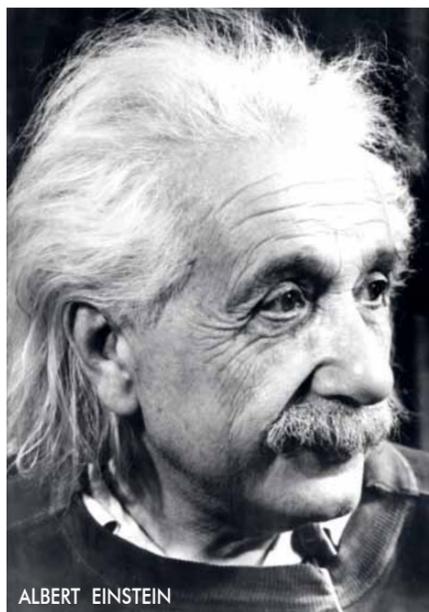


# Preventing Learning Disabilities

Early intervention key to LD students' success



ALBERT EINSTEIN

Mention the name Albert Einstein, and quite naturally, one thinks, genius— perhaps one of the best thinkers of our modern age. Many readers may be surprised to discover that the same man who's known worldwide for his brilliance once struggled with learning difficulties. It seems unfathomable that Albert Einstein could have had any challenges in learning, however, as a child, Einstein may have suffered from multiple forms of language-based LD's (learning disability). This is not an uncommon phenomenon and, in fact, it serves to demonstrate that even with multiple LD's, academic success can be achieved. Learning disabilities are not a direct indication of one's intellectual capacity. It is important that both educators and parents stay mindful of this very important point.

Since the Learning Disabilities were federally designated in the United States as "handicapping conditions" in 1968, the proportion of children identified with LDs has increased steadily. Significant progress have been made in understanding and treating LDs involving, reading, mathematics and written expression. With the area of word reading leading the way, major advances have been made in classification and definition of issues, cognitive processes, neurobiological correlates involving the brain and genetics, assessment and intervention.



The advances in intervention are specifically promising in the area of reading, as the research shows that reading disabilities are preventable in many children, and that intensive interventions can be effective with older children who have severe reading difficulties. Given these advances within the area of reading disabilities, similar advances for other LDs cannot be far behind.

## WHAT IS LD?

Presently the construct of LD and the many definitions that serve as conceptual framework for their identification and treatment continue to be frequently misunderstood. The field is beset by fierce disagreements about the definition of LDs, diagnostic criteria, assessment practices, treatment procedures and educational policies. However, there seems to be a consensus that,

Learning Disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulty in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities.

## ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING DISABILITIES

The tests and procedures selected for any assessment stem from a classification model. The most recent model of classification of LDs is an integrative one, explaining the condition from academic, neurobiological and cognitive perspectives. Based on this model, the approach to assessment is different from traditional test-to-diagnosis approaches that have dominated the assessment domain for many years. In this new approach to identification, LDs are



not "diagnosed" on the basis of a battery of psychometric tests administered on a single occasion. Rather, LDs are identified only after a specific attempt is made to systematically instruct the person. This means that the traditional test-to-diagnosis approach can, at best, identify the person as being "at risk" for LDs. But a single assessment will not lead to a reliable identification if the approach is based on cutoff scores!

## INTERVENTION

The goal of any evaluation should be to intervene as soon as possible with a person who is struggling to achieve. Those who are identified as being "at risk" should be offered intense, multi-tiered, evidence-based interventions. Throughout the intervention period, these individuals should have their progress monitored with Curriculum Based measurements (CBM) as well as standardized, norm-based assessment tools. This approach, central to a

Response to Intervention model (RTI), prioritizes a treat-and-test model of LDs as opposed to the traditional test-to-diagnosis approach.

Advances in clinical and scientific research have shaped how we view and treat pupils struggling with learning. Albert Einstein's learning challenges is a great reminder to us that people with LD's have tremendous potential and are capable of achieving greatness. With appropriate assessment and comprehensive intervention plan, more and more pupils struggling with learning disabilities can overcome their disability and experience academic achievement. Or, like Einstein, perhaps even academic greatness.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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