Specific Learning Disorder

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Criteria

- DSM-5
  - Persistent difficulty learning academic skills
    - Reading
    - Written Expression
    - Mathematics
  - Academic performance is below expectation
  - Difficulty apparent in early school years
  - Difficulty not better accounted for by other neurological disorder
Specifiers

• Reading
  • Word reading (dyslexia)
  • Reading rate or fluency
  • Reading comprehension

• Written Expression
  • Spelling
  • Grammar and punctuation accuracy
  • Clarity or organization of written expression
Specifiers

- Mathematics
  - Number sense
  - Memorization of math facts
  - Accurate or fluent calculation
  - Accurate math reasoning
Outcomes

• Increased risk:
  • Dropout
  • Lower educational attainment
  • Psychological distress
  • Unemployment or underemployment
Misconception

• Learning Disorders are the same as other disorders that impact learning
Differential Diagnosis

- Intellectual Disability
- ADHD
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Normal variation

*co-morbidity is common
Misconception

- Learning Disorders correspond to low IQ
Misconception

• Prevalence has increased
Specifiers/Prevalence

- Prevalence
  - 5-15% (based upon children)
  - More frequent diagnosis in males (2:1 or 3:1)
  - 80% of cases are in reading
**Misconception**

- Learning Disorders fade with time
Course

- Persists into adulthood

- High school to college
  - Slow reading rate, comprehension, written expression, math problem solving

"When our eyes grow up we’ll know what all this means."
Misconception

• Learning Disorders are easy to diagnose
Diagnosis

- Discrepancy between IQ & achievement
  - Historically popular
  - Research does not support
- Response to intervention
  - Progress monitoring and intervention
  - Just focuses on low achievers
- Cognitive processes
  - Cognitive processes that underlie achievement
Assessment

- Comprehensive evaluation
  - IQ
  - Reading
  - Writing
  - Math
  - Information processing
    - Attention/executive functioning
    - Language
    - Memory
    - Visual
  - Social/Emotional Functioning
Typical Processing Weaknesses

• Word decoding
  • Phonological awareness (rapid naming, processing speed)

• Reading Fluency
  • Rapid naming (processing speed, orthographic competence)

• Comprehension
  • Language
  • Listening comprehension
  • Working memory
Typical Processing Weaknesses

- Written Expression
  - Spelling
  - Language
  - Executive functioning
- Math
  - Working memory
  - Executive functioning
  - Language
Dyslexia

• Misconceptions:
  • All children who reverse letters have dyslexia
  • People with dyslexia see things backwards
  • People with dyslexia never learn to read well
  • Dyslexia is a medical diagnosis
Dyslexia

• Misconceptions
  • Can be treated with:
    • Fish oil
    • Tinted lenses
    • Balancing exercises
    • Vision therapy
    • Medication
Accommodations

- Idea to “level the playing field”
- Based upon results of the evaluation
  - Must consider other factors
Common Accommodations

- Extended Time
- Word Processor
- Voice Recognition
- Screen reader
- Calculator
- Formula Sheet
- Word Bank
- Scantron

Georgia State University
Common Accommodations

- Note taking asst.
- Audio books
- Extended time
- Extended deadlines
- Foreign language sub
- PowerPoint
- Written notice
- Group projects
- Relaxed attendance
- Classroom breaks
Case Example #1

- 18 year old, Caucasian male
- High school graduate (3.96 GPA)
- College freshman
- No significant medical history aside from ear infections and tubes
- Healthy, college athlete
Case Example #1

- History of reading and spelling difficulty - since 3rd grade
- Diagnosed and received services through an IEP
- Current - slow reader, poor speller
- No problems with math
- Previously diagnosed ADHD - pediatrician
  - Inconsistent medication (2 years)
Case Example #1

- Weaknesses
  - Reading
    - Decoding
    - Rate
  - Spelling
  - Phonological processing
Case Example #1

- Diagnosed with Dyslexia
  - IQ = high average
  - Solid skills -
    - sensorimotor
    - attention/executive functioning
    - Visual spatial
    - Memory
    - Language
    - Social/emotional
Accommodations??
Case Example #2

- 20 year old, Latin/African American male
- Graduated high school (3.3 GPA)
- College sophomore
- Parents both have master’s degrees
- Medical history - scarlet fever, ear infections, tonsillectomy/adenoidectomy
Case Example #2

- History
  - Speech and writing weaknesses
    - Speech therapy
  - Repeated kindergarten
  - Diagnosed with CAPD, ADHD
  - 504 Plan - second grade (+ private tutoring)
  - Treated for anxiety
    - Therapy
    - Medication briefly in high school
Case Example #2

- Reported difficulties:
  - Staying focused/daydreaming
  - Careless mistakes
  - Studying and completing assignments on time
  - Organization for writing
  - Worry about making mistakes
  - Anxiety related to making friends
    - Feels “awkward,” avoids
Case Example #2

• Diagnosed with
  • ADHD, combined
    • Parent and self-report (past and current)
    • CPT scores and executive functioning weaknesses
    • Observations (organization)
  • Generalized Anxiety Disorder
    • Worry, nervousness, muscle tension, fatigue, restlessness, sleep disturbance
    • Difficulty controlling worry
    • Mood impacted by anxiety
Case Example #2

- Diagnoses (cont.)
  - Specific Learning Disorder - Reading
    - Rate or fluency
    - Weak rapid naming, phonological memory, executive functioning

- Earlier testing did not indicate academic achievement weaknesses (7 years ago)