

# communique

*A different way of learning can lead to success.*

VOLUME 31 NUMBER 2 SUMMER 2002

THE PUBLICATION OF THE LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

## LDAO LAUNCHES THE VIRTUAL SERVICE: [www.ldao.on.ca](http://www.ldao.on.ca) MARCH 1, 2002



Minister of Citizenship Cam Jackson helps LDAO Executive Director Carol Yaworski launch the Virtual Service. The Ministry of Citizenship gave major funding to support the set up of the Virtual Service.



Hellen Bogie, Director of Provincial Schools welcomes guests to the launch of the Virtual Service at Trillium School in Milton. From left to right: Minister Cam Jackson, MPP Ted Chudleigh, Executive Director Carol Yaworski, Director Hellen Bogie.



LDAO Virtual Services Program gets a big boost from XEROX Canada Ltd. From left to right: Ted Chudleigh, Cam Jackson, Carol Yaworski, XEROX Canada Director of Human Resources, Tony Martino.



TransCanada PipeLines representatives Janice Badgley, Community and Aboriginal Relations Liaison, and Ken McBride, Niagara AOI Manager, with Minister Cam Jackson. TransCanada PipeLines is a supporter of the Virtual Service.

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## President's Message

As my term as President draws to a close, this is my last opportunity to communicate in this column with our members and stakeholders. I want to thank the multitude of volunteers who power our organization by participating at our chapters and at the provincial level on committees, projects and focus groups. I also want to thank our incredibly talented Board of Directors and the members of the Executive whose advice and efforts I have relied upon, with great respect and appreciation for how they assisted me in my role. Last of all, I want to thank our tireless and dedicated staff who make LDAO happen, day in and day out.

While there may be both praise and criticism for how LDAO has evolved, I believe that we are on a path that has made the organization more professional, raised our profile with stakeholders and created a culture of innovation. The continuation of this process is reflected in our new strategic plan, adopted at our last Board meeting. This will be our blueprint for the next several years.

The strategic plan sets the following goals:

- ◆ Create a regional centre model for frontline service delivery
- ◆ Improve our communications capabilities
- ◆ Re-imaging and re-branding LDAO's role, services and products
- ◆ Improve LDAO's research leadership
- ◆ Continue the emphasis on developing partnerships with government and private sector stakeholders



*President, Doug Waxman.*

We will provide regular updates on our progress in implementing these goals.

I thank you all for this amazing opportunity and honour of having been your President. This has provided an opportunity for personal growth and the fulfillment of a personal goal. While I did not achieve all of my agenda, I was fortunate to be President in a time when so much was achieved: the Promoting Early Intervention initiative, the launch of the Virtual Service, expanded staff levels, and an improved physical plant to mention just a few things.

As Past President, I will support Isabel Shessel, the new President, as she leads us through continued progress. I wish you all a safe and happy summer. ☺

## communique

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Communique provides a forum for information, news and opinions relevant to the field of learning disabilities. The Association does not, in any sense, endorse opinions expressed or methods or programs mentioned. Articles may be reprinted unless otherwise stated. Please mention Communique as the source if and when articles are reprinted.

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## Message From The Executive Director

In this issue of *Communique* we are focussing on services in secondary and post-secondary education. The fact is that the status of services in these two areas could not be more different in terms of quality and consistency of support for students with disabilities.

First the bad news. While many issues of concern exist within the elementary system with regards to access to appropriate services and programs, it is a paradise compared to what exists for students when they enter secondary school. The stakes in secondary school are high, with the Grade 10 literacy test representing a huge focus and fear for students with LD and their parents. In addition, students are adapting to a rigorous new curriculum and must contend with semesters, more teachers and greatly increased demands on their organizational skills. As well, of course, they are also dealing with adolescence and all of its challenges.

They face all of these factors in larger schools with bigger enrolments and an expectation on the part of many of their teachers that it is the student's responsibility to ensure that their learning and accommodation needs are met. As a result, many students fall through the cracks and far too many drop out. Please

read about SOAR elsewhere in this newsletter for information on what LDAO is doing to address some of the challenges that secondary students and their teachers face.

At an advocacy level, we have been meeting with the Curriculum Branch of the Ministry of Education to address both general and specific concerns about curriculum. We continue to partner with the Provincial Demonstration Schools to discuss issues of common concern and to jointly develop solutions and approaches. Services in secondary education are an advocacy priority for LDAO right now and we will keep you up to date on developments.

Also of concern is the limited number of options for students interested in pursuing trades and similar streams. Currently the options for students are academic or a general stream that leads to no diploma and a bleak future. In a recent speech to the Ontario Teachers' Federation, the new Minister of Education, the Hon. Elizabeth Witmer identified this concern as a priority for her Ministry to address under her leadership. LDAO will ensure that we have input on this important issue.

The better news is in post-secondary. Most colleges and universities in Ontario have



*Executive Director, Carol Yaworski.*

responsive student services offices with knowledgeable personnel. The Learning Opportunities Task Force pilots have provided excellent service models. As a result of recently extended funding, all colleges and universities will be able to hire learning strategists and learning technologists starting this fall.

As the picture in post-secondary is getting brighter, our continuing challenge is to address the needs of secondary students so that they can succeed enough to make post-secondary education an option.

I wish you all a wonderful summer and we'll see you in the fall. ☺

### CONFERENCE CALENDAR

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#### **October 10-12, 2002** **24th. International Conference** **on Learning Disabilities**

Denver, Colorado  
Sponsored by Council for  
Learning Disabilities  
Cost: \$135-210 (US\$)  
Contact: CLD  
P.O. Box 40303  
Overland Park, KS  
66204-4303, USA  
Tel: 913-492-8755  
[www.cldinternational.org](http://www.cldinternational.org)

#### **November 7-9, 2002** **Ontario CEC Conference**

Oakville, Ontario  
Contact: Cindy Perras  
905-1010 X 3125  
[cindy.perras@peelsb.com](mailto:cindy.perras@peelsb.com)

#### **November 13-16, 2002** **IDA 53rd. Annual Conference**

Atlanta, Georgia  
Contact: International Dyslexia Assoc.  
Tel: 800-ADCD-123  
[info@interdys.org](mailto:info@interdys.org)

## ON THE LEGISLATIVE FRONT

### Secondary School Reform and Students with Learning Disabilities

A great deal has been written in the newspapers of Ontario about the concerns that people have about the “double cohort” and the lack of adequate future space for secondary students in the post-secondary educational sector. People whose children are not close to graduation tend to ignore this on the grounds that it does not affect them and their children directly. The “double cohort” issue is just one of several very important topics that relate to the dramatic changes that have been made over the last few years to the way that the secondary schools of Ontario educate our young people. Although important, it is certainly not the most important issue for the students about whom we are most concerned: students with learning disabilities.

All aspects of secondary schooling have been changed. In commenting upon these, it is important to note that all of the following observations related to some of the key changes are based on the primary underlying premise that students with learning disabilities, who have average capabilities, are able to participate in secondary education successfully and graduate, provided that they are taught the way that they learn best and that they are guaranteed access to the accommodations which they have a right to have and without which they may turn out to be unsuccessful.

#### The number of years spent in school

The five-year program has been eliminated. The majority, though certainly not all, of secondary students in Ontario will, in the future, complete their secondary education in four years, rather than in the five, which has been the case for many years. This change brings Ontario in line with most other jurisdictions in Canada and the rest of the western world where students typically leave secondary

school at the age of 18 and proceed to post-secondary education or employment.

Although some people have expressed a concern about 18 year olds being too young for university or college, there is in fact no reason to consider that this decision is harmful to most students.

In order to obtain a graduation diploma, students are required to obtain a total of thirty credits. Some of these credits are compulsory, especially during the intermediate (grade 9 and 10) years, while others are optional. The substitution of certain credits for exceptional students has



been maintained and, for example, those students who have language processing-related difficulties may still be exempted from the compulsory French credit.

The change does not mean that some students, including some of those who have learning disabilities, may not in fact spend more than four years in secondary school. A reduced workload, i.e., taking fewer credits than the maximum, may be a very important and helpful form of accommodation for students with LD. It may also arise that a student first takes a course at a lower level or standard in order to enhance his or her basic academic skills

or knowledge. Then once they have reached mastery of the requisite skills, they are able to proceed to a more demanding level of the same subject area.

Parents of students with learning disabilities and the students themselves should not be intimidated by the elimination of the fifth year of secondary school education. It is important to ensure instead that the student’s annual educational plan reflects his or her strengths and needs, that the recommendations of the IEP are delivered in all aspects of the student’s education and that he or she has access to the requisite accommodations in all aspects of education. Whether under these circumstances the student obtains a secondary school graduation diploma in four, five or perhaps even more years, is immaterial.

#### Graduation requirements: the Grade 10 literacy test

While many people focus on the double cohort issue, however transitory this will be, many others agonize over the Grade 10 literacy test almost to the exclusion of everything else. In order to graduate from secondary school with a diploma, all students are expected to have thirty credits, to have passed the Grade 10 literacy test and to have done 40 hours of community activity. While there are other components, these three represent the most important issues.

Students write the Grade 10 literacy test during Grade 10, but if unsuccessful, they may rewrite it as many times as it takes them to pass, while they are registered as secondary school students. The test reflects a Grade 9 reading and writing level and is expected to assure that all those who get a secondary school diploma in Ontario are functionally literate. An important outcome, most people would agree.

*(continued on page 5)*



## **On The Legislative Front** **cont. from page 4**

Where students are not deemed ready for the test by the school and their parents, they may postpone writing the test to a later grade. Students who have IEPs should receive the accommodations that are listed in their IEP for the purposes of Provincial testing, such as extra time, a different location, the use of assistive technology, etc. The requirement is that students should be able to demonstrate their reading and writing competence, with the focus being placed on comprehension and application of the skills, rather than strictly on the mechanical aspects of these two key tasks. Ensuring that the student's IEP lists the requisite accommodations and that the student understands how to use the accommodations beneficially during the test are the most important components here. Parents need to practice their best advocacy skills to ensure that their children are not exempted inappropriately from the test and that they have access to accommodations.

LDAO supports the Grade 10 literacy test, but insists upon the provision of all appropriate accommodations to all students with learning disabilities when they write the test.

### **Accessing the curriculum**

The Ontario curriculum has been changed dramatically. The curriculum content is much more challenging in some areas than it was before. There is a greater demand for language competence in all subjects even math and the sciences than was the case before. However, the new curriculum is generally very good and will enable students to be eventually more successful in their future education, training and employment. That is the good news.

The less good news is that many subjects do not yet have textbooks for the new curriculum. Teachers are not yet familiar with the new and challenging requirements of the curriculum, the expected outcomes and do not always know how they can

modify their teaching strategies to ensure that all students learn, without lowering standards or watering down content. Many of them are not yet familiar with assistive technology, which is different from simply utilizing a computer or surfing the Net.

As a result, many students with learning disabilities are being taught in the way that the teacher can manage, rather than how they learn best. Many others do not have access to the requisite accommodations including assistive technology without which students with learning disabilities often cannot demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Where technology is available, it is often separated from the regular classroom setting and is seen as a separate component of the student's education. As a result, many students prefer to struggle without the technology and accommodations that would make their lives so much simpler, than always go to the "dummy lab" to get help. This has got to be changed and assistive technology must become an integral part of the classroom setting and the curriculum.

The new curriculum in grades 9 and 10 was introduced at the applied and academic levels. In the senior years, the levels relate to the future direction that the student will likely choose: university, college and workplace. It quickly became clear that many students, not just those who have learning disabilities, do not arrive in Grade 9 with the necessary skills to access the Grade 9 curriculum. But there was no basic level any longer.

To address these difficulties faced by many students, the Ministry gave approval to school boards to develop locally developed courses to assist students to bridge the knowledge and/or skill gap. Every board may offer three compulsory credit courses at the locally developed level to focus on English, math and science. The stated intent was that, after participating in these courses, students will likely acquire the skill sets that will then enable them to proceed to the more mainstream course

levels and go on to the post-secondary destination of their choice.

As is often the case, confusion followed. Many school boards renamed the locally developed courses as "essential courses" and/or "essential academic courses", which communicated to the parents a very different set of expectations. While the skills that are supposed to be taught in these courses are indeed essential, often there are limited opportunities for the teaching of compensatory strategies, accommodations or metacognitive skills. Many students continue in the locally developed stream and are then automatically exempted from the Grade 10 literacy test and the path towards secondary school graduation. This in turn has a significant impact on their future opportunities for further education and training.

There is nothing wrong with locally developed courses. But parents and students should be properly informed about what these courses teach, what they lead on to and assure the implementation of the student's IEP. Locally developed courses do not take the place of IEP mandated special education components.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that eventually the secondary school program offered in Ontario's secondary schools will be superior to the one available before, and secondary school graduates will be better prepared for their future destination than was the case in the past. But in order to achieve these goals, there needs to be many changes made, especially when it comes to students with learning disabilities.

Parents must continue to be vigilant and pro-active advocates and schools and teachers must ensure that they comply with their legislated mandate. That is the road to success for this particular group of learners. 🌟

*Eva Nichols, Legislation and  
Government Liaison Consultant*

# Employment Issues for Adults with Learning Disabilities

For years, learning disabilities, described as a central nervous system disorder that disrupts the basic processes involved in the registration, integration and expression of language and/or symbolic-based materials, were seen as children's issues. Many believed that once the child completed school, the learning disability would disappear. Research has shown that learning disabilities continue to be a daunting lifelong challenge. Many adults with learning disabilities struggle all their lives with little education, underemployment and poor life choices.



Often adults with LD go through life feeling discouraged, depressed and anxious. Having not mastered the academic skills during school-age years, they enter the workforce without appropriate accommodations or strategic tools to assist their performance.



Countless suffer in silence, never disclosing to friends, families or employers because they fear being stereotyped or face outright discrimination. Many of these adults feel that their problems stem from their lack of commitment to tasks, unwillingness to try, lack of motivation or limited knowledge compared to others.

Often adults with LD go through life feeling discouraged, depressed and anxious. Having not mastered the academic skills during school-age years, they enter the workforce without appropriate accommodations or strategic tools to assist their performance. With continued lack of understanding, adults with LD could face disastrous consequences. These could include failure, confusion, anger, hopelessness, lower self-esteem and learned helplessness. All of these factors can lead to unemployment, underemployment and marginalization by

society. Learning disabilities affect all aspects of a person's life.

With the right training, adults with LD have a chance to realize their full potential.

The ALDERCentre is a non-profit community agency located in Toronto which provides pre-employment training consisting of traditional tools and LD specialized sessions. Resume writing, mock interviews, goal-setting, time management strategies and self-directed job searches are taught through multiple models. Specialized sessions are provided with the holistic focus on helping the adult with LD acquire accommodations/modifications for success within competitive employment. Specialized sessions include self-esteem workshops, interpersonal skill development, disclosure issues and positive and negative competency statements about learning disabilities to provide the adult with needed tools in securing mainstream employment.

Coping strategies are addressed based on the individual's profile. Some strategies include adaptive technologies (eg. jornada-personal organizers), tape recorders, computer-based spelling programs or visual screens that allow the adult with LD to accommodate their challenges in the workplace.

The ALDERCentre offers assertiveness training through self-advocacy. Counsellors work with clients to develop competency statements that focus on individual strengths and weaknesses. Clients' understanding of how their learning disabilities affect them in the workplace and what tools are needed to assist them could lead to greater success in the mainstream workplace. If needed, a job coach can be arranged to act as a liaison



between the client and the employer to arrange accommodations ranging from simple modifications such as seating within the workplace, instruction on tape, typed assignments and time allocation to complete tasks to more complex modifications such as adaptive devices like Dragon, WIN and Kurzweil.

Learning how to learn within the limitations of a specific learning disability can set up a lifelong pattern of success. According to Ziegert & Smith, 1997 and Ginsberg & Reiff, 1992 highly successful LD adults share several themes of self-regulation. These are:

- ◆ Desire to prove oneself; to develop determination. The ability to transcend adversity and negative life experiences; recognition of a personal sense of purpose.
- ◆ Goal orientation: realistic, achievable aspirations that are divided into short and long-term goals.
- ◆ Reframing: reinterpreting the LD experience in a more positive and

*(continued on page 7)*

**Employment Issues**  
cont. from page 6

productive manner by recognizing and accepting the learning disability, recognizing personal weaknesses and taking action.

- ◆ Persistence: the development of a work ethic that transcends those around them because of necessity and choice.
- ◆ Goodness of fit: finding environments that allowed support and nurturance.
- ◆ Learned creativity: manipulation of the educational and vocational systems.
- ◆ Social ecologies: supportive people forming networks of family and friends to help with self-improvement programs.

In summary, specialized LD employment services can prepare an adult with learning disabilities to enter/re-enter the labour force with renewed confidence. The ALDERCentre has developed a comprehensive model of services for adults with LD in the Greater Toronto area.

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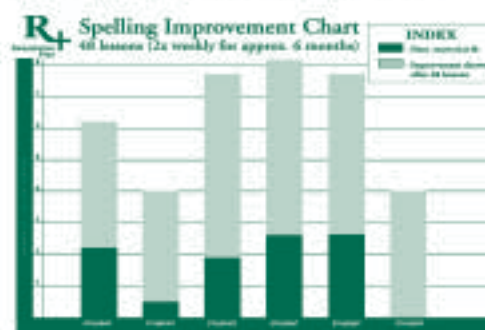
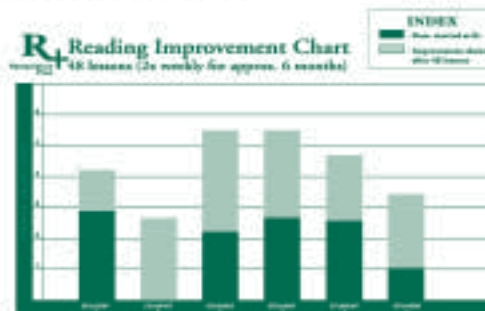
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*Karen Thornton, Program Manager,  
ALDERCentre. Tel: (416) 693-2922,  
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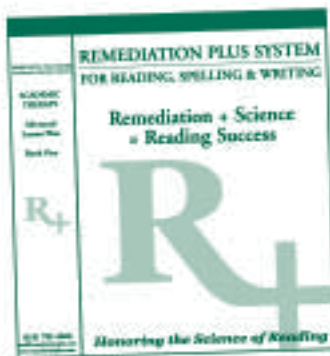
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# Introducing Enhanced Services for Students with Learning Disabilities in Ontario's Colleges and Universities

During the past four years the Learning Opportunities Task Force (LOTF) and its pilot projects have been engaged in researching the supports that students with specific learning disabilities most value and benefit from during their post-secondary education. Based on the Task Force's findings, it is clear that three key components should now be made available to all students with learning disabilities throughout the post-secondary educational system. These are:

- ◆ an appropriate diagnostic assessment of the student's learning disabilities;
- ◆ access to the supports that can be provided by an appropriately qualified and knowledgeable learning strategist;
- ◆ access to the services and accommodations made possible through the work of an assistive technologist, who is knowledgeable about learning disabilities.

This observation is based on the information provided to the Task Force by the over 1400 participating pilot students over the past four years, whose strengths, needs, talents, interests and support requirements were, as one would expect, quite diverse. Clearly one size or one model does not fit all. It is demonstrated through the data obtained to date that students tend to value program components that provide them with:

- ◆ greater levels of self awareness and an understanding of their learning disabilities (assessment, self-awareness and self-advocacy training, and individual counseling);
- ◆ their educational success and achievement ( assistive technology, accommodations, individual advising and planning and metacognitive and learning strategy training).

On the other hand, they appear to value less those components that they do not see as benefiting them directly, e.g., social skills training, college success or other non-credit specialized courses and self-

help support groups. This does not mean that these components are not or cannot be beneficial to the students, but rather that the students do not always recognize the potential benefit and therefore are less likely to utilize them.

The above preliminary findings led the Learning Opportunities Task Force to submit a number of preliminary recommendations to the Government of Ontario. The Government of Ontario in turn announced the establishment of the new **Post-Secondary Enhanced Services Fund for Students with Learning Disabilities**.



The Minister, the Hon. Dianne Cunningham, stated on February 7, 2002, that this fund will enable eligible colleges and universities to enhance and strengthen their abilities to serve the academic support needs of post-secondary students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities. The funds will be provided through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU). The project will be administered by the Learning Opportunities Task Force, the group, led by Dr. Bette Stephenson, that has been engaged, together with ten pilot institutions, in researching what these students need in order to be successful in their post-secondary education throughout Ontario.

These funds are new not reallocated dollars, amounting up to five million dollars per annum and are in addition to

the Ministry's well-established Accessibility Fund, which supports existing offices and services for students with disabilities in colleges and universities across the province.

**The Enhanced Services Fund for Students with LD** recognizes the high proportion of students with specific learning disabilities who now have better access to Ontario colleges and universities. Improvements in accessibility have created particular pressures for post-secondary institutions eager to assist these motivated students. The continued academic and future employment success of such students requires dedicated attention. The Ministry and the Learning Opportunities Task Force will work with interested post-secondary institutions to help such able students more closely realize their true potentials.

**The Enhanced Services Fund for Students with LD** is available to publicly funded colleges and universities in Ontario who demonstrate:

- ◆ willingness to use these funds to help hire and retain qualified staff filling either or both of two direct service positions in disability services: Learning Strategists and Assistive Technologists;
- ◆ commitment to ensuring that the new service provider staff will work directly with students diagnosed ("confirmed") with specific learning disabilities;
- ◆ recognition that monies from the Enhanced Services Fund for Students with LD **supplement** the Accessibility Fund allocation, and **enhance** current service provision, i.e., recipient institutions are expected to continue fulfilling their special needs obligations and their responsibilities under the Ontario Human Rights Code to provide access, services and accommodations to eligible students with disabilities;

*(continued on page 9)*



## Supports for Student Achievement in the New Ontario Secondary School Program

A wide variety of strategies and program options is available to assist Grade 9 students in their transition from elementary to secondary school.

The following supports for students are key components of the new secondary school program:

- one locally developed compulsory credit course in each of English, math and science to provide students with the opportunity to earn compulsory credits toward the diploma while reinforcing their knowledge and skills to prepare them for success in subsequent courses;
- locally developed optional credit courses to provide a 'stepping-stone' between provincially developed courses and to accommodate educational and /or career preparation needs of students, e.g., as a stepping stone to workplace preparation courses;
- up to 4 learning strategies credit courses in Grades 9 to 12 to help students become better, more independent learners;
- substitution of up to 3 compulsory credit requirements with other courses that meet compulsory credit requirements;
- job shadowing and work experience opportunities to enrich courses with 'real world' applications and increase student motivation;

- a choice between academic and applied courses so that parents and students may choose a preferred approach to learning;
- crossover materials between Grade 9 and 10 academic and applied courses and transfer courses between Grade 10 and 11 courses and Grade 11 and 12 courses in case students change their minds about postsecondary destinations;
- modifications to curriculum expectations and accommodations to the learning environment for students with an Individual Education Plan;
- funded teacher time to provide remedial support;
- funded before, after school and weekend literacy and numeracy programs for students in grades 7 to 10.

Additional information about these supports for student success in the new secondary school program may be found in Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9 to 12: Program and Diploma Requirements, 1999 on the Ministry website at:

<http://mettowas21.edu.gov.on.ca:80/eng/document/curricul/secondary/oss/oss.html>.

*By Mary Smart, Education Officer, Secondary School Project, Ministry of Education*

### **Introducing Enhanced Services** *cont. from page 8*

- commitment to meeting the reporting and accountability expectations related to these funds, including a willingness to share their findings and results with other post-secondary institutions.

To guarantee consistency in the diagnostic process for identifying and assessing learning disabilities in the student population, the LOTF and MTCU have stipulated the use of the new definition of learning disabilities, developed by LDAO in 2001 and the application of a consistent diagnostic and documentation process, based on the new definition.

Funding will be provided for the hiring of Learning Strategists. The value of learning strategy instruction and coaching has been well established within the LOTF pilot projects. Over 80% of pilot students stated how beneficial this support has been to them over the past four years. The role of the learning strategist is pivotal in helping students to understand their learning

disabilities, to assess their capacity to use learning strategies and to apply such strategies to better actualize their academic abilities.

Funding will also be provided for the hiring of Assistive Technologists, who are experts in the technology field but also have extensive knowledge and understanding of learning disabilities. The increasing availability and successful use of assistive technology suitable to individuals studying in the post-secondary sector makes this one of the more productive and requested academic accommodations. But LOTF's research has shown that the benefit of such services without the support of a knowledgeable assistive technologist is minimal.

All colleges and universities in Ontario were invited to submit applications for the Enhanced Services Fund. The LOTF was delighted that all institutions within the public sector submitted applications for the enhanced services fund in April 2002. It was most encouraging to see how

committed these institutions are to providing the requisite supports and services to their students with learning disabilities.

Funding has been offered to all colleges and universities starting in September 2002. A total of close to 3300 students with learning disabilities will benefit from these proposed enhanced services, which are expected to supplement and complement the institutions' existing services to their students with LD. The enhanced services fund is an annually renewable allocation, depending on the participating institutions' results, reports and demonstrated accountability. There is no question that this initiative will substantially improve the post-secondary educational opportunities that are available to secondary school graduates with learning disabilities throughout Ontario.

*Eva Nichols, Senior Consultant to the Chairman of the Learning Opportunities Task Force*

# UNIVERSAL INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

## PART 1 – THE ISSUE



Universal instructional design implies a shared accountability for success between students and instructors. It is a recognition that students are our most important consumers. It acknowledges that they are entitled to instruction that meets their diverse abilities and styles of learning in an environment in which diversity is recognized and success is supported. The

principles of universal instructional design are challenging to implement though they seem simple enough at first glance. It is about identifying key concepts and presenting them in ways that make them accessible to students with auditory and visual learning disabilities, short attention spans, limited listening and note taking skills or high anxiety. It is about adapting

instruction to students as much as we expect students to adapt to instruction. It is about ensuring adequate support for students, in terms of a variety of human resources, technology and peer services. It is about cooperative learning. It is about increasing interaction between teachers and students. It is about form and format. It is about variety and flexibility within established learning outcomes for individual courses.

The premise of this approach is straightforward. If we design and deliver curriculum according to the principles of universal instruction and adult learning, we increase the accessibility of content for all students, regardless of disability or learning style. It sounds logical, doesn't it? Yet, it is a significant challenge. Some in the field of learning disabilities misunderstand the approach. They feel an emphasis on building accessible learning communities through the implementation of this approach suggests that we believe students with learning disabilities need no other accommodation or supports. That is not so. Students with learning disabilities include the majority of students with disabilities. They are the benchmarks for universal instructional approaches. If course design and delivery meet their needs we believe it will meet the accessibility needs of most learners. Some will need additional support and accommodation. Our goal is to reduce this need. It will be reduced as we increase our capacity to design and deliver courses to the diversity of students rather than those in the middle of the 'bell curve.'

If some in the field of learning disabilities misunderstand the intended outcomes of universal instructional design, so do many teachers. There is a significant difference

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# UNIVERSAL INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

## PART 2 – THE BASICS



The basic premise of the universal instructional design approach is quite clear. If we design and deliver curriculum according to the principles of universal instruction and adult learning, we increase the accessibility of content for all students, regardless of disability or learning style. Combined with principles of adult learning, this approach is a means of ensuring accessible education for all students. There are various versions of the basic principles of universal instructional design, but they have common elements:

1. Teachers determine the essential components of the course. In doing so, they identify the knowledge and skills that students must attain to successfully achieve the intended learning outcomes for the course.
2. Teachers provide clear expectations and feedback. In doing so, they must be

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### *Universal Instructional Design Part I cont. from page 10*

between access and accessibility. Access means availability, such as access to buildings, washrooms, electronic versions of texts, adaptive technology and such systems as Blackboard and WebCT that allow course materials to be placed on line. Access, as availability, is the first step. Beyond availability is the need for course content to be understandable, differentiated, manageable and applicable. This means different formats for presenting information, understanding that information and demonstrating that understanding through application.

Universal instructional design's origin is the diverse learning needs of students, especially those with learning and other disabilities. Its beneficiaries include all students, teachers and educational institutions. As Johann von Goethe wrote, "knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do." ☞

sure that their expectations and feedback convey the essential components of the course.

3. Teachers explore ways to incorporate natural supports for learning. For example, some disability related accommodations benefit all students. In fact, some of the usual accommodations are no more or less than teaching 'best practices.'
4. Teachers explore ways to infuse natural supports, such as cooperative learning, in their courses.
5. Teachers provide multimodal instructional methods. Recognizing that students learn in a variety of ways, teachers are expected to present course content in ways that are adapted to the various and diverse ways that students in all courses learn. Flexibility and variety are the rule.
6. Teachers provide a variety of ways for demonstrating knowledge. They are expected to create alternative ways for students to demonstrate both knowledge and skills. (E.g. option of writing a research paper or completing a presentation).
7. Teachers use technology to enhance learning opportunities. They put material on line on websites, arrange for course listservs and select software that is compatible with screen reader. They arrange for electronic versions of texts.

There are many ways to implement UID principles into education. The Learning Opportunities Task Force is currently funding two projects in this field. One is focused primarily upon building instructor capacity and the other is focused primarily upon redesigning curriculum. They do also have some overlap. In each approach to the implementation of these principles, we are trying to move people from awareness,

through acceptance and into adaptations of the ways in which we design and deliver curriculum. That movement is accomplished through promotion, education, consultation, education, support services and reinforcement of change.

There are barriers to this approach. Some are philosophical. Some are related to the amount of time and energy such implementation demands. Some are systemic and common to most postsecondary institutions. Part of the work is discovering these barriers and finding ways to overcome them. Those who promote the implementation of the principles of universal instructional design know that the outcomes benefit every student and every teacher. We know too that growth comes in stages, and that it is important to "go as far as you can see, and when you get there, you will see farther." ☞

*Jim Bryson, Student Services  
Office, Georgian College, Barrie  
Campus*



# Is Your Teen Ready for a Summer Job?

Check out the “job-ready” skills below to determine how prepared your teen is, and where you may need to do some work together.

## Makes Decisions

Kids with disabilities tend to be overprotected. At a young age—certainly by age 12—allow your child to make choices about, and direct, his or her daily activities. That includes choosing what to wear or what activity to do after school.

## Takes Responsibility

Is your teen responsible for household chores and completing housework on time? In the case of chores, some instructions and set-up may be necessary so your teen can physically complete a task. While it may be faster to do the chores yourself, it’s important to invest the time in your child’s independence. In the area of homework, let your teen manage his or her time and live with the consequences if deadlines aren’t met—like getting zero on an assignment or being unprepared in class.

## Travels Independently

To help your teen gain comfort in using public transit, accompany him or her the first few times to learn routes and how to problem-solve in different situations.

## Has Varied Experiences

Activities that promote independence and allow kids to develop their interests are prerequisites for the world of work. Encourage your child to sign up for summer camps, babysitting, pre-employment programs, volunteer work and co-op placements. When exploring careers, teens need to decide what type of work they want to do. Is there a work environment, a population or a service they are interested in? Without varied experiences, teens have no way to identify and nurture their passions.

## Problem-solves Well

In order to manage or compensate for challenges caused by their disability, teens need to be effective problem-solvers. To develop this skill, encourage your teen to come up with solutions to everyday problems. For example: “You’re always late for the school bus. What can you do differently so that you’re on time?”

## Knows Strengths and Weaknesses

In order to sell themselves to employers, teens need to understand their strengths and weaknesses. Make sure you give your child constructive feedback on how he or she performs. For example: “You are an accurate typist, but you need to be faster to be productive in an office” or “You’re a great speller and have good ideas, but this essay is a bit disorganized.” Help your child gain the insight to assess his or her own performance. For example, if your child volunteers, ask: “What do you like about it? What parts of the job do you do well? Where could you improve?”

## Meets Job Demands

Your teen may be interested in a summer job, but does he or she have the required skills? Measuring skills against job demands can be difficult for teens with disabilities because it forces them to look at their limitations and related accommodations. Teens need to sit down and think about the barriers they’ll run into, and whether there are strategies or supports that can be used to get around them. For example, if the teen has problems with memory, taking notes when the boss gives instructions, or asking the boss to e-mail instructions, can be helpful. Teens need to be able to communicate all of their strengths to the employer and then present solutions—not problems—regarding challenges. Sometimes, the demands of a job cannot be met and it’s important to be realistic in these cases.



## Describes Disability Functionally

Teens need to be able to explain their disability in simple, functional terms that an employer can understand. They need to think about what they can and can’t do as a result of their disability, and how they compensate for any limitations. For example: “My disability makes it hard for me to write, so I use voice-activated software to produce written computer work. I can have the software installed at work, and then I’ll be able to produce work at 30 words per minute.”

*Abridged from an article which appeared in Connections, Spring 2001, the newsletter of the Bloorview Macmillan Centre*

## Strategies Conference, May 2002

Last May, LDA Kingston chapter held a conference at which a group of LD teens spoke to other students and parents about their struggles to succeed in school and what worked for them. Excerpts from a number of the speeches follow:

### Jim in grade 11:

High school is a much different place from public school because it allows you to start to choose subjects of personal interest and ones that you may do well in or even excel at. You must have the support of your parents who act as advocate, resource and refuge. I had a transition plan from public school to high school and I feel that this is essential since I have witnessed students struggle who didn't have a plan. I have an annual Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) meeting that comments on the type of learning disabilities, lists my positives and accommodations needed to achieve my potential. It is a good idea to familiarize yourself with your new high school the last week of August and practise finding your way around the school.

Organization and losing things has been a problem for me so we found user-friendly school supplies: a large backpack, one large zippered binder with dividers for different subjects, a case for pens etc., two copies of my timetable and a school map in plastic in the front of my binder and one in my backpack to refer to quickly. The less stuff, the easier to keep organized and the fewer things to lose.

The first few days of a semester are so vital that, without special help, by the end of the week you are lost. My parents and myself devised a letter that now is working well. At the beginning of each semester we update this letter. It starts with a brief positive statement saying that I have

learning disabilities and that I am eager to learn, enthusiastic, cooperative and diligent. It then lists areas of difficulty and strategies that work for me.

Initially it consisted of several pages but now it is down to one page and with each semester it becomes more concise as I am able to accomplish more. There is a brief cover letter giving my parents' phone number and a contact person in the special education department. On the first day of



each semester I hand a sealed envelope to each of my course teachers, which means that they immediately have the necessary information. It's discreet so that no one else is even aware, and the teacher and I can talk at a mutually convenient time to expand or clarify my special needs

### Jenna in grade 8:

One of the hardest things is when a teacher does not believe or understand about learning differences. So it really helped me when I met a teacher who had read the reports that the psychologist had prepared or the information my mother had sent in about my LD. Another thing that really helps is when I am given a monthly (or more) calendar that states tests, projects, weekly assignments etc., so I can make

sure I am always aware of what is coming up. Since math is such a challenge for me, creating a math rule book that I can use in tests or during homework is also helpful.

This book shows each type of math question with an explanation of how to do it and an example.

This year is my last one in public school and next year I begin my secondary education. This has also been my best year academically speaking. I have felt better

about myself than in the past. One of the reasons is my teacher. She greeted me on the first day and explained how she was going to support me in being successful in grade 8. She said she wanted me to be with my peers as much as possible and she wanted me to see that I could do the work in almost all the areas of the curriculum and she would modify any area I needed. She has stayed after school to help and has modified the workload when I was overwhelmed. The best part has been how she accepts my learning disability but doesn't let me get away with feeling sorry for myself or not working as hard as I can.

The last strategy that I can share with you is probably the most important. If you have a learning disability you must learn about it and learn about yourself. Know what are your strengths and weaknesses. Know what works for you and how your school can help you be successful. Advocate for yourself. Speak to your class, at your school or even at groups so that others can learn about learning differences.

### Anna in grade 12:

The things that helped me in school are the time extensions on tests and my amazing resource teacher who helped me understand that no matter what your grades are you can always succeed. He proved this

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**Strategies Conference**  
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to me by showing me his report cards from high school that were not great, but he is now a teacher.

One of the best things for me has been the understanding of my parents as they helped me with my schoolwork. My Dad is my hero because he had a learning problem and was never identified because of where he lived. He made his way through school and then came to Canada and learned a new language and has succeeded.

One other thing that helps you succeed is to do things that interest you outside of school, so that you have something to look forward to other than school. If you find anything that interests you, go for it and never stop until you reach that goal.

**Nicole in grade 7:**

When I was little I was scared to ask for help because I thought I was going to get

in trouble. But when I got older I learned to ask for help. But by that time I was really far behind and it was really hard to get caught up. I think that a lot of kids are afraid to ask for help and that's why they get behind.

When I figured out that I had a learning disability I thought everyone would hate me, but, to my surprise, they did not care because they were really friends. Sure at first they thought it was weird, but after a while they did not mind.

**Peter in grade 8:**

I didn't realize that I had a learning disability until about grade four, because before that I had always done fairly well in school. Actually the only hint that I had a learning disability was that I always spelled letters backward and my Mom claimed that I had a hard time learning to read. After grade six I attended a late French immersion school and noticed that I had some problems learning grammar, which is what it must have been like

learning to write when I was little. Now I attend W.C. public school and get all the help I am required to have, which I find is enough to get me through but not so much as to make me think that someone else is doing my work.

**Brooke, age 21 years:**

Last year I attended a private college in Toronto for two semesters. I did not finish the program because I was unable to handle the workload. It was very different being away from home. Even though my parents were only a few hours away, they were no longer there to help me when I needed it. I had to live on my own. The tests were harder and the notes were no longer written on the board. It wasn't like high school any more: I had to take the initiative and find ways around the obstacles. I now had to be independent and find other counsellors to guide and support me in the way that my parents previously did. ☺



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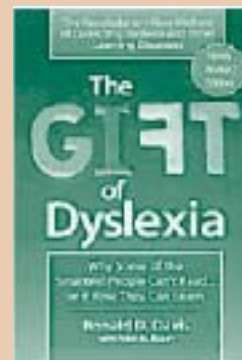
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# WHAT CAN WE DO THIS SUMMER:

## Activities for Children and Parents

### Family End of School Year Checklist

The end of school can be a busy time for you and your kids. Here are some tips to help your child transition into summer time fun with minimal anxiety.

1. Less is more. Don't overbook your schedules. With end-of-year concerts and other school events on top of your daily workload, your child has plenty to do. This teaches time management, a skill needed as they get older. Think twice before adding any other extracurricular activities.
2. Is your child worried that he or she won't be able to see friends during the summer? Have your child collect school friends' telephone numbers as well as snail mail and e-mail addresses. This is a great time to work on social skills; the art of getting along with others.
3. Help them arrange play dates ahead of time for when school is out. This will give them experience in scheduling and making sure to contact friends to get the time, place and transportation lined up so it can be accomplished. How about a reunion picnic with school friends as one get together idea? And don't forget meeting at the movies or the local swimming hole.
4. Talk with your child about what they want to do in the summer. Is it camp or your town's recreation program? Enrol your child in a program that will help him/her make new friends when school is out. Have your child check with friends, family or in the local newspaper to find out what is available. This will help with researching and gathering information and presenting it.
5. Above all, relax and enjoy the change of season. Try to build in a family walk or bike ride after breakfast, lunch or dinner as a way of touching base with your kids. This helps them to realize

that everything doesn't have to cost money. The important things in life are really free.

Listed below are some of the places you can check to see what they have available and if there is a fee:

- ◆ Boys and girls clubs
- ◆ Local churches
- ◆ Museums and Art Galleries
- ◆ YM and YWCA's
- ◆ Recreation and park activities
- ◆ Local theatre groups
- ◆ Local swimming pools
- ◆ Nature centres
- ◆ City and provincial parks
- ◆ Sports: soccer, t-ball, little league
- ◆ Skating rinks
- ◆ Public libraries

### Summer Time Trips

In the privacy of your own car, you can laugh as loud as you want or shout out the answers to questions. So don't hold back when you play these games: laugh, yell or sing your hearts out! The ideas are well suited to driving as they don't involve writing. HAVE FUN!!!

#### Alphabet Words

Starting with A, find words on signs with each alphabet letter. The first person might spot a billboard with the word *all* on it. The next person might spot the word *brake* on a road sign. After you get through, find numbers from 1 to 100.

#### Where Do You Do It?

One person mimics a sound, and everyone tries to guess where this sound is performed. For example, you could make the sound of computer keys tapping, and the answer would be the *in the office*. This game can degenerate quickly into

bathroom humour which may be why kids love it.

#### Building Words

Take turns saying letters and build words together. Someone starts with any letter, maybe an R. The next person thinks of a word, such as rake, and says A. The next person thinks of a word, such as rabbit, and



says B. Each player must have a real word in his/her mind before speaking. If you challenge someone and they don't have a word, they're out.

#### I Spy

Someone says, *I spy with my little eye something green*. Whoever guesses correctly goes next. You could limit the items to what is in the vehicle. Or, you could get tricky and play I Spied, selecting items that you've already passed.

### Kid's Corner: A Time to Share

Now that school is out, it is the time to share with your family what you have learned this year. I am not talking about history dates or science facts but something only you know. What I am talking about is what you have discovered about how you learn best.

Teachers can test and parents can help with homework but only you have the real scoop on what does or doesn't work for

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**What Can We Do This Summer**  
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you. All you have to do is take time to let others know. Share with us what has helped so we can write it down for your next school year and include it in your IEP.

Some things you may want to think about are:

- ◆ Is information easier to understand when it is read to me? Yes  No   
when I read it? Yes  No
- ◆ Do I need larger print to make it easier to read? Yes  No
- ◆ Do I need more time to take tests? Yes  No
- ◆ Do I learn better in group activities? Yes  No
- ◆ Do I learn better in a quiet setting? Yes  No
- ◆ Do I have trouble remembering assignments? Yes  No
- ◆ Do I write down assignments? Yes  No
- ◆ Do I understand assignments? Yes  No
- ◆ Is writing hard for me? Yes  No
- ◆ Can I complete the assignment more successfully if I use shorter answers instead of complete answers? Yes  No
- ◆ What kinds of tests are best for me? Essay? Multiple Choice? True/False? Fill in the blank? (circle one)
- ◆ Other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ Do I like to give book reports? Yes  No
- ◆ Do you use study guides as homework and for studying work? Yes  No

Write down other things that work for you and give a copy to your family and teachers and keep one for yourself. You

know what works for you and what doesn't. You are definitely the expert in this area so share your expertise with us.

### Teacher's Corner

#### Thank You

At this time we want to thank you for all you do during the year:

- ◆ The extra classes you take or teach on your own during the school year and during the summer. Thank you.
- ◆ The extra meetings that are held after school hours. Thank you.
- ◆ The time you take after school to read through the work our children have done during the day and the encouraging messages on their work. Thank you.
- ◆ The time you give to solve problems in school that don't pertain to reading, writing, math, music, PE and art. Thank you.
- ◆ The quiet respect you give to students and parents. Many times we are not aware of the stresses of your day, but you still give your best. Thank you.
- ◆ For your dedication to passing on knowledge to our children as they can have a better life. Thank you.
- ◆ For being able to forgive and forget when hurtful words come out in conversations with students or parents. It's then we realize the love that is there for not only for your job but for the children, families and people you work with. Thank you.
- ◆ For the times when there are conflicts of interests and the child's interest is always put first. Thank you.
- ◆ For the times you let us see your frustrations about situations that can't be controlled and take away from our child's joy of learning. Thank you.
- ◆ For understanding that all children don't learn in the same way and for your willingness to try different

methods and strategies until our children are successful. Thank you.

- ◆ We also want to thank your families for the time they give up with you, so our children get the best possible education possible.

### Parent's Corner

#### Gear up for the summer

It may have seemed like it would never get here but school is now out for the summer. Our kids have spent days learning many new things and we want to help them retain these over the summer months. Now is the time to get their summer gear ready. Things you will need are:

1. A container: portable file box, shoe box, tote bag or book bag
  2. Supplies: pencils, lined and plain paper, scissors, crayons, markers, coloured pencils, ruler, chalk, masking tape, paper clips, ziplock baggies (various sizes), overhead sheets or page protectors, overhead markers, cereal boxes, blank index cards, glue, cookie sheets, powdered sugar, sand, finger paint and hair gel or shaving cream. An extra, if possible, is some age appropriate colourful workbooks. All you need to do is set a time of day where you have 15 to 30 minutes each day to work together. You can make it fun for both you and your child/children. Remember this is not to be a homework time but a fun time to work on skills they have learned in school.
- ◆ The containers should be portable so if you want to work outside you can, or if you want to work in different rooms you can. These can be used to hold and carry supplies.
  - ◆ The shoebox is a great place to keep index cards with spelling words from last year. Let them help you alphabetize them in the box. Take an index card and turn it sideways placing a letter of the

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**What Can We Do This Summer**  
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alphabet on each card. These can now be used to divide the words alphabetically/

- ◆ The cereal boxes can be cut up for puzzles, either using the picture on the box as the puzzle or gluing other pictures on them and then cutting them up. They can also be used by cutting off the front or back and attaching the overhead sheets to them with masking tape to make a magic slate. You can now put worksheets, homemade math sheets or spelling cards under the overhead sheet and your child can write the answers or trace over things with the overhead pen.
- ◆ The worksheets can be used over and over again and the overhead sheets can be wiped off with a damp paper towel.
- ◆ The ziplock baggies and page protectors can also be used with the overhead markers. Place the spelling words in the baggies and worksheets in the page protectors. Make your own Bingo sheets with spelling words and store them in the page protectors along with the index cards with the words on them. You can make as many sets as you want, just make sure that the words are in different places on the sheets. Take turns being the caller.
- ◆ The cookie sheets are for making letters and shapes. Use different textures such as the sand, sugar, paint, hair gel and shaving cream. You can make lines and have your child follow right behind you. Or, your child can make the lines and you follow. Shaving cream and hair gel can be used to locate body parts such as: put shaving cream on your elbow, put the shaving cream on my nose, etc.
- ◆ Older kids can make math flash cards with the index cards, for example,  $2 \times 2 = 4$ . The answers can be cut off and you have to match answers with the problems. They can make their own multiple choice or true/false worksheets

to share with you. The worksheets can be about any topic such as sports, movies, nature or family. Put them in the page protectors and use the overhead pens to answer.

Use your imagination and make it a daily treat to spend some fun time with your kids. ☺

*Abridged from an article that appeared in the May/June 2000 edition of LDA Newsbriefs, a publication of LDA of America. Reprinted with permission.*



## New in the LDAO Library

The following three books discuss their subjects from both a personal and a professional point of view.

**Learning How to Learn: Getting into and Surviving College When You Have a Learning Disability**, by Joyanne Cobb, 2001, Child Welfare League of America Inc., Washington, DC, (\$25.50).

Joyanne Cobb draws on her experience as a student with a learning disability and as a vocational rehabilitation counsellor to give helpful tips to high school and postsecondary students. Some of the information is specific to the U.S. but most is very useful, including her descriptions of common psychoeducational tests used, assistive technologies available, and strategies for studying and time management. The author comments throughout on her own experiences as a student.

**Embracing the Monster: Overcoming the Challenges of Hidden Disabilities**, by Veronica Crawford (with Forward and Commentary by Larry B. Silver), 2002, Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Baltimore, MD, (\$36).

Veronica Crawford struggled with undiagnosed learning disabilities and ADHD until young adulthood and with emotional difficulties that were only diagnosed as bipolar disorder later in life. As a professional she has worked with many individuals with learning, attention and emotional disabilities. Her inspiring autobiography is full of important insights and positive approaches. Dr. Larry Silver, a leading authority in the field of LD, adds his own analysis of her struggles at the end of each chapter.

**Bridging the Gap: Raising a Child with Nonverbal Learning Disorder**, by Rondalyn Varney Whitney, 2002, Berkley Publishing Group, New York, NY, (\$19.99).

Rondalyn Whitney writes from her perspective as an occupational therapist and as a parent of a child with NLD. She uses numerous examples from her son Zak's life to capture the perspective of someone growing up with NLD. There are many practical suggestions on dealing with everyday life, including emotional-social issues, discipline, safety, schooling and finding the right professional help. Her concept of using "teaching moments" is particularly helpful.

*Check for these books in your local bookstore,  
or call Parentbooks 1-800-209-9182, [www.parentbookstore.com](http://www.parentbookstore.com).*



# The Learning-to-Learn Differently Program

Thanks to the generous support of both the Ontario Government's Early Years Fund and Sobey's Ontario, a new and exciting program began operation last fall in several Toronto schools. Designed by one of our consultants, Dr. Adam Lodzinski, the Learning-to-Learn Differently Program (LLDP) reaches out to aid Senior Kindergarten and Grade One students who are academically at risk. LLDP uses trained volunteer tutors who work with both parents and children on key goal areas identified by the child's teacher as critical to their academic progress. LLDP also focuses on helping parents recognize and appreciate their child's unique learning strengths and how to build on these strengths.

In March 2001, Dena Tenenhouse, Executive Director of LDA Toronto District agreed to implement the program on a pilot basis. Since it began operation in May, thanks to the hard work of the volunteers and their coordinator Mimi Hoffman, LLDP has proven to be an invaluable resource to teachers and parents in helping academically at-risk children attain grade level expectations.

Here is how it works: Once a child is referred to the program by their teacher, Ms. Hoffman goes to work matching the child and family with a volunteer. She matches volunteers on the basis of where the family lives, the academic needs of the child, and, when helpful and possible, ethnic background or language. Volunteers then connect with both teachers and parents. Parents are required to attend the tutoring sessions because their presence guarantees that they acquire important insights and skills as to how best to help their child.

For the child, the one-to-one tutoring affords them the intensive intervention

they need. They usually thrive on this direct and immediate attention, and the rapport established between volunteer and family is a key ingredient.

LLDP's pool of volunteers consists of devoted individuals who are committed to making a difference. They come from all backgrounds and walks of life. Some are considering a career in teaching, some come from the private sector and feel the

working with their students. The sharing of information has proven to be useful and has provided the opportunity for team building.

To date, LLDP is working with 40 volunteers and families throughout the city and, as a result of the program's success, LDA Toronto District recently received a three-year grant from the Early Years Fund to keep LLDP going.



need to do something different and some are relatively new to the country and chose this opportunity as a means of giving back. No matter where the motivation comes from, LLDP's volunteers are all exceptional people with the "right stuff." They work either from the school setting or out of their local library. Tutoring can be provided right after school or in the early part of the evening. LDA Toronto provides the resource material (such as phonics packages) and, with Dr. Lodzinski, the training and consultation they need. Volunteers also meet monthly to brainstorm effective and creative ways of

LDA's of York Region and Newmarket-Aurora and District have also received funding to implement and run LLDP for two years. In addition, LDA's of Peterborough and Windsor-Essex have received Early Years Challenge funding.

It is our hope that other chapters will be successful in obtaining funding to deliver this service.

LDAO is currently seeking funding to develop materials and a model that would extend this program to students in grades two and three. ☺

# Some Assembly Required: An Instruction Manual For Learners: Transitional Curriculum for Students Grade 7 to 12

## What is Some Assembly Required?

**Some Assembly Required (SOAR)** is a transition curriculum for secondary school students with learning disabilities, designed to assist them in succeeding in school and making healthy choices for their future. SOAR helps these students gain an understanding of their disability, as well as an understanding of how to use this information to enhance their own career planning. Ultimately, the materials aim to provide students with the means to make the best decisions about which programs, institutions and employment they should pursue.

Developed by the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO), SOAR provides support and guidance for youth with learning disabilities. Book 1 begins to introduce the fundamental concepts to assist the students in developing the self-awareness and insight to make the choices in school that will set the path for their future. Utilizing materials and instruction, the program helps students understand their learning differences, giving them the support and guidance they need to advocate on their own behalf and to make successful and strategic academic and career choices.

SOAR fosters greater self-awareness, improves self-esteem and assists the individual in setting realistic post-secondary and employment goals leading to appropriate job-readiness training. SOAR also addresses employment issues such as disclosure and negotiating on-the-job accommodations. The emphasis on understanding and accepting strengths and limitations allows students to make career and vocational choices with a greater

potential for success. There is no other transition program specifically directed to students with learning disabilities in North America.

## SOAR's Online Community

As well as the printed workbooks, a website will be also developed that will

students with learning disabilities, SOAR is Ontario-specific, but can be modified for English and French secondary schools worldwide.

Beginning in September, 2002, SOAR Books 1-3 will be piloted by the Lambton Kent District School Board. This piloting will provide LDAO with an excellent opportunity to refine the materials by field-testing them in a variety of school-based settings with a wide range of students. It is our hope to make SOAR available to all School Boards across the province by September, 2003.

The development of the materials has been made possible through the support of key organizations, such as the Justine Eves Foundation and the TD Bank Financial Group who have made a donation of \$10,000.00 in support of the program. "TD Bank Financial group is proud to support a program for children with learning disabilities. Because learning disabilities tend to be invisible, the need for assistance may not always be seen to be as immediate, leaving these children with feelings of isolation and

inadequacy. We hope this program will help to provide these special children with the support, guidance and tools they require to be happy, healthy and productive members of society," says Tim Tiernay, Associate Vice President, Employee Relations, TD Bank Financial Group.

For additional information, please contact:  
Kate Lloyd  
Program & Service Development Manager  
kate@ldao.on.ca  
(416) 929-4311 x. 23



enable students and teachers to access the program directly through online facilities. The virtual aspect of SOAR will augment the original materials by providing forums for discussion, such as chat rooms.

## Included in Secondary School Curriculum

In September 2000, the Ontario Ministry for Education identified "Transition Planning" as a critical curriculum component for secondary schools. Filling this identified gap in curriculum for

# Secondary Level Students with Reading Disabilities: No Time to Waste

The ability to read is critical to academic, social and economic success. Beginning in the upper elementary grades and certainly middle and high school, students are expected to read and to comprehend increasingly difficult text in a variety of content areas. Academic instruction shifts from an emphasis on *learning how to read* and early reading skills (phonological awareness, word identification and oral reading fluency) to *reading to learn* content area text. Thus, students need to possess effective reading strategies and skills, including basic early reading skills, as a basis for accessing the general education curriculum and engaging in content area classroom instruction.

Reading problems are the most significant reason that children are retained, assigned to special education or given long-term remedial services. It is estimated that 80% of school-age students with learning disabilities receive services for a reading disability. Results from the 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress showed that 30% of 8th. graders and 25% of 12th. graders were reading below grade level.

There is a growing consensus that to the extent possible students with reading disabilities are best educated in the general education classroom. Nevertheless, a group of students with reading disabilities remains who require intensive, individualized or small-group instruction in reading in addition to the general education curriculum.

## What do we need to consider when developing a reading program for secondary students who do not read well?

**Students' needs:** Identify the primary reading problem of each student. For example, one student may have severe decoding problems; another student may read the words accurately but slowly or without comprehension. Other students

may have difficulty with decoding, fluency and reading comprehension.

**Time:** Struggling readers require more instructional time than most educators realize. Some students require one regularly scheduled class period a day for intensive, individualized reading instruction. Others may require two class periods a day, depending upon the extent of the reading difficulties and the amount of work required to help students transfer their newly acquired reading skills to the content area.

**Teachers:** Students deserve well-prepared teachers who want to teach adolescents with reading difficulties. The teacher must have specialized preparation for struggling secondary readers that includes knowledge of all reading components and effective instructional approaches. The teacher should willingly participate in additional pertinent professional development.

**Teacher-student ratio for instructional purposes:** Instructional grouping works best when there are between one and four students per teacher at one time.

**Reading components:** Students may require intervention in one or all of the reading components:

◆ Decoding: Skilled readers rely on print rather than pictures or context clues. Many struggling readers over-rely on pictures and context clues. Their inability to automatically decode interferes with reading fluency and comprehension. Decoding strategies that need to be taught include:

- ✓ Letter-sound relationships
- ✓ Breaking words into recognizable or decodable parts
- ✓ Blending and segmenting individual sounds and word parts

◆ Fluency: Reading fluently means reading with accuracy, adequate speed, appropriate phrasing and correct

intonation. Fluency building activities may include:

- ✓ Timed reading
- ✓ Daily practice
- ✓ Word recognition of irregular words at an automatic level
- ✓ Teacher modeling
- ✓ Partner readings

◆ Comprehension: Effective comprehension not only builds vocabulary and focuses on text content, but also teaches students methods of developing and using reading strategies effectively. Comprehension instruction includes:

- ✓ Cognitive strategies that promote deep processing and understanding
- ✓ Understanding where and how to use cognitive strategies
- ✓ Ways to link background knowledge to new knowledge such as setting a purpose, predictions, think sheets or graphic organizers

◆ Vocabulary: Vocabulary development is enhanced through large amounts of reading. Therefore, it is imperative that students have the opportunity to read independently and to be read to. Note that having students read independently and reading aloud to students must not take time away from teacher directed instruction. Activities that promote acquisition of vocabulary include:

- ✓ Reading a variety of genres, both narrative and informational
- ✓ Discussion of new words
- ✓ Word banks
- ✓ Word analysis of morphological, phonological and semantic

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*Secondary Students with Reading Disabilities*  
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structures; multiple opportunities to use words

- ✓ Development of word consciousness (e.g. word games)
- ◆ Spelling: Spelling is inextricably connected to reading but is not acquired through reading exposure only. Spelling is not mechanical, but involves the integration of phonological, morphological, semantic and orthographic knowledge. Effective spelling instruction includes:
  - ✓ Phonemic awareness
  - ✓ Daily dictation that includes sound dictation, real words and sentences
  - ✓ Word analysis
  - ✓ Spelling rules and generalizations
  - ✓ Irregular words taught to automaticity
  - ✓ Syllabication principles and the six syllable types
  - ✓ Short manageable word lists
- ◆ Writing: Reading and writing share a reciprocal relationship. Written expression provides students with the opportunity to develop and shape ideas. Effective writing instruction includes:
  - ✓ Text structure or organizational strategies based on a writer's purpose, the audience and content
  - ✓ Stages of writing including planning, organizing, writing drafts, revising drafts, editing drafts and writing a final draft
  - ✓ Standards of English including grammar, word usage, punctuation and spelling

**Critical features of effective reading instruction:**

The following features of reading instruction are recursive and ongoing:

- ◆ Systematic coverage of reading components
- ◆ Sequenced from easy to difficult
- ◆ Background information provided before new knowledge is introduced
- ◆ Diagnostic
- ◆ Explicit
- ◆ Scaffolded including teacher modelling and think alouds
- ◆ Frequent opportunities for students to respond
- ◆ Guided practice with specific feedback
- ◆ Frequent and planned review that leads to more difficult applications

Progress monitoring:

Progress monitoring must be ongoing and specific, including:

- ◆ Measurable reading goals and objectives (e.g. will read passages from the grade 7 reading curriculum at 120 words per minute versus will improve reading)
- ◆ Individually set reading goals that include comparison to normally achieving peers
- ◆ Parental or family unit input
- ◆ Use of student progress data to make decisions about the effectiveness of reading instruction and to make instructional decisions
- ◆ Language assessment and progress if student needs to acquire English while improving reading

*Diane Pedrotty Byrant and Cheryl Young, Dept. of Special Education, University of Texas, Cheryl Young, doctoral candidate and Shirley Dickson, Director of Reading, Texas Education Agency. From an article in LDA Newsbriefs, Jan./Feb. 2001. Used with permission.*

## Thank You to Our Donors & Funders

for monies received from February, 2002 to June, 2002.

*Your support helps LDAO provide a level playing field of opportunities and services for children, youth and adults with learning disabilities!*

### Project Funders

#### Promoting Early Intervention

Ontario Ministry of Education

#### Learning Disabilities & Literacy

Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

Human Resources Development Canada

#### Chapter Development Project

The Ontario Trillium Foundation

### The President's Council

The President's Council was initiated to recognize an outstanding level of commitment through annual contribution to LDAO and the learning disabilities network.

Sheri Cohen  
Allen & Deborah Edward  
Carol & Randy Jones  
Peter & Mary Elizabeth Kinch  
Merle Langbord Levine  
Dr. & Mrs. William Mahoney  
Robert M. McDerment  
Annette Quinn  
Bob & Karen Quinn  
Robert & Penny Richards  
Carol Yaworski

The welcome and invitation is still open! You will help us and our chapters maintain our position as the only organization in Ontario providing services to the learning disabled population. Please contact Denise Harding, Fund Development Consultant @ (416) 929-4311 ext. 40 or e-mail mdharding@rogers.com for further information.

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Diane Wagner  
Laura Weintraub

## Commemorative Gifts

LDAO appreciates gifts made in honour of anyone of your choosing. Please consider a commemorative gift to support the work of LDAO and mark birthdays, anniversaries, memorials, graduations or any other milestone. Please contact Denise Harding, Fund Development Consultant @ (416) 929-4311 ext. 40 or e-mail [mdharding@rogers.com](mailto:mdharding@rogers.com) for further information about **Commemorative Gifts** or the **Lifetime of Learning Monthly Donor Program**. Gifts of \$50+ will be listed in the subsequent newsletter.

## In Memory of Audrey Watts

Joan, Jen & Horne Ing

## In Memory of Gary Reid

Lesley Reid

## Birthday Wishes to Eva Nichols

Laura Weintraub

## Profiles of Three LDAO Funders

### *The Justin Eves Foundation*

Thanks to extraordinary core support from the Justin Eves Foundation, the SOAR (Some Assembly Required) program will be launched in 90 schools throughout Lambton and Kent Counties this September. SOAR helps secondary school students with learning disabilities understand the ways they learn best and gives them the support and guidance needed to advocate on their own behalf and to make successful and strategic academic and career choices.

The Justin Eves Foundation was established in 1997 in memory of Justin Eves, the son of Premier Ernie Eves and Vicki Eves, following his sudden death in an automobile accident in 1995. Justin was dyslexic, but never allowed this to stand in the way of reaching his full potential. He graduated from Parry Sound High School and Curry College with the support of his family, teachers, and friends. The foundation honours Justin's courage and determination, as well as his concern for others less fortunate than himself, by providing financial support to youth with learning disabilities from across Ontario who want to pursue post-secondary education at institutions that serve their needs. Their mission also includes a strong commitment to promoting awareness of learning disabilities and their lifelong impact.

Jinnie Bradshaw, the foundation's new executive director, is pleased with the way the SOAR program complements the work

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*Profiles of Three LDAO Funders*  
*cont. from page 22*

of LDAO's Learning and Employment Assessment Profile (LEAP) program, an adaptive human resources tool aimed at helping adults with learning disabilities become more effective at finding and maintaining employment.

"The Justin Eves Foundation chose to fund LEAP because it helps those at the post-secondary level identify their strengths and weaknesses and find the right career path," said Bradshaw. "SOAR was funded because it helps students begin that journey even sooner."

To increase its capacity to identify and assist students with learning disabilities as they pursue their college and university studies, the foundation plans to launch a new program aimed at forging education partnerships. "We are very excited about our Justin Eves Foundation Partnership Program," explains Bradshaw. "We are in the process of inviting colleges and universities to join the foundation as matching partners. This means that we will be able to offer twice as many grants and scholarships to learning disabled students as we have in prior years."

### ***Royal Bank of Canada Foundation***

LDAO is grateful to Royal Bank of Canada Foundation (RBC) for \$10,000 in funding to help launch the SOAR (Some Assembly Required) program this year.

SOAR is a multifunctional special education tool designed for students in grades seven through twelve. Through materials and instruction, SOAR helps students with learning disabilities understand the ways they learn best and gives them the support and guidance needed to advocate on their own behalf and to make successful and strategic academic and career choices.

LDAO is now in the process of field-testing, streamlining, marketing, and distributing materials for SOAR, and is developing a Web site that provides the materials, lesson plans, and resources to students, educators, professionals, and parents. The program will be piloted in 90 Lambton Kent District School Board schools this fall.

"RBC Financial Group recognizes that people with disabilities are entitled to full inclusion in Canadian society, including access to goods, services, premises, and employment opportunities," says Renae Addis, Manager, Community Investment at RBC Royal Bank, "and that means we must be committed to removing barriers, providing opportunities, and becoming an employer-of-choice. RBC takes its role as a corporate leader in this area seriously. We are pleased to be partnering with the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario on this innovative program."

### ***XEROX Canada***

XEROX Canada has allocated a substantial gift of \$100,000 over three years to support the Aboriginal Services component of LDAO's Virtual Services program.

"We're excited about this new initiative because at Xerox Canada, we believe that supporting education and the Aboriginal community is both a moral imperative and a business advantage," says Cam Hyde, President of XEROX Canada Ltd.


Since learning disabilities are invisible, and frequently unrecognized or misunderstood, people with learning disabilities, families, employers, educators, and professionals need information and advice on an ongoing basis. However, access to LDAO services can be difficult for those who live and work outside the reach of a chapter.

To address this issue, the association developed the Virtual Services Website. This online resource enhances the delivery

of LDAO's services by making resources available to people and communities previously without access to them, and serves the needs of francophone and Aboriginal communities. The project will significantly increase our ability to serve isolated areas of Ontario and will assist family members, parents, partners, siblings, employers, professionals, and institutions in their efforts to help and support individuals with learning disabilities.

Tony Martino, head of human resources, quality and communications at XEROX, endorses the initiative. "An investment in Aboriginal citizens is an investment in the future success of the Aboriginal community, and that is good for Canada and all Canadians," he says.

"Individuals from some cultures may have different ways of processing information from other individuals who have been raised in the mainstream culture," explains Carol Yaworski, LDAO's Executive Director.

"One of the biggest struggles for many Aboriginal people is to maintain their aboriginal identity," says Yaworski. "Aboriginal customs, values, and codes of behaviour are an essential part of the lives of Aboriginal people. However, parents are often obliged to send their children to mainstream schools where these customs, values, and codes are usually ignored. Not only the teaching styles, but the very cultural basis and assumptions of the schooling are often inconsistent with the students' cultural background. The result is that aboriginal people often do not receive the types of public services that address their needs. With this funding, XEROX will help us close the gap." 





# Your Community Contacts

## Chatham-Kent

Contact: Dawn Babbirk  
Tel: (519) 352-2024  
ldack@netrover.com

## City of Kawartha Lakes Satellite (Lindsay)

Contact: Barb Overwijk  
Tel: (705) 324-5119  
overwijk@sympatico.ca

## Durham Region

Contact: Mrs. Marlene Avery  
Tel: (905) 509-4182  
platers@pathcom.com

## Halton County

(Oakville-Burlington)  
Contact: Heather Holden  
Tel: (905) 844-6905

## Hamilton-Wentworth

Contact: Cindy Sacco  
Tel: (905) 523-1332

## Kingston

Contact: Lana Greenwood  
Tel/Fax: (613) 545-0373  
ldak@kingston.jkl.net

## Kitchener-Waterloo

Contact: Charlotte Buchan  
Tel: (519) 743-9091  
ldakw@golden.net  
www.ldakw.on.ca

## Lambton County

Contact: Joanne Cully  
Tel: (519) 344-7745  
www.sarnia.com/groups/lda-lc

## London Region

Contact: Carl Sinclair  
Tel: (519) 438-6213  
lda@linkd.net  
www.ldalr.on.ca

## Mississauga

Contact: Terri Hamilton  
Tel: (905) 272-4100  
ldamiss@idirect.com

## Muskoka Satellite

(Huntsville)  
Tel: (705) 788-7097

## Newmarket-Aurora and District

Contact: Terri Hamilton  
Tel: (905) 853-6542  
ldanad@email.com

## Niagara Region

Contact: Kay MacDonald  
Tel: (905) 641-1021  
ldaniag@becon.org

## North Bay & District Satellite

Contact: Kathy Honeysett  
Tel: (705) 476-8177  
air.repair@sympatico.ca

## North Peel (Brampton)

Contact: Susan Silver  
Tel: (905) 791-4100  
lda@bellnet.ca  
www.ldanp-peel.org

## Ottawa-Carlton

Tel: (613) 567-5864  
ldaoc@magma.ca  
www.ncf.ca/ldao-c

## Parry Sound Satellite

Contact: Becky Smalldon  
Tel: (705) 389-3320 or  
Debbie Junk-Lloyd  
(705) 732-2858

## Peterborough

Tel: (705) 748-9455  
Tollfree: (866) 503-3303  
ldaptbo@pipcom.com  
Cobourg : (905) 373-7033  
ldanorthclar@rol.ca

## Sault Ste. Marie

Contact: Jessica Bernhardt  
Tel: (705) 942-4310  
learningdisabilities@shaw.ca  
www.members.shaw.ca/ldassm

## Simcoe County

Alliston: (705) 435-0376  
ldoffice@ldass.org  
www.ldass.org  
Barrie: (705) 726-5553  
Midland : (705) 527-5372  
Local Tollfree: (888) 684-5855

## Thunder Bay

Contact: Janis Thompson  
Tel: (807) 622-9741  
www.ldatbay.ca

## Toronto District

Contact: Dena Tenenhouse  
Tel: (416) 229-1680  
www.ldany.on.ca  
admin@ldany.on.ca

## Wellington County (Guelph)

Contact: Andrea Waldron  
Tel: (519) 837-2050

## Windsor-Essex County Satellite

Contact: Beverly Clarke  
Tel: (519) 252-7889  
learningdisabilities@on.aibn.com

## York Region (Richmond Hill)

Contact: Lynn Ziraldo  
Tel: (905) 884-7933/471-1620  
ldayr@idirect.com  
http://webhome.idirect.com/~ldayr/



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## communiqué

365 Bloor Street East,  
Suite 1004, Box 39,  
Toronto, Ontario  
M4W 3L4  
Tel: (416) 929-4311  
Fax: (416) 929-3905  
E-mail:

membership@ldao.on.ca  
Website:  
www.ldao.on.ca



