpful. The book moves neatly from a clear description of the disorder to chapters on effective parenting, coping strategies, and medications.

Coupled with Barkley and Benton's 2010 work specifically addressing adult ADHD, the pair provide a robust picture of the challenges posed by this disorder as social roles and responsibilities change across the lifespan. Teachers will find Barkley and Benton's work particularly useful as a tool for recognizing the symptoms of ADHD and providing 8 useful rules for managing the disorder in adulthood.

Of particular value, is the book's focus on various life situations in Chapter 3, including behavior in the workplace, managing personal finances, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle—issues that routinely find their way into adult education settings. Barkley and Benton's work provides useful insights for adult educators working with ADHD students who are attempting to incorporate continued learning into what are already complex and challenging life situations.

Eide, B.L. & Eide, F.F. (2012). *The dyslexic advantage: Unlocking the hidden potential of the dyslexic brain*. New York: Plume.

It is, indeed, odd to be including *The Dyslexic Advantage* (2012) in an article addressing learning disabilities, as the primary point of this book is to alter the general perception that dyslexics are somehow "slow" or "unintelligent." To that end, Eide and Eide present "a new view of dyslexia" (p. 3) as a "processing style" (p. 4) that while causing challenges to learning how to read and write, also indicate a predisposition to other important ways of thinking and learning.

The authors point out that in addition to the transposition of letters and numbers (typically associated with dyslexia), dyslexic processing typically strengthens such things as material reasoning (utilized by architects and engineers) and narrative reasoning (used by novelists and

attorneys). And while early diagnosis is important, the continued framing of dyslexia as a disability—often unwittingly perpetrated by educators—overlooks the opportunity to reframe dyslexic processing and its long-term potentials.

Through the use of case studies and accessible sections on brain structure and processing, the authors provide a strong foundation for understanding dyslexia and its impact on learning. In addition, the final chapters provide an outstanding guide for addressing dyslexic processing across the lifespan, including sections of negotiating college study and “thriving in the workplace” (p. 238).

Mierzwik, D. (2013). *Understanding and teaching at-risk adult students*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

While not focusing on learning disabilities explicitly, Mierzwik’s *Understanding and Teaching At-Risk Adult Students* (2013), provides a clear, practical guide for working with students whose at risk status is often the result of undiagnosed or unaddressed learning and/or behavioral disorders. A former middle school teacher, Mierzwik now works in correctional education, and this recent work poignantly addresses the difficulties of maintaining professional distance with students while “understanding the challenges he or she has overcome and those challenges he or she is still facing” (p. ix).

Focused largely on working with students in the criminal justice system, this book will be particularly helpful for correctional educators. Nevertheless, as is so often the case, at risk students often represent a mix of challenges that make the creation of safe learning environments and useful curricula particularly difficult to achieve. Poverty, addiction, crime, developmental delay, learning disability, behavioral disorder, and mental illness often mix in ways that require educators who are both attuned to their students and invested in adapting to their changing needs.

In response, Mierzwik has produced a compelling and concise text that addresses these complex issues while providing a structure for classroom management, the delivery of new materials, and explicit teaching strategies and activities. While a slim volume (just over 100 pages) this work provides insights that practitioners working in any context will find immediately helpful.

Sicile-Kira, C (2012). *A full life with autism: From learning to forming relationships to achieving independence*. New York: Palgrave.

A writer for the *Huffington Post* and blogger for *Psychology Today*, Chantal Sicile-Kira writes with a style that is insightful, touching, and highly accessible—reminiscent of Mary Pipher’s *Another Country* or *Reviving Ophelia*. And like Pipher, her work is rich with material supported by research and enlivened by experience. Indeed, her co-author for this work, Sicile-Kira’s son, Jeremy, was diagnosed with severe autism at birth.

These lived experiences shape an honest and hopeful account of the challenges faced by those with autism as they work toward lives of independence. Addressing the development of life skills, the complexities of building and maintaining relationships, the importance of supports for adult learning and college study, and the details of finding and keeping a job, this work is a must read for those working with autistic adult learners.

Of particular interest are the portions at the end of each chapter written by Jeremy and providing a list of “helpful hints” for both autistic adults and their advocates. This is a wonderful addition to the growing literature on working with autistic adult learners and a compelling resource for adult educators in any context.

Tyamans, J., Gregg, N., Hock, M., & Gerber, P.J. (2013). *Learning to achieve: A review of the research literature on serving adults with learning disabilities*. Lexington, KY: National Institute for Literacy.

Commissioned by the National Institute for Literacy, this work reflects the current research addressing the provision of services to adults with learning disabilities. Covering assessment, English language learners, accommodations, teaching methods, transition, and the impact of learning disabilities, this text is meant to provide practitioners access to research on “issues consistently raised by service providers working in the field (p. 1).

Perhaps this book's greatest contribution is not as a comprehensive analysis, but rather as an important overview and helpful resource for educators in search of research to support the development of improved programs. The text is thick with references and critiques of the current research and its implications for practitioners.

As an introduction to the research on supporting adults with learning disabilities, this a useful work; but it is perhaps a better reference source for those seeking a better grasp of the current status and future directions of this important area of study.

References

Horowitz, S.H. (n.d.). *Learning disabilities in adulthood*. National Center for Learning Disabilities. Retrieved December 6, 2013, from <http://www.nclld.org/adults-learning-disabilities/living-disability-tips-learning-disabilities-adulthood>

