A Closer Look

Perspectives and Reflections on College Students with Learning Disabilities

Edited by

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All of the stories in this book are based upon actual situations in practice. Names, characteristics, and profiles have been changed in many cases in order to respect the privacy of our students. In some chapters, individuals may represent composites of several learners in order to synthesize a wider range of experiences in a condensed account.

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A Closer Look

Acknowledgements

In writing and editing this book, although we experienced many moments when we felt alone, frustrated or stretched beyond our elasticities, we were aware of the consistent vigilance which was maintained by some of our colleagues. We kept moving forward with the encouragement of these "cheerleaders."

Diane and Jane want to thank one another. We believed in ourselves, in our vision, and in our capabilities. With each faltering step, and with each crack in the sidewalk, we picked one another up, and helped to carry to carry the load. These matters are never fifty-fifty propositions; the division of labor changes daily, hourly, depending on who is busier, who is experiencing an academic or personal crisis, and who at any one time has an extra pair of hands or a clearer mind. We've survived the ordeal, still respecting each other as colleagues and caring for each other as friends.

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And thank you to our families and friends who were always "there" encouraging us to "keep movin'."

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all of the learners who have shared their stories with us over the years. We are indeed privileged to have walked with them through their metacognitive journeys.

All of the stories in this book are based upon actual situations in practice. Names, characteristics and profiles have been changed in many cases in order to respect the privacy of our students. In some chapters, individuals may represent composites of several learners in order to synthesize a wider range of experiences into a condensed account.

Table of Contents

(Just click on a chapter title to get to it.)

A Closer Look

Acknowledgements

Dedication

Message from Dr. Gertrude Webb, the Founder
of the Curry College Program for the Advancement of Learning

Prologue: Genesis: Affirmation of Knowing
Jane Utley Adelizzi, Ph.D.
Diane Goss, Ed.D.

Reflecting on Practice: Thinking About Our Work with Learning Disabled College Students
Jane Utley Adelizzi, Ph.D.
Diane Goss, Ed. D.

Transformations: The Way of Learning
Michele Talabach, Ed. M.
Marie Murphy, M.A.T., Ed. M.

Relationship within the Models of Education & Therapy
Jane Utley Adelizzi, Ph. D.

Mentoring College Students with Learning Disabilities: Facilitating Metacognitive Development
Susan Pennini, Ph. D. (cand.)
Eric Peltz, M.A.

Parental and Professional Perspectives: Looking at Students' Issues as a Parent and as a Professional
Diane Webber Ph.D.

The Relationship Between Psychological Trauma
& Learning Disabilities: A Look at Classroom Trauma
Jane Utley Adelizzi, Ph.D., Certified Educational Therapist (AET)

Twice Oppressed and the Right Brain Exit
Stacey Harris, J. D.

The Circle
Andrea L. Baldi, Ph.D.

Professionalism Without Detachment
Marguerite Wengler, M.A.

Writing as a Therapeutic Tool
Allan G. Hunter, D.Phil., Oxford University

Soul Talk
Michelle A. Gabow, *M.A.*, Playwright

Relationship Between Social Deficits and Learning Disabilities in College Students
Kathleen Cassidy Wilmot, M.S., M. Ed.

Community Service: An Opportunity for Students With Learning Disabilities to Identify Strengths and Develop Competencies
Diane Goss, Ed. D.

Sensitivity in Teaching Basic Language Skills to College Students with Learning Disabilities
Donna Cataldo, M. Ed., C.A.G.S., Educational Therapist, AET

Learning Disabilities in Speakers of English as a Second Language
Lisa Ijiri, Ph.D.
Grace Rooney, M.A., M.Ed.

Learning to Adapt: Models for Inclusion
John J. Carroll, Ed.D.

Message from Dr. Gertrude Webb, the Founder of the Curry College Program for the Advancement of Learning

Join me in turning back the pages of time to the fall of 1937 when, as a young teacher of English in a Boston junior high school, I entered the "noblest profession of them all" inspired by such educators as John Dewey "to enhance the quality of individual lives or to encourage the intellectual, moral and aesthetic growth of individual human beings," (Democracy and Education, 1916). Enjoy with me as I reflect on my initial experiences, trying to learn the "ropes"- how to "tune in" to my students' natural desires to grow through learning, how to respect my students as thinkers who had amassed a wealth of knowledge before I had met them, and how to present new information to them so that it enhanced their earlier learning through relevance and interest.

Those issues stimulated my search as I continuously tried to improve my teaching and enhance my students' learning. Some of the most important things I have learned in more than one half century devoted to these issues have been that:

1. Just about all students start school wanting to learn.
2. Learning is synonymous with growth.
3. Those who do not learn in our schools fail to do so because they have not found their way.
4. Good teachers serve as "coaches" to both those successful at school learning and to those who have not found their way through the conventional system; they understand that the latter think differently.
5. Teacher/coaches are excellent observers; they focus on the uniqueness of their learners.
6. Teacher/coaches are good questioners, encouraging students to "talk," to discuss developing concepts as they clarify their thinking while identifying their preferred learning styles.
7. Teacher/coaches are deep listeners-they search for the meaning behind what they hear, adding that insight to their observations, putting the pieces of the learning puzzle together.

8. Believing that a student's understanding of his/her learning style preferences is foundational to metacognition, teacher/coaches facilitate this understanding in their learners, suggesting how their preferences might be used to bring them to success.
9. Teacher/coaches do reality checks, encouraging students to evaluate the usefulness of the application of their newly acquired metacognitive knowledge.
10. Teacher/coaches respect their students' potential for success, coaching them as they strive to become independent, competent, and effective learners, able to take charge of their own learning while working collaboratively in a very competitive society.

In the Program for the Advancement of Learning at Curry College, which I designed in 1970, it was my pleasure for 23 years to share my thinking with the faculty of teacher/coaches leading our population of college-able, learning disabled students. Together we observed, questioned, listened, and respected our students as we helped them identify their unique learning preferences, building metacognitive understanding for effective application to task.

In the spirit of collegiality, and with humility, what some of our faculty have learned from each other, they are in this book sharing with you for your critiquing and evaluative comments. I salute them for their contribution to the field of teaching and learning.

In addition, as we move towards the twenty-first century, we learn from scientific researchers that the world is not as well ordered as we were wont to believe; in fact, that, perhaps, we on the planet Earth as well as our neighboring planets are the product of CHAOS. We then look at some of our PAL populations and recognize their unique learning styles following similar seemingly chaotic patterns. We anticipate that among them may be another creative mind, another Edison, Einstein, or Hans Christian Andersen who did not follow the conventional routes, but uniquely found his way, encouraged b some significant person who truly enjoyed his uniqueness. To my initial salute to teacher/coaches, I add a salute to their students.

Prologue: Genesis: Affirmation of Knowing

Jane Utley Adelizzi, Ph.D.
Diane Goss, Ed.D.

In the beginning...the idea of writing a book about what it is that we *really* do in our practice came out of a conversation over a cup of tea. Historically, our best ideas came to us under similar circumstances, through informal discourse between people who shared a common experience and had empathy for one another's concerns and struggles as well as joys and satisfactions.

Both of us are professors in the Program for Advancement of Learning at Curry College. The PAL program, as it is familiarly called, was the first post-secondary support program in the U.S. for students with learning disabilities. Founded by Dr. Gertrude Webb in 1970, it was grounded firmly in her belief that talented students who learned differently could succeed in college by building on their strengths. Through the years, the program has evolved, responding to new demands, incorporating new research, and implementing new approaches, but Dr. Webb's basic premise has remained the cornerstone of all we do.

Our faculty had been searching for ways to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the program. As a group, we had decided that we wanted to commemorate the anniversary by finding a variety of ways to communicate our philosophy and share with others some of the things we had learned over the years as PAL evolved into the comprehensive program it is today. Arrangements for a conference were already being made as well as preliminary plans for a party.

On the day the idea for this book came to us, the two of us were relaxing at Jane's dining room table and talking about the upcoming events planned for the anniversary year when a "light went on." We realized that one way our message could be effectively communicated was through a compilation of personal perspectives and reflections by members of the PAL faculty. PAL's director, Lisa Ijiri arrived, listened to our idea, expressed enthusiasm, and suggested we bring the idea to the next PAL faculty meeting. This encouraged us to keep talking about it and to take the first tentative steps of our journey into a new way of discourse with others in our field.

Reflective Dialogue: Understanding Our Practice

As a faculty, we had always engaged in a great deal of reflecting upon what it was that made our program unique. Often we found ourselves at faculty meetings struggling to concretely describe that elusive or mystical element of our teaching or mentoring. Just that week at a department meeting, in the midst of making decisions about specific programmatic issues, our faculty had wandered off track (or on) and became engrossed in a philosophical conversation about our practice. Ned talked of coming to the realization, after being at PAL for several semesters, that what we are about has to do with the "core of self." The skills and strategies aren't the focus of our work- the person is.

Michelle T. added that she felt our main struggle in working with our students was to mentor them in the integration of various aspects of self- the physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual.

David added that it is the *relationship* we have with the student that allows us to facilitate integration. "Our teaching is relational. Students bring the key to unlocking their learning. It is through our relationship with them that we help them discover it."

Michelle G. stressed that one of the most important aspects of the teacher/student relationship is engaging in therapeutic discourse, carrying on this discourse in conversations and through the arts- helping the students to get in touch with themselves and their learning.

"Everything we do is strength-based," Sue Pratt added, "The discourse is centered on their strengths."

Joe turned to her and nodded enthusiastically. "I think the *diversity* of backgrounds we bring helps us to recognize and affirm the strengths of our students. Most of us come to PAL not from the mainstream of the L.D. world, but from other disciplines or settings. We have an incredible richness of experience here because we bring so many different perspectives. This creates a broader vision of what we can be for our students." Around the table, faculty members who had been or still were involved in private practice, hospital settings, prisons, social service programs, holistic health centers, theaters, and churches murmured agreement.

Capturing the Dialogue

It was this kind of interchange that we hoped to capture in writing, believing that it opened a window into who we are and what we do in our work with college students who have learning disabilities. We approached our colleagues with our idea for the book, simply inviting them to write chapters giving their personal perspectives on topics they considered important in our practice. We hoped to engage them in reflecting on their work, and through this process of reflection, to uncover new meanings. We didn't plan the order or the contents. We didn't know whether common themes would arise (although

we suspected that they would) or whether we would compile a highly diverse collection. It turns out that we did both. *A Closer Look* reflects our diversity as well as our unity.

As individual authors worked on their chapters, they conversed with each other and, more intensively, with us as the editors. Our conversations were deep and meaningful, always leading us to another level of understanding. What each author set out to do developed into something much greater than originally anticipated. As we read and re-read each chapter in *A Closer Look*, we discovered that the common themes which emerged confirmed our faith in ourselves, in one another, and in Gertrude Webb's original philosophy of teaching to a student's strengths in order to acknowledge and address his or her learning differences.

As we reflected upon "who we are," it became easier to see that because of our philosophy and approach, we attend to a *whole learner*. Although the process is often unconscious, we teach, mentor, and heal a total being who thinks, feels, reacts, and functions both in and out of the classroom environment. The Association of Educational Therapists in Sherman Oaks, CA has been inspirational in terms of its philosophy. Dorothy Ungerleider, a leading figure in AET asks that as teachers or mentors we listen with our "third ear" to the connections between emotions and learning, and that we work collaboratively with the people involved in the lives of our students.

During the process of working with the individual authors, we as editors found ourselves "listening with our third ear" to our colleagues and becoming in tune with layers of meaning the authors themselves hadn't yet consciously come to know. Schon (1987) notes that professionals often operate within situations in relatively routine ways guided by their "theories in use" and operating on tacit knowledge until something causes

them to reflect on their experiences, question their assumptions, modify their former theories, and develop new ones. This process frequently occurred as we engaged in discourse with the authors, drawing out the tacit theories they held and encouraging them to reflect on them.

Emerging Themes

The product we created together, *A Closer Look*, presents personal perspectives on the unique combinations of particular individuals, specific contexts, and perplexing dilemmas that make up the "real world" of teaching. Chapters center around particular topics important in teaching students with learning differences. Such topics as coming to terms with our own strengths and weaknesses and helping our students come to terms with theirs, enhancing our students' self-esteem, fostering their metacognitive awareness, helping learners acquire effective academic strategies, and dealing with the social and emotional effects of learning disabilities are conveyed by illustrative examples. Throughout the book, the writers present their topics subjectively as well as objectively and intertwine the cognitive, emotional, theoretical, and practical elements of their experience and the experiences of the learners with whom they work. The line between the personal and the professional is often blurred in these accounts as the authors recognize that their own experiences and characteristics are inextricably woven into the fabric of their professional practice. Just as it is the whole person who learns, it is the whole person who teaches.

This emphasis on a holistic approach is one of the most important themes that emerges in our book. To say merely that we employ a holistic approach understates what it is that we do. Each chapter describes from a different perspective the process of

connecting the thinking person with the feeling person, acknowledging that s/he does not learn purely from a cognitive perspective, and re-establishing the notion that emotions are very connected to the ability or inability to learn and function. We recognize that we teach and learn cognitively, emotionally, socially and neurobiologically.

Kindred themes, which are interwoven in the chapters, are those directly related to the human connection in teaching. By this we mean that there is universality in our thinking that comes from the belief that it is impossible to mentor a student in the process of becoming a competent and confident learner without establishing a relationship. We have to look at the gestalt of the student, at his or her whole being. If the student is struggling with reading comprehension, we cannot merely remediate the difficulty, but we must investigate the history, the "whys" involved in each person's learning profile. Possibly the problem may be ameliorated in a very straight forward way by simply demonstrating and applying a diverse repertoire of strategies, but even to do this we must first establish a rapport which allows the student to become open to such strategies. Many learning disabled students do not experience success simply by being exposed to a multitude of techniques. They need the security of a trusting relationship as the context in which learning may take place. Only when the relationship is established and maintained is it possible to lift the layers of resistance or reluctance, and have a conversation about what is successful or disastrous for each student. Often it comes down to confessions about what is loathsome about learning, and what is the ideal to that individual.

By the time many of our students with learning disabilities become adults, they have dragged their emotional issues concerning their academic struggles around like

heavy and tattered luggage which bears old faded decals of places visited and revisited. Most adults with learning disabilities have "tried everything." Their fears have become camouflaged so that the "secret" is artfully hidden. They live in constant vigilance, waiting to be exposed, ready for the next attack on their egos, on their souls. They are courageous people, hungry for knowledge and the opportunity to prove their intellectual worth.

As we teach a new concept, a new skill, we move our students from the task at hand to a deeper understanding of how that learning actually took place, and to why this process is so uniquely personal. The student-teacher relationship becomes the moving force behind each developmental step in metacognitive awareness. We walk with our students, sometimes beside them, sometimes ahead of them, sometimes behind them, shepherding them in their journey of discovering self as a competent learner. As teachers or mentors we try to engage in listening deeply to what our students say, or don't say. Each of us in life finds our own way to connect, to give as well as receive in a relationship. Within our interactions with our students in PAL, there exists an intimacy that comes from safety in disclosing the fear, anger and shame as a result of histories of classroom trauma, a phenomenon Jane has been researching. The events are many and repetitive, the results leave lifelong imprints. As teachers or mentors we listen to their stories of the pain and humiliation which often accompany learning disabilities.

As we listen to our students' stories, we bring forth our own. This occurs as a result of being "there" with them while they are moving from a level of fear of failure to a more comfortable level of performance once small increments of academic success have been achieved. It is our privilege to bear witness to their cognitive and socio- emotional

growth. At the same time, we put our observing egos to work, watching our own countertransference; aware of the impact a trusting alliance may have upon a relationship whose goals are academic and personal success.

Throughout the journeys we take with our students, we occasionally stop and take a look at who we are, who we have become, and who we wish to be as teachers, mentors, and just as people. We value the opportunities to collaborate, or the minutes we often steal in the hallway or parking lot in order to share our common concerns as caregivers, and as human beings who need to be affirmed or reassured that we are doing "O.K." So often we walk through our days and weeks, unsure that what we have been doing is working for our students. Diane speaks of our trembling hearts as we wait for midterm deficiency notices, final grades. We feel a part of our students' experiences. We have survived their many storms with them, large and small, and often feel like the little rowboat that has been tossed and turned in the eye of a hurricane. Occasionally we are dented or splintered, and try to wait for the next calm. Reflection helps us to ground our emotional responses. By grounding some of these responses in theory (both old and new), we as practitioners move to the creation of our own perspectives on what teaching and learning are all about.

Valuing Our Knowledge

A Closer Look is representative of the growing movement in educational circles to recognize the perspective of teachers as an important source of knowledge. William Schubert (1991), a specialist in curriculum theory at the University of Illinois who has been studying “teacher lore” asserts that it is “a necessary and neglected construct in

educational literature" (p.207). Schubert defines teacher lore as "the study of the knowledge, perspectives, and understanding of teachers...inquiry into the beliefs, values, and images that guide teachers' work" (p.207). He notes that studying teacher lore is an effort to learn what teachers learn from their experience as they continuously integrate theory and practice, developing concepts and beliefs about teaching and integrating them in their reflective action.

Schubert finds the conceptual basis for his work on teacher lore in John Dewey (1916). "A Deweyan perspective ... gives credibility to the notion that educational theory should be conceived as praxis in the lived experience of teachers" (Schubert, 1991, p.214). By tapping into the "lived experience" of teachers, by exploring the teacher lore which so often goes unwritten, we avail ourselves of an important body of knowledge. Teachers, as Schubert notes, are creators of knowledge and theory.

The beliefs that brought us, the editors of *A Closer Look*, to the idea of inviting our colleagues to collaborate with us in compiling our own volume of teacher lore were also influenced by Dewey as well as by other theorists important in our development as educators. We had both read Schon (1987) and found ourselves recognizing the truth of his ideas on reflective practice. We were both also well versed in the learning theory of David Kolb, having incorporated many of his ideas on the experiential learning cycle into our teaching. Kolb (1984), like Dewey, asserts that learning is a function of the interaction between the learner and his/her experience. Individuals create knowledge by transforming experience into concepts. Each interaction modifies the concepts so there is continuous creation of knowledge. In various stages of the learning cycle, we may be immersed in a concrete experience, engaged in observation and reflection on that

experience, involved in developing an abstract concept which organizes the experience, or actively manipulating the situation to experiment and test our concept. We both recognized the applicability of Kolb's theory to our own learning through our practice and to understanding the ways in which we as practitioners were creating knowledge in our field.

For each of us, the idea of being "creators of knowledge" triggered other associations that held much meaning for us. For Diane, the concept of our being creators of knowledge was rooted in the work of Paulo Freire whose ideas on liberatory education have long influenced her professional and personal life. Freire's emphasis (1970, 1985) on the necessity of dialogue and the union of action and reflection in education is embodied in our book. Freire asserts that education can be transformative and liberating only when teachers and learners dialogue and reflect on their experience to create (rather than simply receive) knowledge. Our book includes chapters by two former PAL students (Eric Peltz and Stacey Harris) whose insights represent a true "insider's view" from the vantage point of the learner and whose inclusion in this volume testifies to our belief that we are collaborators in learning with our students and that their voice and perspectives are an important source of knowledge in this field.

For Jane, recognizing that we are creators of knowledge was connected to a feminist epistemology. Deciding to articulate our knowledge in a book such as this one was an example of "finding our own voice" (Belenky, et. al., 1986). The collaborative process we used in creating the book is also consistent with a feminist approach. A feminist perspective takes time to listen to and value the stories people have to tell. Often when we do tune in our third ear, we will pick up clues that offer us answers and

connections to a student's behavior or performance that the *WAIS-R*, *Woodcock Johnson*, or other standardized tests just cannot offer. Teachers in this book often rely on ways of knowing based on intuition and grounded firmly in the caring they have for their students- an epistemology explored by Noddings (1984).

Through qualitative analysis we receive information rich in description and feeling, the very elements that are consistently missing from quantitative studies. We could simply have offered our audience a quantitative study consisting of pre and post testing, demonstrating how each student succeeded or failed at a variety of tasks. However respected such studies are in the scientific world, the descriptions of what took place, the conversations, the observations and the emotions connected to the teacher-student relationship are what makes this book meaningful to us and to the people who will read it and use it as a resource in their own work. The telling of stories goes beyond qualitative research into practical teaching methodology. Can a new teacher learn how to artfully apply her knowledge from reading a chart, from trying to pick her way through a series of numbers? She *can* learn as a result of reading about what really happens in the teaching-learning arena. She can learn from other teachers and mentors who have experienced and observed emotional pain and frustration. She may also learn from reading about the joy which comes from being a midwife in a student's intellectual, academic and emotional development.

We have listened to many stories, and have moved with our students through their journeys in metacognitive development. In this book we offer you our stories, and report to you how our deep listening and observation have enabled our experiences to become alive with feeling.

Making Sense of Our Experience

In their prologue to *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*, Carol Witherell and Nell Noddings (1991) say that the use of narrative and dialogue in education is grounded in the idea that "we live and grow in interpretive, or meaning-making communities; that stories help us find our place in the world; and that caring, respectful dialogue among all those engaged in educational settings- students, teachers, administrators - serves as the crucible for our coming to understand ourselves, others, and the possibilities life holds for us" (p.10).

Collaborating with our colleagues in writing A *Closer Look* has been an experience in meaning making. The dialogues among us as we wrote and the telling of our stories of practice have given new meaning to our work and given us a greater sense of connection to it and to each other. The act of writing our stories and ideas has helped us to bridge the theory-practice dichotomy which too often exists among teachers and has connected us and put us in touch with the philosophical underpinnings of our day to day teaching.

In our book, we are using our own voices- affirming our belief in ourselves as creators of knowledge, created from our own experience, reflection, and dialogue (with each other and with our students). We create our knowledge collaboratively and experientially. We write in first person as well as third, blend the personal with the professional, blend theory and practice. Like Witherell and Noddings (1991), we affirm the importance of narrative and dialogic ways of knowing and explore topics by including description and interpretation of the authors' experiences as well as relevant literature in our field. We recognize the importance of the subjective, unique point of

view of each individual author and of the particular perspective each has as a result of individual experiences. We try to give voice to the tacit knowledge that Schon (1987) discusses.

We know that we speak for many of our colleagues when we say that our work with each student is like Franz Schubert's Unfinished Symphony. As beautiful as it is, and as finished as it sounds, it is never-ending; there is no ending. The learning, the listening, the watching go on forever. Because the process is infinite, and will always be unfinished regardless of the completion that each stage of development presents to us, it keeps moving and changing. It is indeed a beautiful piece of unfinished art.

We are proud of our dedication. We question conventional wisdom and theory, and find meaningfulness in discovering "new ways" with each student. Recipes for learning strategies are not what we are about. The collaborative triad of the student, the mentor, and the consulting colleague is just one element of what makes us different, what makes us confident about our leadership in post secondary education for students with learning disabilities. It is with our compatible blend of theory and practice that we offer you our reflections, our perspectives, our sense of knowing the grave significance of the self as a whole entity.

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Reflecting on Practice:
Thinking About Our Work with Learning Disabled College Students

Diane Goss, Ed. D.

The first section of this chapter describes the author's efforts to reflect on a particular incident in her practice and to engage in discourse with her colleagues in an attempt to gain support and deeper understanding. The second section places the author's attempts in a theoretical framework suggested by Shon's The Reflective Practitioner and explores the process of reflection in and on action.

A Reflective Conversation: Teacher Talk

The teachers' room was uncharacteristically quiet. I stood alone at one of the large windows gazing out at a bleak expanse of parking lot. Beyond it, the maples were almost bare. Only a scattering of dried, mud-brown leaves clung to their branches. It was one of those late October days when you really knew the bone-cold New England winter was fast approaching. The wall clock read 4:10, and dusk was already settling in. I always experience a temporary seasonal slump in energy, and even worse, in optimism about the time I realize that summer is really over. A nice fall had stretched the summer season and this was the first day this year that I had experienced what I call my "change of seasons depression."

I was feeling more than a little sorry for myself when the door swung open and Michelle and Jane came in, hardly noticing me at first as they were engrossed in conversation about the new play Michelle was writing. Abruptly, their conversation halted as Jane, her antennae always alert for turbulence in the emotional weather, greeted me with a peremptory, "What's the matter? Are you all right?" I had learned long ago

that there's no use trying to hide anything from Jane because she's an extremely accurate sensor of moods, motives, and hidden agendas. I surprised myself as I realized my eyes were slightly watery as I blurted out, "*I have* twelve deficiencies."

"Deficiency" is the simultaneously threatening and warning term we use at Curry College to refer to notifications sent to students (and their advisors) who have received grades of C- or below at midterm. I had found my list only a few minutes earlier, crammed into my mail slot amid the memos, catalogues, and pink message slips

The absurdity of my statement, claiming the deficiencies as my own, is probably obvious to an objective observer. I'm a teacher, not a student, and clearly hadn't actually earned any of the dreaded grades myself; my students had. Jane and Michelle, however, knew exactly what I meant and even more importantly, understood why I claimed ownership of them.

"It's so discouraging," Jane commiserated. "I haven't picked up my list yet, but I expect quite a few too."

"How about you, Michelle?" I inquired almost hopefully.

"Only two," she responded, "but I have fewer students than you and this year I have a very together group."

I knew Michelle's group because she, Jane, and I team-taught a metacognitive learning skills workshop on Thursday nights for all of our first year students. I knew Michelle's students weren't really any more together than mine, but I appreciated her effort to soften the comparison. "I'm working so hard and trying everything I know," I complained. "I just don't get it. I don't know what else I can do for them."

It was true. Knowing that first semester is crucial for any first year student and particularly for a student with a learning disability, I'd been doing everything I could to help my students make the transition into college successfully. By this time in the semester, I was already physically tired from the long hours and emotionally drained as well. The first week of school, in an effort to alleviate the fears and insecurities I knew

they were experiencing, I had promised my students that I'd be there for them whenever they needed me. All they had to do was say, "Help!" And most of them had. It wasn't unusual for me to be flipping off the light in my office and settling wearily into my slightly battered Plymouth Horizon well after 9:00 p.m. Besides my work with learning disabled students in the Program for Advancement in Learning (PAL), I was also the advisor for Project Share, our community service organization through which students served meals in area shelters, collected clothing for homeless people, mentored urban adolescents, and ran an after-school program for children in a local public housing development. In addition to these time-consuming activities there was committee work, attending meetings, working on my doctorate at Teachers College, and caring for my father who, though basically healthy, at eighty-two needed companionship as well as help with shopping, cooking, and other activities. I'd been pushing myself (like most of the members of the PAL faculty) and it was catching up with me. I didn't know how to cut back because most of the things that demanded my time in a never-ending stream of phone calls, appointments, and meetings were things I enjoyed doing and believed in.

The microwave peeped and Michelle removed three mugs of steaming water, dropped in the tea bags and carried them over to the big-scarred wooden table that formed the centerpiece of the room. Around it, our PAL faculty gathered for the formal or informal, planned or impromptu, moments of sharing which we believe are essential to our community of teacher/learners. Jane was scrounging around in the refrigerator and surprisingly, amid the jumble of bags and plastic containers (some with contents of dubious identity and longevity), found an open bag of Pepperidge Farm Milanos.

She emptied the cookies onto a paper plate. Figuring that some things were more important than the amount of cholesterol floating around in my blood, I bit into a cookie, wrapped my fingers around the warm mug, breathed in the scent of the tea, and felt the tension in my muscles begin to relax. It wasn't just the tea and cookies, but the familiar comfort of being with nurturing colleagues and friends who knew we should start, not

with abstract theories or technical dissection of the situation, nor even with practical advice, but with a human connection, shared experience, mutual understanding and acceptance. Then we could proceed.

"How many students are involved?" Jane asked, getting down to the practical task of clarifying the problem.

"Seven. Two of them have three deficiencies, one has two, and the rest each have one."

Michelle jumped into the discussion. "Well, you don't really have to worry about the students who have only one, Diane. They have plenty of time to raise their grades and this will be a good reminder for them to work with you in figuring out what's holding them back. They're doing fine in everything else. One deficiency isn't that significant."

I could always count on Michelle to help me put things into perspective and get a balance. She was right about it being an opportunity to get the students to work with me in figuring out what they needed to do to be successful in those courses. Strange as it may seem, as a learning specialist it is sometimes more difficult to work with students who seem to be doing well in all of their courses. These students are getting the work done, but not necessarily in the way that is most efficient for them and sometimes not in a way that will have long-term impact on their ability to handle the increasingly difficult demands of the advanced courses they will eventually be taking. They may be relying too much on rote memory instead of trying to see relationships and interconnections which would help them to remember new material by association with previously acquired knowledge. They may be insistent on taking copious notes on their textbook reading, unable to distinguish the main ideas from the details and compensating by painstakingly recording everything. Or, as one first year student of mine was doing, they may be using an inefficient writing strategy, resisting any pre-writing strategies for idea generation, planning and organizing, and then doing multiple re-writes of entire essays until they were coherent and comprehensive enough. While these approaches may work for them in

the short run, it is only a matter of time until such a student becomes overwhelmed by the hours and effort required and the coursework becomes too complicated for these methods to work. Often, it is only after being confronted with objective evidence, such as a deficiency, that students will be willing to consider the need to let go of methods they have rigidly adopted in an effort to gain some control over their learning tasks and open themselves to trying new approaches more in keeping with the task itself and with their own learning strengths and weaknesses**.**

" I guess you're right. I am over-reacting to some of these," I replied as I continued to examine the familiar green and white striped sheet while absently picking at the perforated strip which ran along the left side of the printout.

Jane leaned over and looked down the list. "There are really only three who look like they're in trouble. What's going on with them?"

"Akiko's working really hard and doing the best she can, but it's not enough. These two D's are in subjects that require a lot of writing under pressure. Her English still isn't as fluent as she needs it to be to do well in classes with a heavy writing demand. I talked to Petr, one of my former PAL students who's an excellent writer and he's going to be working with her on her English twice a week now as a peer tutor. I think that will help because she really needs more support than I can give her in her PAL sessions. Akiko likes the idea and they've set up a schedule. Jeff, her ESL instructor, is going to meet with me on Friday to see if we can brainstorm some ideas on how to help accelerate her grasp of English. The combination of being a non-native English speaker and having a language-learning disability is a tough challenge. I need to figure out some better ways of helping her."

"That's true, but don't lose sight of how far Akiko's already come. When I meet her now, she seems so much more confident and outgoing than she was when she first arrived. Remember how she wouldn't even talk with the other students? Now everywhere I see her she's with friends, talking and laughing. That's major progress in

adjusting, not just to college, but to a whole new culture. You've helped her gain confidence and you have to start there. Don't you think your expectations might be a little unrealistic? Did you really expect her to do well in every subject? Sounds like you might be expecting too much, of her and of yourself. That makes it hard to appreciate the real gains."

Jane was right, of course. Objectively, I had known from the start that it would take a while for Akiko to get on her feet, but subjectively and emotionally, I couldn't seem to get the message. It still felt like a failure on my part to help her enough. I realized she was starting to understand how to use her visual strengths to help her. She had an amazing visual memory and she was highly organized. The day before I had asked her if I could Xerox a few pages of her textbook notes to use as a model for some of my other students who were having trouble with note-taking.

"In her case, I guess you're right**.** I do set myself up by not setting realistic goals and then I'm not satisfied when I should be." I looked down at the deficiency list again, "But these other two, I really haven't been able to help, and it makes me feel so inadequate. Mike's not buying into the strategies**.** Everything's always "Fine,' but then he just goes off and does his own thing. I can't get him to look at his own learning patterns and try to figure out more efficient ways for him to accomplish what he needs to do to be successful**.** Joel, I don't even know. I haven't seen him more than twice this semester. And one of those times I drove over to his residence hall and picked him up myself. I have a feeling a lot's going on with him personally, but he won't trust me enough to open up and let me know what it is. He's the one I feel worst about. I feel guilty about not being able to connect with him."

Even as I spoke I recognized my tendency to "own" things I wasn't really responsible for. It was irrational for me to feel at fault for not connecting with a student I had hardly seen, but somehow I did. I knew my reaction was somehow connected to my

own lack of confidence; I took every failure as evidence of my own inadequacies. It was one of the most difficult aspects of my work with learning disabled students.

"I know," Michelle nodded. "I think I would have quit after my first year here if I didn't have you and Jane to talk to about that. I couldn't believe it when you said you felt that way too, after having so many years of experience here. Facing my limits and accepting them without losing confidence has been a challenge. Just when I start to feel really good , really competent, something comes up that undermines it. There's always some student with a problem I can't solve."

Jane interrupted us. "Listen to what you two are saying!" She leaned forward as she made her point. "We all tend to personalize our job too much. It's what makes us good at it, but it's also dangerous. These grades aren't yours, Diane. They can't be equated with your level of competence. It's O.K. to question your performance, assess how you're doing, figure out if your problem-solving strategies are working, but you have to use more appropriate measures of assessment to do that. You've got to look at the whole picture."

Jane knows I have a tendency, especially when I'm overwhelmed, to suffer from tunnel vision. My field of vision narrows so I can only see one aspect of the situation and telling me to look at the whole picture was her way of reminding me that I was doing that now. Her words struck a chord and I could almost see the lens widening. I had had a predominantly good semester so far. The majority of my students were on solid ground academically and personally. I could see the gains they had made in important areas. Sean, a severe dyslexic, had read his first complete book; Marcy, a painfully shy young woman had made it through her first public speaking assignment; Shari, who had at first refused to put her thoughts on paper, was now writing poetry; Joel had been able to share his pain at being rejected by his father, a physicist, because of his learning problems. Actually, I had been enjoying the semester, and had been feeling productive and more like I had a handle on the job than ever before. Until today that is.

Jane continued, "Remember that developing metacognitive awareness isn't like delivering an overnight package for Fed-Ex! We can't move people along fixed routes and guarantee “on time” delivery. Some students need to meander off-track a little first. Others just aren't ready to move to the next level right away. We can mentor them in the process, but we can't force them through it.”

"You're right," I nodded smiling as I conjured up a mental image of myself trying to drag a six foot-two rugby player through a maze similar to the ones used in learning experiments with lab rats. "I *have* been losing sight of the developmental aspects involved in fostering metacognition. Maybe I’ll re-read Sue’s paper on that to see if I can get any new insights on what I can do to nurture it. And I guess, as usual, I’ve been falling into the trap of taking too much of the responsibility onto myself.”

As I spoke, I realized that in doing this, I had been taking the responsibility away from my students- not just the ones that were in academic difficulty, but also some of the others too- especially my first year students. I wanted them to succeed so much that I did too much for them sometimes, made myself too available, and turned my schedule inside out to accommodate them. I knew this could encourage the tendency to dependency and learned helplessness which many of them were already struggling with. I was *saying* I had faith in their strengths and abilities, but my *actions* were giving another message. I needed to figure out how to hand over more of the power to them while still giving them the support they needed. This was an ongoing struggle for me and my conversation with Jane and Michelle was helping me to get on a balanced course once again.

By the time we finished our tea, I realized that my thinking about my practice hadn't been expansive enough. My original analysis of the situation had been focused too narrowly and had been mainly concerned with what *I was* or wasn't doing, ignoring the larger context and the other players. I was acting out in my practice my own personal tendency to take on too much responsibility for others. I was setting goals for students that I wanted them to achieve and not paying enough attention to helping them clarify

and set their own goals. Some of the goals I was setting were unrealistic. Now that I was more aware of the cause of my discouragement, I started to feel a little more optimistic.

Unexpectedly, Akiko appeared at the door. A broad smile played across her face as she waved a blue book in her hand, proudly extending it so I could see the "B" scrawled in blue ink in the lower left corner. "My marketing exam!" she said and then shyly added, "Thanks."

"I didn't do it. You did," I responded automatically.

"Yeah, but you showed me how."

Thinking About My Teaching

I reflect often about the unique challenges of my work with learning disabled college students. Some things stand out as consistent and recurring experiences in teaching: the stimulation of taking on a new challenge every year, every day; the sense of meaning and the sustaining belief that nurturing the cognitive and emotional development of learners is an important, worth-while commitment; the immense satisfaction of seeing measurable, obvious growth. But also, what stands out is the sense of never being *done*; either with myself or with my students- never being skillful enough, knowledgeable enough prepared enough to effectively handle every situation. No matter how many courses I take, books I read, workshops I attend, no matter how many conversations I have with other experienced and talented teachers, no matter how many years of experience I gain, there are always new problems I haven't yet solved which challenge me to use everything I have and to discover what I am still lacking. I have no foolproof formula, no pre-determined course of action, no comfortable routine to fall back on when I am presented with these unique situations of practice.

Recently re-reading Schon's (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner for* one of my courses at Teachers College, I experienced that flash of understanding, the "aha" which keeps me addicted to learning. I hadn't had the same response to Schon's ideas when I first read his book soon after starting my work at Curry, but teaching at PAL during the

past ten years had made me so much more aware of my own thinking processes and of the importance of monitoring them. Metacognition, thinking about thinking, is the hallmark of our program and the essence of what we do every day with our learning disabled students. Often people say, "What is it you actually do at PAL? Do you tutor students in their coursework? Teach them the 'how to' of specific learning strategies and hope they'll transfer them to their coursework? Work on basic reading and language skills hoping to remediate their deficits?" Although we do at times provide all of these interventions, they are certainly not the essence of what we do. What we do is more complicated and qualitatively quite different than those descriptions suggest. What we do is get the students to think about their thinking. We mentor them in becoming aware of their own mental processes and in understanding the cognitive tasks involved in their learning and problem solving. We encourage them to become experts in seeing how their own mental abilities and personality characteristics intersect with particular academic tasks and help them to develop and select from a repertoire of strategies that contribute to their learning effectively. We guide them in evaluating the outcomes and in adjusting their behaviors accordingly. This metacognitive approach does not apply only to our students, but to ourselves as well.

Indeterminacies of Practice: Facing the challenge

Shon (1983) notes that the situations that present themselves to professionals during any given day are far from routinized. This certainly applies to teachers. If we could freeze-frame each teaching moment, we would find no two exactly alike because the constituent elements are constantly in a state of flux. The particular convergence of intra-learner characteristics, intra-teacher characteristics, interpersonal dynamics, immediate environmental influences, wider contextual elements and the given academic task changes in an instant, the way the slightest turn of a kaleidoscope shifts the pattern in the blink of an eye. Often, just as I begin to perceive the pattern, get to the point where I can grasp its essential organization and meaning, the design falls apart- replaced by a new

puzzle. The combination of individual persons, particular context, specific problem, task, or process at hand makes for many possible permutations and insures the uniqueness of each teaching/mentoring moment. The specific theories we might use to guide our practice, the particular tools we might select, the behaviors we might engage in ourselves and those we might try to elicit in the learner cannot be delineated and rigidly prescribed or even adequately described apart from the unique convergence of all of the elements which make up a given moment.

The constant struggle to cope with the indeterminacies of practice may sometimes make us more aware of what we don't know than of what we do know. As Schon (1983, p. VIII) points out, much of the knowing which guides us in the competent execution of the demands of our practice is automatic and tacit. It's not easy to become aware of it and articulate it because this knowing-in-practice is intuitive, spontaneous, and occurs in the context of action as we go about doing the work of our professional lives (p.61). When we are asked to put this knowledge into words (as we are trying to do in this book) we often feel somewhat at a loss as to how to do this.

As experts in teaching and learning, we know that we are "supposed to" have a great store of specialized knowledge, yet we experience self-doubt. This self-doubt is certainly related to the fact that so much is undefined; so much of any circumstance is unique. I think it's also related to the fact that as teachers we receive constant intended and unintended feedback and thus may be acutely aware of our own failures and inadequacies. There are always critics to let us know that we have not done enough for our students. There are always demands that we can never fully meet and conflicts we cannot resolve. There is even our own belief in the amazing potential of each student- a potential so great that we can never say, "I'm finished with this one," the way a physician may feel a sense of closure when the patient is cured or an engineer may know that a new building is completed.

Because of this, I think many of us constantly question our own effectiveness and engage in a never-ending struggle to discover new and better ways to reach our students. We reflect on our actions both during and after them- engaging in what Shon calls "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action." We try to identify and articulate the conflicts and discrepancies we experience. We examine the validity of the values, norms, and beliefs which underlie our actions.

Critical Reflection: Questioning Our Perceptions and Assumptions

There is also another level of reflection described by Shon which, I think, occurs far less frequently and that is "reflecting on reflection-in-action" (P.126-7, 282). It is this metacognitive process which allows us to free ourselves of unexamined assumptions which inhibit our reflections on our practice. Taking reflection to this level, thinking about our thinking about our actions, is a struggle and is something that we have to work hard to foster among ourselves. I feel very fortunate to be part of a community of teacher-learners who respect and trust one another enough to reflect in and on our actions and also to reflect on our reflections. Support and honest discourse with colleagues seems to me to be indispensable in this process. I needed Michelle and Jane to help me to see that my reflections about my students' deficiencies were too narrow and without our conversation, I probably wouldn't have recognized the way my own history and personality were controlling the way I was thinking and problem-solving in that situation.

Through honest discourse and shared reflection, we can become more aware of the unconscious knowledge we have, can critique, refine and extend it, and can apply it to the cloudy, confusing, and uncertain situations of practice which we frequently encounter. Through it, we learn to become better practitioners. Jack Mezirow, one of my professors at Teachers College who challenged me to become a more critically reflective practitioner, states that "Learning may be defined as the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action" (Mezirow, 1991, p.1). One of the most exciting

aspects of my work has been engaging in this meaning making with my colleagues. This is what sustains me and gives me the energy and vision I need to face the daily challenges of my profession. Without it, I think I would have become stagnant or burned out long ago. With it, although there will occasionally be those gloomy October days, I can keep on going.

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Transformations:
The Way of Learning

Michele Talabach, Ed. M.
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Michelle and Marie have been personal friends and professional colleagues for over twenty years. Together they have journeyed in a transformational path that guided them in gaining expertise. Their chapter describes this path and the understandings they acquired as they traveled it. It particularly emphasizes the importance of education for human wholeness.

> "If you treat man as he appears to be, you make him worse than he is. But if you treat man as if he were already what he potentially could be, you make him what he should be." (Goethe)

A Transformational Journey

Hello dear reader. We are Michele and Marie and we cordially invite you to share in our transformational journey along the illuminating path that leads to the essence of true learning; the *way* of learning. Twenty-five years ago, we embarked upon this journey. It has taken many twists and turns; has trodden upon rocky, rough terrain; has floated like feathers in a soft breeze. Each experience along the way has been richly endowed with meaning and has resulted in innumerable "AHAS" and, of course, the questions. Oh yes, the constantly emerging, never-ending, ceaseless questions. Cognitive dissonance ensues and the frantic searching for "the answers," only to discover after weeks, months, years of fruitless endeavors, there are no "answers". There are only clues

to finding the next "place" on the path. And with the emergence of each "next place" comes another transformation, another level of awareness.

The Beginning

But, let's go back to the beginning. How did it all begin, this transformational process? As beginning teachers, possessing minimal to no information about learning as a process, we found ourselves in educational environments that produced more questions than answers. Albeit, there were always glimmers on the horizon. In our classrooms, we were confronted with groups of students, all of whom were expected to perform in the same manner and produce similar results. Furthermore, these students were neatly tracked and placed into groups according to the degree of expertise they demonstrated in producing these expected results.

It became apparent to us early on that something was not quite right. What was it? What was wrong? And so the questions...Why were incredibly hurtful labels being placed on so many kids; labels which produced negative self images that would follow the students through the system and later, we discovered, throughout their lives? Why were students being tracked according to what they produced on paper or scored on a group administered IQ test? Why weren't some students able to read, write, spell or talk very well? Why were some of these students considered to be emotionally disturbed? YET, why did these students appear to be so talented and able in many other areas such as art, music, theater, movement, hands-on doing, etc.? And why weren't those abilities valued as being worthwhile in our educational system?

A Step Forward

Unbeknownst to us at the time, some clues were on the horizon. We merely had to be in the proper energy field to make the connections. In July 1973, it happened. As fate would have it, we heard about a program at Curry College, under the direction of Dr. Gertrude M. Webb. The program was designed to educate people in the area of learning disabilities and to certify those interested to teach the "perceptually handicapped" (the term used at that time). Since the curriculum of the program included theory and application, there was a group of learning disabled youngsters ranging in ages from 5-12 years enrolled in the program also.

The Massachusetts State law, Chapter 766 which mandated an appropriate public education for all students was in the State legislature awaiting approval which it did receive in 1974. Our experience at Curry was our first lesson in realizing that Dr. Gertrude Webb, her philosophy, creativity and determination placed her and those on her faculty at the cutting edge of "the Way of Learning". When we arrived at the Learning Center at Curry College, on July 6, 1973, it was immediately obvious to us that something was different here. It was a dynamic and energy-charged environment. The focal point of this energy field was the LEARNER, an individual, possessing strengths and weaknesses, engaged in, a process of growing, developing, and becoming.

The concept of learning took on a completely new meaning. What a heartening message. AHA, another clue! It was the first time in our experience in the field of education that each person was concerned about the child/learner as an individual, not as a member of a tracked group to be taught in a lock-step manner.

Armed with this knowledge, we were prepared to meet the students. Or were we? With no recipes at our fingertips (they were forbidden in this program), we were definitely expected to apply this knowledge, using our own thinking capacities. Now, there's a paradox. We were both college graduates, holding Bachelor and Master's degrees, - yet we possessed absolutely no expertise in facilitating learning in our students.

Even though our hearts led us in this direction, we had actually never heard of these concepts before.

This was not about “group think”. It was about the inherent worth and dignity of each learner.

It is here that definition gave way to invention. Merely identifying what these students could not do was completely unacceptable. Instead, identifying learning strengths and developing ways to utilize them effectively was not only encouraged, but mandated. AHA! The learning must come from within each learner; it cannot be imposed from some outside force or internalization and synthesis will not occur. This will, in turn, prevent the learner from attaining higher levels of cognition, consciousness and integration as a complete person.

How exciting, how challenging, how energizing! Then reality struck. All the theories, learning systems, and terms were, initially, absolutely overwhelming. Gaining an understanding of the theoreticians, Piaget, Myklebust, Cruikshank, Kephart, Barsch, Vygotsky, etc.; the learning systems, auditory, visual, motor, tactile, kinesthetic, language; the complexity of skills involved in making each of these systems fully operable; and the relationship of these systems to one another was phenomenal. Then placing these systems within an operational framework of space and time, linear, circular, simultaneous, sequential, added to the realization that learning was a truly complex process and, in fact, a miracle of sorts.

If you can just imagine being presented with this incredible amount of "new" information within a six-week period and at the same time, realizing the importance of this input in relation to the children entrusted to our pedagogy. Our brains were on overload; our minds were in a state of chaos. Yet our sheer determination to search for meaning moved us ever so quickly forward. Then the next question emerged. How do we know who learns in what way? How do we identify these marvelous strengths? At this point, we were introduced to diagnostics and the recent theories emanating from research

in the neuro-sciences. The diagnostics included both formal assessment tools and informal measures and they provided us a means to analyze the learner and find out exactly how best to address the individual. Research in the neuro-sciences supplied us with information about the working brain.

We knew that, unfortunately, thinking was generally not included in the standard curriculum. Learning was predominately about memorizing facts, figures, and details without any apparent purpose for the student. In our own hearts, we believed this process had little purpose for us as teachers also. We found ourselves in the same turmoil as the students. Now, we were finally being challenged and expected to facilitate the thinking processes of these youngsters according to their individual learning styles, which we were then analyzing through the use of diagnostic tools and astute observation.

As we became totally immersed in this, what began to emerge was a "feeling sense", an intuition about learning. We "saw" learning to exist as a core drive within each learner. And it was the students who unmistakably led us to see what our eyes and hearts had been opened to see.

Their questions, statements, self-assessments were the breath of life that gave meaning to teaching. Thus, teaching and learning became perceived as a circular process; an ongoing flow, a dance between teacher and student. Within this framework, the teacher became learner as the learner became teacher. It was “we”, not I and they. How refreshing and freeing to "feel" the connections.

At the end of the six-week period, we decided to continue in the program for certification. Dr. Webb opened another door and we found ourselves at Carney Hospital in Dorchester as members of an interdisciplinary diagnostic core evaluation team. During the years we were at the hospital, we became extremely proficient at administering, scoring and interpreting just about every diagnostic instrument available in the psycho-educational sphere. This was the ultimate experience in learning how to analyze a learner. We actually became very sophisticated in "breaking the child into pieces." It wasn't long,

however, before those questions began to surface again from the very depths of our being.

As we interacted with more and more schools and school systems, we began to realize that we were sending children to "pull out" programs. They were being pulled out of classrooms and being placed in resource rooms where one piece of the child was routinely and rotely being addressed. In some cases, these children returned to Carney at a later date, for re-evaluation and, to our dismay, they were more fragmented than they were when we did the original evaluation. Fragmentation seemed to be a significant problem. Aha - the clouds were lifting; the eyes were seeing. Once again, we were at another "place" on this journey. If fragmentation was creating such insurmountable problems, and it definitely was, then integration must be part of the solution.

Simultaneously, another startling insight came to us as a result of our evaluating a group of persistent truants and dropouts. Their evaluations consistently demonstrated increased scores in the conceptual, organizational, and motor areas of learning. Alarmingly, they were less fragmented, more integrated, more pleased with themselves and also in trouble with the law. What did this mean? Were we to presume that when students leave school, they naturally begin to use movement and experience as an integrator in the learning process? Actually, we had been dealing with this question for quite some time and were convinced in our own minds that experience and movement provided the foundation for meaningful learning and that an integrated approach to the use of the other learning systems must accompany the experience, not be detached from it. In fact, we had been using this approach in our private practice and found it to be successful for all types of learners.

Another Place in the Journey

Little did we realize that these insights were preparing us for the next "place" on the way-of-learning journey. One of the regulations of Chapter 766 was to provide full

time alternative educational placements for those students whom the public schools were ill equipped to service. These students were usually labeled emotionally disturbed, conduct disordered, or behaviorally disordered. Some of them possessed all three of these highly charged, negative labels. In the Spring of 1974, we were asked to develop an alternative education program for special needs adolescents which could service the surrounding communities. The school was named Donna Vista Alternative High School, eventually affectionately referred to as DVA by the students. The students were referred to Donna Vista by school systems, Department of Youth Services, judges, probation officers, and psychiatric facilities. One by one, the students arrived on our doorstep. For some, it was the last chance before being incarcerated. For others, it was an alternative to a mental hospital setting. For all, it was an escape from the nightmares of the school system.

Donna Vista was the experience that opened our eyes to the utter brokenness of these youths, a brokenness of mind, body, and spirit - a brokenness that reached to the very core of their beings. They had been molded by forces that made them foreign to every societal system. What they could do was never grasped. What they could not do was all too readily apparent, and what they did do (survival behaviors) was too quickly judged without ever being questioned as to the why. No one had realized how to direct their special and unique energies toward meaningful learning for them. Negativity, punishment, and ridicule were a way of life for these confused and hurting young people. Now, they were being entrusted to our care for their education.

Drawing on our past experiences, we decided to develop an integrated experiential learning model, rooted in the philosophy that there is dignity and worth in

every human being and on the belief that a setting responsive to these students' learning needs would allow them to direct their energies toward developing into healthy, whole individuals.

Our generalized approach was as follows:

> *To accept each student with a trusting spirit*
> *To have positive expectations*
> *To assist students to identify their learning strengths and to respect the value of these strengths*
> *To help them to develop a sense of connectedness with themselves, others, and the world around them (We used the environment as the place for learning.)*
> *To allow them to experience a cooperative, caring spirit, not a competitive one which had traumatized their nervous systems for so many years.*
> *To "talk and walk through" problems that arose at any point during the day. ("Let's talk" became two extremely important words at DVA.)*
> *To never do harm to students; always treat them with love and respect.*
> *To assist them to develop a sense of empathy for one another.*

Experience, moving and doing was the umbrella under which all this learning occurred.

During the process of working with these students, it became quickly apparent that all of our students had learning disorders of some type. We developed an enhanced awareness of the relationship between learning disabilities, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, and mental disorders. While there were always challenges to be addressed, we did the necessary problem solving as a team of learners, teachers and most of all, caring people. We witnessed many mini-miracles in this setting: miracles of caring, peace, connectedness, and wholeness. Unfortunately, it was also becoming more and more apparent to us that the breakdown in society's institutions at all levels was certainly counterproductive to the work we were trying to accomplish.

Another Dimension of Experience

In 1978, when the Donna Vista circle was completed, we were spiraled into our next "place", PAL, bringing with us another dimension of experience. By this time, we had so much information at our fingertips; information that was not available in textbooks. It was knowledge that we gained as a result of years of painful, yet joyous experiences where our eyes made the observations, our minds generated the questions and the students provided the clues. This was accompanied by reading myriads of books in other disciplines, especially the neuro-sciences which provided us with evidence of concepts such as kinetic melody, sensory integration, and synthetic mental activities. All of this led us to conceptualize the mind/brain as a holographic entity connected to a sensing body.

We knew that students were coming to the program as fragmented learners. We knew that the support systems provided for learning disabled students in elementary and secondary education did not help the learning systems become integrated, but acted as splinter skilling, bandaiding mechanisms. This was the natural consequence of the way the entire educational system was organized. We were aware that the learning disabled students were being forced into a mold completely unnatural to their "way of learning".

We had also become profoundly aware that professionals attempting to assist the learning disabled population must be teacher-counselors. Emotional issues must be addressed within the context of the learning. It is foolhardy to believe that any meaningful academic learning will occur when a student's emotions are overriding the situation. And this happens all too frequently. We were also aware of the deep-seated emotional trauma stored in the psyche of these students.

We viewed the learner as a whole, consisting of body, mind, and spirit, not merely a composite of discrete parts to be chipped away at ad infinitum. It was also our contention that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts in the human being. Consequently, integrated learning, according to the individual's way of learning, was

necessary for synthetic mental activities to occur. So, we set about finding a way to accomplish this somewhat formidable task.

In the early years of the program, the PAL student population demonstrated a variety of learning disabilities, but the most common were disorganized language and dyslexia. Diagnostic testing results of these students consistently revealed well developed verbal concept formation. Consequently, taped books, bad speller's dictionaries (before the word processor and spell check), cut and paste techniques for organizing written expression, and concrete materials for spatial relations were standard fare. Academically, many students were successful. However, the students who were not making it or who were suffering trauma upon trauma in the process became our main concern. Why? Back to our original contention. They needed a different foundation upon which to build their integrities as learners. Our challenge was to discern the need and find the means to address it within an academic setting at the post-secondary level. We began this process by expanding the concept of what had constituted PAL assistance. This process involved adapting the learning methods we had previously used to address the issues within academia and adding components that were not part of the presently operating model.

As we became more familiar with the students, it became evident that many of the students with disorganized language weaknesses also exhibited varying degrees of internal disorganization. They had difficulty organizing their space, beginning with themselves and extending to their immediate environment, their relationships with others and ultimately to their academic demands.

We set about trying to find the means to assist them to discover and organize the structures inherent to their lives and to their academic subjects. In order to accomplish this rather staggering task, it was necessary to begin the process of concretizing the abstractions presented in their texts in such a way that the concepts held meaning for them and could be expanded upon by them. We (the learner and teacher) followed the way through action-oriented activities beginning with their own bodies. We began by

jump-starting their motor systems through activities such as: exercising, organizing their space, our offices, collecting and classifying objects. We then proceeded to address the academics through simulation, role-playing, student generated visual representation, discussion, questioning. And finally, once concepts were grasped, internally organized and verbally expressed, the students proceeded to write.

The dyslexic students who were natural movers and doers and were internally organized presented a different challenge. Our modus operandi with these students was to encourage them to continue to move and do as we attempted to facilitate their verbal expression, both orally and in written language. However, stressing only academics within a fragmented structure for those otherwise talented individuals began to eat away at us as we observed on a daily basis what it did to them. It was a constant return to a failure or weakness mode. How could we make this process more dynamic, more alive, and more meaningful?

We began to stress their action-oriented strengths. They began to discover other ways to demonstrate their knowledge in college classrooms in addition to the standard test taking procedures and teaching methods. They soon became proficient self-advocates. They educated others, as they had educated us, to their "way of learning". Their strengths and the diverse learning styles of all the individuals in the college classrooms (PAL and non-PAL) became evident. The community benefited from their presence.

With the emergence of the technological explosion and the dawning of the information age at a global level, more information is being presented to students at an accelerated pace equal to nothing experienced previously in history. This phenomena is accompanied by devastating deterioration of the institutions in our society and the stagnation of an educational system that remains glued in a "factory model" structure, ill equipped to address the issues of the 21st century. Consequently, PAL students are arriving as a population, presenting increased fragmentation at every level of their being,

more complex patterns of needs, and severe psychic trauma. As these new challenges are recognized, the culture of PAL continues to be reinvented, re-created, and re-presented. Continuously "becoming " has been the one unique and consistent inherent characteristic of the program.

Today: The Journey Continues

Now, in 1995, as we stand on the threshold of the 21st century and ponder how to effectively prepare these students for the ambiguities and the futures that await them, one thing is for certain, a paradigm shift is essential. Perhaps an exploration into the new physics (quantum theory) may stimulate the questions that could open minds to recognizing the necessity for dramatic changes in the way we perceive learning. According to quantum theory, "you never end up with "things"; you always deal with interconnections. Modern physics reveals the basic oneness of the universe. It shows that we cannot decompose the world into independent existing smallest units... nature appears as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of the whole. The world thus appears as a complicated tissue of events, in which connections of different kinds alternate or overlap or combine and thereby determine the texture of the whole" (Capra, 1981, p.91). The problem of understanding the texture of the whole in our educational system perhaps lies in the fact that too often we perceive situations and issues narrowly, a natural consequence of the age of specialization.

How does this information translate into learning? At the next transformation point, we find ourselves asking:

1. How does the student become aware of wholeness which in the body is senses and feelings, in the mind is emotions, thoughts and consciousness and in the spirit is the life force that gives meaning to Being, when a disconnecting of these parts has been his/her experience?

2. How is the student led to nurture the kernel of seeking, the essence of learning, that always begins at the center, the heart of the matter when the sum total of the educational experience has been exposure to a variety of disconnected puzzle parts with no means to connect to the whole.

3. How do we facilitate the formation of responsible contributors to a global society
` who understand the interconnectedness to the whole?

A resolution can be found only if the structure of the web is changed, and this will involve profound transformation of our educational institutions. As educators, we must

recognize and respect the uniqueness of each learning individual and then create the fluid learning environment which will allow the student to explore, discover and become.

> "If you treat man as he appears to be, you make him worse than he is. But, if you treat man as if he were already what he potentially could be, you make him what he should be."
> ~Goethe

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The Unconscious Processes in the Teacher-Student Relationship within the Models of Education & Therapy

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This chapter describes the unconscious processes which are present within the teacher-student relationship, or what has been previously referred to by Freud in the therapeutic relationship as the issues of transference and countertransference. Two cases studies are presented which describe teacher-student interactions and how this magical and unconscious phenomenon manifests itself during the interface of teaching and therapy

Many of today's educators are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that within the process of teaching and learning there exists an intangible component. This seemingly magical and difficult to describe entity is the therapeutic technique employed by teachers in order to facilitate students' metacognitive awareness and the acquisition of specific knowledge. In order to engage in this phenomenon, both teacher and student must be involved in an interpersonal relationship. During the establishment, maintenance and termination of the relationship, unconscious processes are at work which determine the destiny of the student's personal and academic growth.

Within a relationship, especially that of the teacher and her student, there exists a multitude of components which contribute to a mutually beneficial healing process for the involved parties. If a relationship is to exist between two people, then there must be a recognizable level of kinship, a spiritual attraction and caring, or a *connection.* These

elements are not always recognized or identified by both parties, but may instead be *felt.* During a relationship, or following one, it is not always possible for each person to be able to analyze, thereby labeling, the elements of the kinship or connection which existed within the teaching-therapy situation.

The Teaching-Therapy Relationship

Teachers are not always aware of the impact the relationship has upon the learning process and outcome. Often, they do not credit themselves with providing an attitude and environment which cares for the whole student. During this process, the teacher becomes not only the giver of care, but also becomes the recipient; as her students begins to trust in her, she begins the process of providing them with belief in their capabilities, moving her students toward autonomy. Confirmation of her ability to provide students with the appropriate cognitive and affective tools for effective learning commences at this time. The teacher and her students become both the givers and recipients of care.

The connectedness or kinship which exists between the teacher and her student is not always present in the beginning stages of the relationship; sometimes the affinity takes a great deal of time to cultivate. A teacher who is conscious of such components within a relationship will be patient, and wait for the mutual emotional responses which indicate that a connection is indeed in the making; a positive transference and countertransference will occur in order for her to begin and continue the integration of teaching and therapy.

The relationship may be established while engaging in the process of teaching and therapy, or it may be accomplished while simply putting the academic demands aside and finding other ways to become acquainted. Whatever the time frame, the relationship will eventually emerge, allowing the teacher to offer her services, providing the student with the opportunity to engage or disengage in the teaching-therapy process. The common boundaries of teaching and therapy are at times overlapping and enmeshed with one

another in order to address the whole learner, yet there are also times when the boundaries are not fuzzy, but very clear. The teaching, or educative component of teaching and therapy may be considered the contributing factor to a student's development. The therapeutic aspect, conversely, is utilized when that development is in jeopardy.

> *. . . the inward-looking process of analysis may run counter to the outward-oriented process of education, at any rate until therapy has enabled the child's ego to arrive at better adapted compromises between the demands of id, superego, and external world, thus freeing the child's capacity to benefit from educational opportunities* (Edgcumbe, 1975, p.134).

The interface of teaching and therapy provides the forum, the set-design, the textural background into which the student-teacher relationship will be cultivated and acted out, eventually culminating in a successful personal and academic experience.

Many teachers do not recognize unconscious processes within the relationship. Often these same teachers may not be aware of the therapeutic component present within their work with their students, and some teachers may not choose to address the concept of teaching-therapy because they do not understand the nature of the process. Their chief concern is that the student learn the material; the whole learner is not the concern, the attainment of the subject matter in question is all that matters. What most teachers fail to realize is that they do engage in the process of teaching and therapy simultaneously, and at times, separately, in order to facilitate their students' learning. It is an emotionally removed teacher who does not provide a healing element in her work, consciously or unconsciously. As human beings, we (teachers) tend to respond to our students' needs on all levels. When physical or emotional needs are left unaddressed, then learning becomes more difficult, at times impossible. The relationship needs to be acknowledged, possibly readjusted, in order to maintain a reasonable rate of progress.

Most often the teacher-student relationship is seen as a means to an end. "The relationship is subservient and instrumental to achieving the goals of the helping process" (Egan, 1990). As important as the empathic, trusting and challenging relationship may be, the very nature of it can also be overrated. Adequate focus needs to be given to the actual academic work to be accomplished by teacher and student; the relationship may appear to be an effective textural background, coming to the forefront when needed, fading into the background when other academic matters need to become the primary focus. It is during this process that the interface of teaching and therapy may be recognized and identified as the primary players in the learning scripts which are at times contrived by us, as teachers, and at times have occurred spontaneously.

Like all relationships, that of the student-teacher is vulnerable to imperfection, disintegration and anger, and open as well to the healing nature of success, growth and joy. Both parties are affected by the relationship; the caregiver is not necessarily exempt from emotional responses which tend to arise in a teaching/learning situation. Despite a teacher's efforts to remain objective and organized in her efforts, the ever-present interpersonal relationship accommodates a constant flow of feelings and biases which affect her position within the teaching-learning situation. While some teachers may possess an awareness of these unconscious processes, students are often unaware of the existence of their emotional responses, and their impact upon the learning situation.

The student-teacher relationship is composed of the two parties involved, their sense (and continued development) of connectedness, their issues of transference and countertransference, and the integration of teaching strategies and therapeutic techniques. Teacher-student relationships change in their dynamics if the structure moves from a one-to-one interaction, to a small or larger group setting. When this change in dynamics occurs, then the teacher becomes a group leader; issues of transference and countertransference change as the teacher's/leader's role changes.

Transference and Countertransference Defined

Freud referred to emotional responses which teachers and students experience within their unique relationships as transference and countertransference, or the "true vehicle of therapeutic influence" (Rychlak, 1981). Dollard and Miller professed that transference took the form of a warm and sometimes loving relationship which encouraged necessary change or desirable behaviors. These factors can then be used by the teacher in order to promote the desired effects, namely, flexibility and cooperation within the teaching-learning situation. Rogers stated that if a relationship was good, then clients (students) would be able to gain adequate insight into their behaviors. Teacher and student would share equal status in the relationship, thereby avoiding the type of transference and countertransference experienced in a relationship in which the teacher maintained greater control (Rychlak, 1983). It stands to reason that each teacher-student relationship will vary in the degree of transference and countertransference experienced. Some teachers must maintain the more powerful position; creating emotional responses in the student which when projected toward the teacher resemble that of a parent-child relationship. According to Sullivan, "Transference grows out of the need everyone has to gain intimacy in interpersonal relations" (Rychlak, 1983). "He (the student) is hostile as well as affectionate, seeks to defy as well as to please, provokes blame and punishment as well as praise and reward" (Edgcumbe, 1975).

> *…transference arises naturally between persons in a variety of situations (Jung, 1971, Perls et al, 1951, Karon, 1976, Jacoby, 1984). Jacoby explains that, 'since we are all motivated by unconscious factors . . . transference exists in all close human relationships - - transference in the sense that we unconsciously experience the other person as an object for our own needs' (Jacoby, 1984, 67) additionally, transference often arises in contexts that parallel the psychotherapeutic setting where one member of the relationship occupies a position of authority over the other member; . . . . teacher-student relationships . . fit the early childhood pattern of adults exercising control and influence over children*
> (all references cited in Wolf, 1986, p.160).

Countertransference, in Jungian terms, is the counter- projections that are experienced by the therapist, which in this case is the teacher (Rychlak, 1983). Teachers need to be aware of their own needs and assets within the relationship in order to appropriately address their students' academic and emotional concerns during the interface of teaching and therapy. There is nothing simplistic about the unconscious processes which are always at work within the teacher-student relationship; they are as multi-faceted and unique as the individuals who are experiencing them.

One-to-One Relationships Described & Discussed

For example, during the earlier years of my teaching career, I was hired to teach study skills to small groups of behaviorally/emotionally disturbed high school students. To begin with, the special education team in this school system defined study skills as "helping students finish their homework". It was an important job for me, my first opportunity to prove myself capable of dealing with students who were considered by the school system to be reluctant, and at risk, both socially and academically. I wanted desperately to please all parties concerned. Therefore I did not challenge their false notions about study skills, nor about the negative judgment they passed on these students. I compromised myself so that I could challenge my ability as a teacher.

Initially, I tried to work with several students at once, an effort which was quickly and effectively sabotaged by the class as a whole. Then I began to work one-on-one with each student. At first I tried to help them identify what it was that had to be accomplished academically. They just were not interested, and demonstrated in a variety of creative ways their decisions to remain in power. I learned quickly that I had to back up, establish some kind of a positive relationship, and then possibly they would allow me to work with them. I did just that. We began by getting to know one another. I had to establish some boundaries as they wanted to know every detail of my life, down to what street I lived on, and what cereal I ate for breakfast. I disclosed personal parts of my life which did not feel

threatening to me, but which I felt were helpful for them in terms of gaining a sense of exactly who I was. Eventually they each began to disclose parts of their personal lives to me. Often they used me as a confidante, a mother, or a whipping post. Eventually I realized that we had established some very interesting interpersonal relationships. A respect and trust grew among us; I was allowed into their worlds. This was a necessary process in order for me to eventually address their academic and truant difficulties.

Deep learning may be experienced as a direct result of a therapeutic relationship between student(s) and teacher. If true empathy is expressed by the teacher, then she is trying to *understand* her students' needs. " . . . accepting the validity of student perceptions in the classroom, places the teacher in the context of the student's inner world, past and present, and even embraces an experiencing of the developmental level a student may have reached (Romanelli, 1991, p.76)." Being able to gain some insight into students' worlds, and sometimes their thinking, allows teachers to begin integrating therapeutic technique with their teaching, addressing the whole student. In order for learning to take place, or even for the stage to be properly set, a teacher must know how her students *feel* before she can begin the process of interpreting their thinking, and facilitating their metacognitive development.

One student insisted that during his one-to-one time with me he be allowed to sit at my desk. Eventually he insisted that he sit in my chair. I knew that I was being tested, and that my personal boundaries felt "shaky" as a result, but I was willing to make numerous concessions in order to progress. We made a deal. If he could sit at the desk, and in my chair during our tutorial, then he would complete some of his homework assignments, and allow me to begin some writing projects with him. As a result we accomplished a great deal (on most days). The Assistant Principal, during his surprise visits, did not approve of my students "failing to respect my position" as they put it, but on some level, I just didn't care what he thought. Some of these students wanted to learn, and that's all that was important to me.

During our tutorial sessions, much discussion took place. This particular student's mother was terminally ill, his father was unemployed, one sibling was in jail, and another was in a great deal of trouble as well. In retrospect, the marriage of teaching and therapy was clear to me during our sessions. I did not have a label for what was occurring, but I knew that if it was beneficial for this student to discuss the issues which often kept him from functioning as a normal fifteen-year old, then together we would explore his "other" issues, as well as his homework assignments. At no time did I behave as a psychotherapist; I offered my unconditional positive regard, as much empathy as I could muster, and a sense of humor which kept us both progressing during many difficult sessions.

During one session in particular, I remember working with him on memorizing his spelling, a task which I abhorred as much as he did. His mood was sullen; his mother had been feeling very ill. He did not want to admit how frightened he was that she was going to die. I was his target; I was the object of his transference. He threw the book across the room, called me several descriptive names, and told me that I was forcing him to do meaningless things which would have no value later in life (not expressed in that language). I knew that it wouldn't matter what I said or did, I was destined to be punished. I made feeble attempts to justify the work we were doing, and tried coaxing him back to "our" desk. He stormed out of the classroom, slamming the door. He was hurt. He blamed me for his pain. He was angry, and I was the cause of his anger. He was frustrated and I would pay for it.

I was desperately afraid that the Assistant Principal would pick him up somewhere in the school and assign him to a useless session of after-school detention. I began to worry, as a mother worries. I began to feel responsible, not for his roaming the corridors during class time, but for his pain, for his anger. The countertransference I was experiencing was unpleasant, disconcerting, and very real. I was concerned about that student as a whole being, not just the boy who sat and struggled with his spelling, but

with the boy who was experiencing an overabundance of emotional issues which were interfering with his academic and daily functioning. I tried to conceal my emotional responses to the situation from my classroom aide. I was very confused, and not at all sure of the legitimacy of my feelings. " Because of the natural overlap of therapeutic techniques with other kinds of language behaviors, some similarities between therapy and other helping professions (such as teaching) are to be expected. Unfortunately, the problems raised by this overlap are seldom addressed by the professionals who encounter them (Wolf, 1986, p.2)." There was no one with whom I could discuss the unconscious processes present within the teaching-therapy situation.

Just as I was beginning to give up hope (turning him in was out of the question), he came back into the classroom, slammed the door and told me to get out of "his" chair. I did. He looked so vulnerable. He was trying to be so brave and so tough. I just sat and waited. The aide just sat and waited. He said he didn't want to study his spelling any more, but that he would tomorrow. I said that that was fine. We just sat quietly until the bell rang and he left for his next class. He regretted his outburst. His transference, or emotional response to me, was something which he did not comprehend, and at that point in time, neither did I. I knew that he would be cooperative the next day. My countertransference shook the foundation of what I felt was my unbiased and completely objective demeanor. I worked hard at being cool and professional. I realized that I wanted to cry for him, to protect him and care for him because he was so needy in so many ways. I also experienced deep feelings of inadequacy as a helper and an educator.

When we were engaged in the business of spelling, we were strictly in a teaching-learning situation, despite the fact that he had manipulated the physical conditions of the classroom, putting him in his perceived position of control. His outburst, and my attempts at rectifying a quickly deteriorating situation, became the therapeutic intervention, despite the fact that our relationship was temporarily suffering. At this time there was a clear distinction between the actual teaching and the therapeutic intervention. However, there

were other times when both teaching and therapy were working compatibly together, accomplishing the completion of an academic task and addressing some personal needs at the same time, usually through informal discussion. Had the compatibility of teaching and therapy not been occurring as it had, and had my student and I not been engaged in a relationship which elicited emotional responses reciprocally, then our work together would not have been nearly as productive. Our interaction would have been stilted, task-oriented and probably non-productive.

Another case that illustrates the relationship within the interface of teaching and therapy is that of a twenty-year old learning-disabled male. When he first came to my classroom, he was defensive and rude. He was a transfer student from another college where he had experienced failure; his self-esteem was in a battered state. His chief difficulties were in general organizational skills, specifically in the synthesis of ideas in preparation for writing. He suffered from a visual-spatial-perceptual deficit and operated on the belief that his mother was to blame for most of his learning difficulties. He also experienced great distress and frustration in his social interactions with peers and adults. It was clear that he was not going to allow me to establish any sort of relationship with him other than that of the powerful student-subservient teacher type. It was in this mode that he felt control.

We began by attempting various visual organizational strategies. He balked at them all, and told me that I did not understand enough about his *handicap* (his terminology). Admittedly, I did not, as there was still a great deal of research being conducted in the field of visual-spatial deficits, not only from a teaching-therapy perspective, but from an occupational therapy perspective. I valued discussion as a great tool in comprehension (and still do), and insisted that we discuss his reading and lecture material. As he talked, I mapped or outlined his thoughts and interpretations. Together, we were able to form some sort of organizational plan for him to utilize independently in the future. Reluctantly, he admitted that something had worked. During these sessions,

we engaged only in a teaching-learning interaction. The subject matter in conjunction with the acquisition of compatible learning strategies was our focus. Very slowly, my student gained some trust in my ability to help him, although he never failed to remind me that I "didn't know enough".

After this twenty-year-old felt that he had gained sufficient proficiency in organizational strategies and in a prewriting process which was appropriate to his style, he requested that we work on his inability to successfully interact on a social level. I agreed (feeling not-very-sure-of-myself). Together we looked at pictures of faces from magazines, and from snapshots which I provided. He tried to guess what each person was feeling; was it anger, joy, pensiveness? It was at this time that he began to share his deep feelings of frustration with me. He related many stories to me which graphically depicted his pain and humiliation from being unable to read a social situation adequately. He questioned me. How did I interact successfully? How did I read the expression on that person's face? Was that how I knew how to behave? Without risking my personal boundaries any more than I already had, I gave examples of how I accomplished these things, and informed him that at that time there was a great deal of research being conducted in just that field. Again, he was angry with me because I "didn't know it all", but was accepting of the fact that at least we were working toward a solution, or an improvement for him.

He let me into his life enough so that I could catch the occasional glimpse of who he really was underneath all the anger and frustration. Each time he was aware that I was getting to know him a little better, he would insist on knowing more about how I functioned, how I learned. The questions were constant. Gradually, I became aware that we actually had a relationship, as questionable as it was a great deal of the time.

A strategy which he learned on his own, and several years later, still utilizes, is reading *my* face. He took great pride in being able to read my expressions, listen to my voice and be able to tell me how I was feeling. During this part of our work together, he

was reacting to me in a very different way, and I, in turn, was very disconcerted, caught emotionally off guard by the fact that every fleeting expression that crossed my face, and every inflection in my voice, held meaning of which I was not always aware. While I was pleased, I was threatened. I was proud of our progress together, but I felt that he was trying to look inside me. The unconscious processes were at work and felt paradoxical in nature. The effect was disarming and confusing. Again, I did not have a professional with whom to sort out this vital process. I only knew how I *felt*.

In this young man's transference, I became the whipping post (again). I, not he, was the failure because I did not possess the depth and breadth of knowledge to immediately address his neurological deficit. I needed some time; he wasn't giving me any. I also became the object of his respect and gratitude from time to time. When he was able and willing to notice his gains from our work together, he found ways to express this to me. I, on the other hand, was feeling as if my boundaries were being constantly pushed and pulled out of place. He was aggressive in his need for my attention. While I did not want our progress to lag, neither did I want to continue to experience that feeling of engulfment. He was manipulating me, and I didn't know how to stop him. My issues of countertransference were threatening to me.

The boundary between teaching and therapy was tenuous during the last year we worked together. We had developed a relationship which consisted of trust and a mutual respect for one another's feelings, but there existed a caution on my part stemming from earlier issues of countertransference. Our academic work became laced with a very therapeutic element. Everything he learned, he related to his personal life. We discussed the issues thoroughly and analytically, so that it was not only a teaching/learning experience, but a personal and healing experience as well. Eventually I recommended that he become involved in psychotherapy in order to address the concerns which were beyond my professional abilities, and which did not belong in our educational therapy sessions.

> *Where a child's ability to profit from educational experience is being interfered with by internalized conflicts, or by distortions in his modes of relating and functioning of a kind which preclude his making a predominantly positive and trusting relationship to his teacher, then individual psychotherapy is required. . . . . But it would not be appropriate to attempt analytic work within the school itself, because of the disruption to group life which can arise from enactment of conflicts, transference of negative features of relationships, and the proliferation of fantasies.*
> *(Edgcumbe, 1975, p.146)*

Group Relationships Discussed

When the teacher or educational therapist becomes the leader of a larger group, then the nature of transference and countertransference changes in accordance with the shifts in the interface of teaching and therapy. The group becomes the social microcosm in which learning takes place in a much different manner. There is not one model, one speaker, one listener, one confidante, one supporter, one nurturer, one teacher, one therapist. There are many sources from which to gain insight into the self, the learning process, or into an isolated personal or academic task. Problem solving becomes a different type of process. Collaboration does not occur with only one person, but with many. Feelings of transference will be experienced on a multitude of levels, as there are other individuals who will incite emotional responses in each student. Each individual becomes a leader as well as the textural background for one another's academic and emotional learning experiences. The teacher or ET is not the center of the therapeutic process. The group is.

> *Even if it (transference) is called by another name, there is a powerful, persistent teacher-student process, indicated by affect, unexplainable by actual circumstances, available in the classroom as a vehicle for deep learning* (Stivers, 1989, cited in Romanelli, 1991/1992, p.5).

In order to fully understand the importance of each student's metacognitive development, it is vital that the teacher strive to familiarize herself with each student's

strengths and difficulties, both academically and emotionally. In this way the learning experience can be addressed cognitively and affectively, caring for students complete needs. The teacher, ET, can begin by establishing a relationship with each student based on unconditional positive regard, empathy and mutual trust so that learning goals may be planned. Together, strategies may be devised to utilize students strengths in order to ameliorate their difficulties. In the beginning stages of the relationship the teacher or ET may take the role of a nurturer, depending upon the needs of the students, and will also guide the progress, the plans, and to some degree, the emotional responses of the students. Gradually, with increased levels of self-esteem due to incremental experiences of academic success, students will move to a more equitable position of interdependence within the relationship. According to personal styles and/or needs, students may take control of the relationship, gaining more autonomy in their learning, giving the ET cues in the teaching and therapy situation. Within the teacher-student relationship, the roles may change, and indeed, almost reverse at times, as the components of teaching and therapy integrate, separate and function in response to the learning experience.

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Mentoring College Students with Learning Disabilities: Facilitating Metacognitive Development

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Counselor

This chapter explores the nature and role of the mentor in facilitating metacognitive development in college students with learning disabilities. Susan Pennini summarizes the literature which she has been exploring on this topic as part of her doctoral study. The personal reflections of Eric Peltz, a former PAL student who has recently completed his masters degree in counseling, and those of his mentor (Susan Pennini) are used to "give voice" to the relevant literature on metacognitive development and mentoring relationships with the goal of understanding the potential triumphs as well as the struggles that are inherent.

Two hallmarks of the Curry College Program for Advancement of Learning (PAL) are its focus on helping students understand and take control of their own learning, and its commitment to teaching/learning within the context of mentoring relationships. Recently I had the opportunity to spend some extended time with Eric Peltz, a former student whom I began mentoring in the summer of 1986. He is now finishing as an intern in Curry's Counseling Center while completing his Master's Degree in Counseling Psychology. I was sharing with him the research that I had been doing on metacognitive development and mentoring relationships, and it initiated a conversation about our work together during his four-year undergraduate career and our subsequent relationship since his graduation. The two perspectives that emerged from our discussions on the role of

mentoring in fostering metacognitive development for college students with learning disabilities deepened our understanding and appreciation for the struggles and triumphs that are embedded in this type of relationship. This chapter is a reflection of that dialog. In it we summarize the literature as it relates to metacognitive development and mentoring relationships and give our personal perspective on its significance in our work together.

The Importance of Metacognition for Students with Learning Disabilities

Research has indicated that some of the poor academic performance of LD students is a result of problems in self-regulation of organized strategic behavior, rather than inability to execute specific strategies. LD students are said to be less aware than their non-LD peers of their learning styles, the demands of the task, the strategies appropriate for the task, and the relevance of using their background to facilitate learning (Harris, 1986). Metacognition is a concept that explores how a person comes to understand him/herself as a learner. Metacognition has been defined as referring to "one's own knowledge of one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them. Metacognition refers, among other things, to active monitoring and consequent regulation and orchestration of these processes...usually in the service of some concrete goal or objective" (Flavell,1986, p.28). Central to this definition is the notion that metacognition involves two distinct forms of competence: declarative knowledge about the cognitive system ("knowing that"), and effective regulation and control of that system ("knowing how").

By definition, students with learning disabilities have a complex profile of strengths and weaknesses. It is often confusing to students and difficult for them to

understand why they are quite able in one area while extremely deficient in another. This confusion is only compounded by an educational system which uses highly technical terms when "diagnosing" a learning disability and further tends to focus only on the student's weaknesses. Consequently, many students with learning disabilities arrive at college well versed in what their weaknesses are, but unable to identify any cognitive strengths that they can use to attack their course work. The undermining effect this has on their academic performance as well as their self-concept is obvious.

ERIC: It does not take long for a child to become aware that he/she is somehow different than other children. Even as young as six, I can remember the frustration I felt because I could not write the way the other kids could. In second grade these differences rapidly became even more evident both to myself and my peers. Teachers, apparently angry with my inability or laziness, began to separate me from my peers until I had accomplished the task at hand. Thus, sitting in the back of the room trying desperately to finish printing the alphabet, or complete a math problem so that I could join the class for story time or show and tell, became a regular scene in my academic life. As my frustration grew, so did my distractibility and disinterest in academics. Somehow no matter how hard I tried, I failed.

Fourth grade was a long year for me, as I became the recipient of a seemingly endless battery of tests. It seemed as though I was taken out of class a couple of times a week for months at a time by a strange man or woman. They would ask me to do things like puzzles, math, and reading all in a very short time. My reward for completing the battery of tests was that I was given the label learning disabled (Chapter 766). Along with

the label came an Educational Plan which was reviewed twice a year. I was then subjected to meeting with tutors at least once a day, and often for half and whole days.

In later years being LD entitled me to miss classes that were difficult for me, and spend time in the resource room. I vividly remember two other students in elementary school who used this room; they were both mentally retarded. I naturally assumed that I too was retarded, and that LD was just a fancy term for it. However, something inside me didn't want to accept this label and continued to try to succeed academically. Sometimes I would do well on a test or an assignment, but this would prove to hurt me later as the teacher then assumed I was lazy when I inevitably failed later assignments. The only thing that I was learning in school was how incapable I was, and how much I hated educators.

Straight through high school this LD label followed me, and no matter how hard I tried to beat it by doing the work, I failed. I was given special tutors every year, and was to see them every day; however, these tutors must have been frustrated with my lack of understanding of the material, because without fail they wound up doing the work for me. I believe that this was the only way I graduated from high school. It seemed as though every teacher/tutor "tolerated" me, but none truly engaged me.

SUSAN: In the summer of 1986, Eric arrived at Curry College for Summer PAL, a three-week preparatory program for students who have been accepted into PAL and Curry College for the fall. I remember that summer well because I was six months pregnant and the three-week program in July was a bit of a struggle. Right from the beginning, Eric challenged everything. Our goal was to have students begin to reflect on

the way they learn and to experiment with some different strategies which might use their strengths more effectively. This involved some unconventional learning experiences. We would have the students move through different types of experiences, and then reflect on them in terms of the learning process. Eric was so intense. He continually would stop what we were doing to question the validity of the learning activity and to share his skepticism. His favorite question was "What book did you get that from?" or "Where did you learn that?" When it is 90 degrees and you are not feeling physically comfortable, it is hard not to take this personally. I wasn't sure whether this was just a bit of an annoying personality trait or whether he had another agenda. I tried not to react but rather to listen to what was underneath his skepticism.

Eric was obviously very bright. This was reflected in his testing and was continually demonstrated in his haunting questions, yet he seemed unwilling to accept this. As part of Summer PAL we take out the students' psycho-educational testing, particularly the WAIS-R, and help them analyze it in practical terms making sure to highlight the cognitive strengths that the testing indicates. Eric had a very difficult time accepting this. He spent much time talking about his past academic failures and predicting future ones. I knew that my first job was to help him see that he really did have strengths that could be used to help him be successful in school. He had always thought of learning as a product not a process; his "products" in school had been failures, so he believed he was too. It was time to break the cycle.

ERIC: Taking for granted extreme perseverance on my part, and a miracle on god's part, I found my way into Curry College and the PAL program. As an entrance to

the program, I had to attend a three-week summer program. The main purpose of this program, as I understood it, was to discover my strengths and weaknesses as a learner and acquire some compensation skills. Although this did happen, it did not turn out to be the major piece of work done.

I was introduced to my PAL instructor, Susan Pennini. She was not what I had expected, nor was the three week program. My first impression of Sue was that she was firm, aggressive, and somewhat militant. She told me that I was going to do things the way she told me to whether I wanted to or not. She promised it would work, and I would be successful if I did it her way. As it turned out, it took compromise on both of our parts, and ultimately I did succeed, but I fought her every step of the way. After about 3-4 days of my complaining it wouldn't work, statements like I "couldn't do it", and continuous questioning of her credentials, Sue "nudged" me, and said “You can do it, and it will work; we will do it together.”

Over the years I had built up strong defense mechanisms serving two main purposes, to avoid failure and to avoid doing academics. I distinctly remember thinking two things: I would not invest too much of myself into this program, as I was going to fail anyway, and given that Sue was pregnant and would be leaving anyway, I couldn't fully trust her to really be in this with me. However, although still apprehensive and very resistant, I was able to begin to try it her way.

Nature of the Mentoring Relationship

PAL's commitment to engendering mentoring relationships is based upon an understanding that students who have had traumatic educational experiences need a teaching/learning relationship that goes beyond the conventional faculty/student

relationship to build a supportive environment for self-reflection. "If we are serious when we assert that education is most successful when students 'grow,' that it is intellectual development we are about rather than simply knowledge acquisition, then the evidence is strong that emotional engagement must be part of the learning process. The recognition that passion is central to learning and the capacity to provide emotional support when it is needed are hallmarks that distinguish the good mentor from the mediocre teacher" (Daloz, 1986, p.33).

The mentoring relationship appears to extend the boundaries of the student/teacher relationship in three significant ways: it must have a whole person orientation, a humanistic-learning quality, and embrace broader goals than the conventional educational relationship. A mentor does not draw strict boundaries between academic and personal matters when working with a student, thus dealing with the whole student. "Not having to maintain a rigid division between work (thinking, performing, achieving) and personal relationships (loving, caring, fostering development), he can combine work and friendship in various admixtures (Zucker, 1982,p.32). This whole-person orientation develops mutuality and trust as the student comes to realize that the mentor cares about him or her as a person, not solely a student. Incorporated in this interaction is an opening up of the mentor revealing his or her own human qualities.

The relationship between the mentor and the student must take place in a humanistic learning environment. The environment must be student-centered and provide a safe context in which the student can reflect, explore, and stretch. Central to this is positive regard, the view that all students are capable of learning and growing;

acceptance of the student's frame of reference, using this knowledge to respond to students needs; and emotional availability of the mentor, expressing hi or her own feelings and shared experiences (Schneider, Klemp, Kastendeik, 1981).

The true mentoring relationship also has goals that go beyond the immediate task at hand. Different researchers have framed those goals in different ways. Daloz (1986) suggests that the mentor's goal is to provide a vision for the student. Candy (1990) emphasizes the goal of helping the student to gain a sense of personal control and encouraging the student to believe in his or her own abilities. Zucker frames it in more psychological terms when he states that the mentor's goal is to "foster the young (individual's) development from child-in-relation-to-parental-adults to adult-in-peer-with other-adults" (Zucker, 1982, p.24).

SUSAN: When I reviewed Eric's file before he came to Curry, I knew that he had been at another college and had failed. The testing indicated that this was probably due to his poor reading comprehension and his difficulty organizing his writing. These were obvious goals for our work together; however as is true with most of the students in PAL, this was only the tip of the iceberg. As I got to know Eric during the first three weeks, I realized that he needed to feel good about himself as a learner, truly understanding his strengths so that he could believe that he could be successful. To begin to accomplish this, I needed to work to "earn" his trust.

Throughout my twelve years teaching in PAL, I have found that I must genuinely show my students how much I respect them, that I care, and that I will always be honest with them if I am going to earn their trust. For Eric, as well as for most of the students I have in PAL, my respect for him initially grew from recognizing his true desire to

complete a college education given the many painful experiences and insults to his intelligence that he had suffered throughout his schooling experience. We spent much time during Summer PAL talking about those experiences and trying to sort through their impact on his academic life today.

I find it important to make time to be with my students outside of the classroom doing things unrelated to schoolwork. For example, in the summer I have students come to my house for a cookout. We often will play some games or students will bring their guitars and just relax together. This often allows me to see another side of the student. This was very true of Eric. Anytime we were able to get away from academics, his defensiveness subsided and a much more confident, sensitive young man emerged. Accordingly, during these times I was able to share things about myself confirming the idea that this is a two-way relationship.

Engaging in this type of relationship with students has its risks and gray areas. It is difficult to always know where to draw the boundaries. Though I do believe that mentors must move beyond the usual boundaries to work with the "whole - person", I think it is unhealthy and unhelpful for students and teachers to completely blur the boundaries between teacher and friend. There is a power dynamic that is involved that can be harmful to both people if the boundaries are stretched too far. This means that a mentor must continually check him/herself that he/she is reaching out to his/her students but not becoming enmeshed with them. I have found that talking with my colleagues can help me sort out these dilemmas.

ERIC: One of the greater difficulties that I faced was allowing myself to be open to the learning experience. This openness had been shut down in me since about the age

of 10 or 12 via countless statements about what I couldn't do, and how lazy or stupid I was. Over the years, I would periodically try and open myself to education, inevitably fail, and receive yet another insult to my already diminished ego. Never before was a tutor able to help me succeed, so I wasn't quite ready to trust that Sue could help me.

At the time, I did not put very much thought into how Sue was able to engage me, and allow me to maintain a positive attitude. In retrospect, I am able to identify some of what made Sue's approach successful where countless other tutors and supposed specialists had failed. I believe the main entity was her genuine interest and caring attitude. This went far beyond my learning disabilities and well into my personal life. Sue wanted to know me as a whole person, and in turn wanted me to know her as a whole person. I was, and still am, struck by her willingness to give of herself to me, a student who undoubtedly made her job more difficult than necessary. Never before had a teacher, tutor, or specialist allowed himself or herself to be a real person with me. I strongly believe that this makes all the difference in the world especially to a student who has never had a positive relationship in this (educational) arena.

A major turning point for me was when Sue returned from her maternity leave, (as she stated she would), and invited all of the students she was working with to her home for dinner. I met and was welcomed into her family. To some, this may sound like a crossing of that imaginary fine line between teacher and student, but to me it made all the difference in the world I realized at that point that she was not only my teacher, but was also my friend. More important was that I truly believed she cared that I succeed as a person, not just as an LD student.

I guess this is where the term "mentor" holds meaning for me. When I met Sue, she not only provided me with the direction and structure which I so desperately needed, but she also treated me as a person and not as a learning disability. Soon she provided guidance, and later suggestion and reflection. Presently, and throughout our relationship there are three things that have never changed: the unconditional support, encouragement, and friendship which Sue has provided have allowed this relationship to bloom. They have also permitted me to grow, change, and succeed on my own. To me, this embodies the mentoring relationship.

Developing Metacognition within the Mentoring Relationship

The nature of the mentoring relationship has been described through the use of metaphors such as guide, midwife, and wisdom personified. Each of these metaphors communicates an essential quality of the relationship. The guides "embody our hopes, cast light on the way ahead, interpret arcane signs, warn us of lurking dangers, and point out unexpected delights along the way" (Daloz, 1986,p. 16). The midwife assists in the birthing of a voice and a consciousness. He or she does not act as a physician who may administer anesthesia and take-over the birthing himself or herself, but rather supports thinking, allowing the student to feel the contractions of development along the way (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). As wisdom personified, the mentor embodies wisdom and is not the source of wisdom him or herself. Therefore the mentor becomes the means to an end rather than the end itself. The development of metacognition is essential to all of these roles.

In considering the development of metacognition, Flavell further clarifies metacognitive knowledge as the understanding of one's own learning along three

dimensions: an understanding of the universal, inter individual, and intra-individual aspects of cognition; an understanding of the way in which the nature of a task affects how you approach that task; and a conscious knowledge of the use of different strategies that one uses for achieving a goal (Flavell, 1986). He suggests that metacognitive knowledge is that knowledge that has been stored in long term memory that is not related to a particular subject, but rather to the mind and the way that it works. It can also be subdivided into knowledge about persons, tasks, and strategies. The category of knowledge about persons includes any information that a person has stored about the ways that humans think. As stated previously, this information includes knowledge that a person might have about the universal aspects of our cognitive processes, our inter-individual differences, and our intra-individual differences. The task category includes knowledge that relates to the nature of information encountered and dealt with in any cognitive task. Finally, the strategy category refers to information that has been stored regarding both successful and unsuccessful strategies that can and have been used, and why they were successful or not.

The second component of Flavell's conception of metacognition is metacognitive experience. He defines metacognitive experiences as "cognitive or affective experiences that pertain to a cognitive enterprise. Fully conscious and easy-to-articulate experiences of this sort are clear cases of this category but less fully conscious and verbalizable experiences should probably also be included in it" (Flavell, 1985, p. 107). Therefore, a metacognitive experience can be a simple or complex experience in which a person focuses on where he or she is in a cognitive process. For example, a person taking an exam might sit back after the first half and reflect that he or she did well on the multiple

choice questions, and wonder if the essay questions in the second half will be more difficult. These metacognitive experiences usually happen in tough cognitive enterprises where the person is trying to take the cognitive task one step at a time, monitoring and regulating each step of the process. These metacognitive experiences serve to mediate ongoing activities as well as inform metacognitive knowledge. It also seems likely that metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experience, and cognition are constantly eliciting and informing one another during any cognitive task (Flavell, 1985).

The primary responsibility of a mentor is to orchestrate dialog and experiences which enhance metacognitive development. In Daloz's book, *Effective Teaching and Mentoring* (1986), he suggests that mentors do three basic things: provide support, provide a challenge, and provide a vision. In the previous section we have discussed extensively the ways in which a mentor provides support. However, it is also important that the mentor provide a challenge. The mentor must ask questions, give bits of information, and produce situations which cause cognitive dissonance in the student, creating impetus for growth. Finally, the mentor provides the student a vision by offering him or herself as a model, offering a map of the possible developmental journeys ahead, suggesting new language that reflects different frames of reference, and providing a mirror to enhance the student's self awareness.

Much of the interaction that is described in the mentoring relationship is based on the mentor helping the student develop metacognitive skills through verbal mediation. The concept of verbal mediation is grounded in the work of Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist who studied the relationship between thought and language in the early 1900's (Vygotsky, 1986). Vygotsky asserted that inner language was a result of

language that had first been used by others to direct a child's actions, and then used by the child to direct his or her actions and ultimately his or her thoughts. Verbal mediation is defined as the way in which a higher order conceptual system, once taught to a person, may make it possible for him or her to accomplish a new kind of thinking.

The improvement of metacognitive strategies through verbal mediation is imbedded in the mentoring relationship. Vygotsky stated that within new fields of learning, new systems are developed, and the mentor becomes a model for the inner language. He feels that this is best accomplished through a "scaffolding" technique which begins with the mentor and student working cooperatively to accomplish a task and gradually moves toward the student taking over the responsibility. Initially the mentor takes responsibility for those elements of the activity which are just outside the student's ability to accomplish independently. Vygotsky labeled those abilities which a child is unable to accomplish independently, yet is able to accomplish in cooperation with the mentor, as falling into the "zone of proximal development". He saw that the abilities that fall into this zone are in the process of being internalized. Gradually the mentor cedes control of all the activities to the developing learner (Vygotsky, 1978).

SUSAN: The way I help students develop a metacognitive understanding of themselves is through a continual dialogue. At first, there is some theoretical understanding of them that we have when we look at their WAIS-R scores, learning style inventory, or whatever we do with them in the summer. Then it’s going into practice and applying it, asking, "Why are you having so much trouble with this?” And they say "Oh yeah, this is asking me to do such and such, and I have a hard time with that.” Then they go back and think of how they can handle that based on the kind of

learners they are. What we give them first is the overview of their learning profile, but I don't think they really grasp that actually until they apply it and compare that theoretical knowledge of themselves as a learner to their concrete experiences. Sometimes these ongoing "metacognitive experiences" completely change the way they see themselves and the way I have viewed them. Initially we have only limited information from tests, and we might find that something we thought would work based on testing doesn't work in reality.

Eric's testing indicated that he had superior verbal and visual conceptual ability. I spent much of our beginning time together acting as his mirror, reflecting back his strengths based upon whatever we were doing or talking about. I found that this was most effective when were talking about his experiences outside of the classroom. In those conversations, I would try to show him why he had been successful at whatever he was doing and then show how that strength could be translated into his academic work. At times I would have to become somewhat forceful to get him to try new strategies that might better use the strengths we were seeing. It is always a tough call to know when to push and when to wait and be patient. It is important that the right relational foundation has been built before you give a nudge, and sometimes you make the wrong call. On the other hand, that nudge can be the very gesture that confirms the student's sense of respect from you.

Eric did begin sensing his strengths and using them to build strategies that were successful for him. As the semester progressed, we moved from my strongly recommending strategies that he would try and then modify, to his coming in and using me as a sounding board for ideas that he had for attacking particular academic challenges.

For example, Eric took a philosophy course that involved writing a thesis paper. This tapped into his superior conceptual strength, yet in the past he would write a fairly concrete paper because he had difficulty organizing his high level abstract thoughts into a cohesive paper. Now he was able to come to me and clarify his thoughts and build a visual concept diagram to organize them, and write a sophisticated paper. By the end of the third semester, he only touched base with me for reassurance that he was on the right track. When he came in, he would tell me what he needed to do, why he approached it in the manner he had, and why his approach had been successful or not. THAT IS METACOGNITION!!

ERIC: Sue and I have now known each other since August of 1986, and our relationship has grown and changed several times and in several ways. When it began, Sue gave me very little leeway, and seldom integrated any of my suggestions or strategies. Gradually that changed, as I learned more about my strengths and how to use them to compensate for my weaknesses (which I knew about all too well). Sue would suggest, (or tell me) how to do something, explain why she wanted me to do it that way, and a discussion would ensue, allowing each of us to articulate both our strategies and our thoughts behind them. Ultimately, I was able to take ownership for the direction that I would pursue in completing the task.

An example of how this metacognitive process was used in an effort to help me succeed was in my re-learning how to effectively write a paper. Sue would continually suggest ways of attacking a paper, and I continually would ignore those suggestions. It had been ingrained in me from an early age that when one writes a paper or essay, it must begin with a topic sentence followed by three sentences which reflect what will be

discussed in the next three paragraphs. The paper is then finalized by a paragraph which restates the topic sentence. In all, a paper should consist of five very structured paragraphs. Since one of my greatest weaknesses is in organization, writing papers in this structured manner forced me to focus on the structure of the paper rather than on the content. This method in and of itself was flawed because it forced me to rely on my weakness in sequential organization, rather than my strength in exploring content using my strong abstract reasoning ability. Ultimately, after countless attempts on Sue's part, I agreed to try brainstorming, using mapping as an organizer. Although it was extremely difficult for me to break the old habit of grinding my way through the work, this method seemed to free my mind in a way which allowed me to write with ease. Papers that would have taken days for me to complete, now took/take hours.

Without knowing it, I had been developing metacognition through Sue's explanations of why she wanted me to do things in a specific way. This metacognition allowed me to think more critically about myself as a learner. I was able, for the first time in my life, to begin to express why I had to do something in a specific way, and begin to figure out better ways of doing things.

The Life Cycle of a Mentoring Relationship

Developmental theorists such as William Perry (1968), Belenky, Clinchy Goldberger, and Tarule (1982), and Levinson (1978) note the importance of a mentoring relationship in the young adult years. It is at this time that the individual is moving away from an authority bound, receptive frame of reference to explore a more relativistic perspective. The lure of the mentor has been described as his or her embodiment of the protégé's dream (Levinson, 1978; Zucker, 1982). In her book *The*

Critical Years: Young Adults and the Search for Meaning Faith and Commitment, Sharon Parks (1986) states:

> *In the young adult there is an appropriate dependence that differs from the dependence of either the adolescent or the older adult. Though the adolescent is subject to the power of the conventional milieu, the young adult is primarily subject to those voices that invite out the still emerging but increasingly inner-dependent, self. This dependence is manifest in the relationship between the mentor and the young adult...the young adult is not subject to the mentor in a condition of fusion (characteristic of the adolescent); nor is the relationship ordered by the negative tension of counter dependence. The young adult is better described as subject to the emerging self that is yet dependent upon an authority "out there" to beckon and confirm its integrity. In young adulthood, the self depends upon mentors not so much for its integrity as for its expression, confirmation, and fulfillment* (p.88-9).

SUSAN: It is so interesting to look back over the past eight years with Eric. Looking back, I can now see the different stages that the mentoring relationship has gone through, and the ways that the dynamics have changed, some consciously and some subconsciously. When Eric first arrived, I know that I was seen as the ultimate authority figure. I believe that is why Eric felt the need to question me so much to see if I was worthy of his trust in that role. I often used that authority to suggest a new way for Eric to reflect on himself and his way of learning. This continued through the first semester of our work together as I strongly suggested new approaches for his coursework and consistently tried to reflect back a new image of himself. Throughout that semester, Eric would periodically come in and tell me that he was going to flunk out at the end of the semester. He would then take out a piece of paper and make a list of his courses predicting the terrible grades he was going to get in each. I would then make him stop and reality test that against the grades he had gotten so far in the course to try to assure him of his success. He still had a hard time accepting an image of himself as a successful student.

Sometime in the second semester, Eric began moving from being a passive learner to becoming a more active learner, taking control of his learning. He would come into our sessions with whatever assignment he was concerned about, seeking advice, yet often interjecting a different idea or approach. This is one of the first critical transition times in a mentoring relationship. I have to be careful that I do not become too accustomed to being in complete control knowing "what's best" for the student. The conscious act of the student taking ownership of his learning is as important as "the right approach" is. By the end of the semester, Eric would stop in to tell me how he was doing and we often spent much of our time having an informal friendly chat that would cover anything from what was happening in his classes, to my plans for going skiing the next weekend. Though I did believe that there were other academic skills that I could help Eric improve, it was obvious that Eric wanted to take on these challenges on his own. It was time for him to leave PAL.

ERIC: Then much as a bird pushes her chicks out of the nest so they can fly on their own, Sue sent me off on my own. Daloz (1986), uses the metaphor of the mentor/student's journey in which the mentor first leads, then walks beside, and eventually disappears, leaving the protégé to continue his or her journey alone. I distinctly remember not wanting to leave the PAL program, feeling for sure that without Sue to work with me I would fail. However, I was too proud to state this, and Sue was telling me it was time, so our relationship took another turn. In fact she was correct, I did fine on my own and my self-reflection about my learning continued. From time to time I stopped by to say hello, and share yet another success story with Sue. I am amazed at the natural progression this relationship has taken. I don't remember ever feeling out of sorts with the direction of the

relationship. Although I felt nervous and apprehensive at times, I never felt like I had to get away or go back to any level of the relationship.

New Roles

Lastly, research regarding the mentor's role suggests that it changes over the lifetime of the relationship (Daloz, 1986 ; Levinson, 1978; Zucker, 1982). Initially the mentor is seen as a very powerful figure who leads the way holding much of the power in the relationship. Eventually, as the protégé develops, he or she begins to see the mentor as an equal who is able to give advice which can be explored or set aside. Unfortunately Levinson (1978) finds:

> *The end of a mentoring relationship is often punctuated by conflict and bitterness. The protégé, becoming more confident in his own abilities, may feel stifled by his mentor. He may manifest his newly acquired skills freely and creatively without disapproval or overprotectiveness from his mentor. On the other side, the mentor may find the protégé to be 'inexplicably touchy, unreceptive to even the best counsel, irrationally rebellious and ungrateful'* (p.101).

SUSAN: Our relationship has to develop and change. I have continued to act as a resource for Eric, particularly when he has taken on new challenges academically; however, increasingly the boundaries between mentoring and friendship have blurred as the power dynamics have balanced. Most recently Eric has come back to Curry as an intern in our Counseling Office. This has given us the opportunity to interact on a more professional level. I have been very impressed with Eric's understanding of the psychological needs of the population here at the college as well as by his personal qualities which put others at ease and make it easier to open up and reveal oneself. On a number of occasions, I have referred students of mine to him and on other occasions we

have sought out one another's advice regarding student situations. It has been very personally and professionally rewarding to work in this way with someone whom I had previously mentored; however, I am also keenly aware of tensions that exist as we move into new roles once again.

The first point of tension is the struggle not to continue the patterns of our previous roles. The first time I suggested to one of my students that he meet with Eric, I wanted to reassure him that Eric would be able to understand his situation and would help him sort out his feelings. To accomplish that, I told him that Eric had been one of my students, hoping that would help the student connect with him. It wasn't until a few days later when Eric was talking to the entire PAL faculty about the ease and difficulties of interning in a place where he had gone to school that I realized I had really violated his privacy. I had thought it was such a good idea for Eric to let his students know that he had "been there", that in my enthusiasm, I did it for him without his permission. We were able to talk about this and set up appropriate guidelines.

The reality of the significant changes in our relationship became most clear to me one day when I was struggling over a particular student whom I was feeling I had failed. I was confiding my feelings about the situation to Eric and he provided me with a completely different perspective which helped me to frame my role in an entirely new way. In retrospect, I was very grateful for his support, yet I must confess to a twinge of confusion in this role reversal.

Probably the most surprising point of tension for me in our new roles has been my sensitivity around his evaluation of me. At times, I find myself cringing as we talk because I wonder whether something I have revealed will substantially alter his image of

me. This has caused me to question and recognize the intensity of feelings and emotions that are involved as I move into a more equal relationship. Thankfully we both have healthy senses of humor and have been able to move beyond these moments, acknowledging the awkwardness, yet reassuring each other that the respect that has been the foundation of this relationship remains.

ERIC: I am currently completing an internship at the counseling center. In my capacity as a counselor at Curry, I have had the opportunity to work with several of Sue's students. In doing so, Sue and I have had many occasions to work together, seeking one-another's professional consultation. This has proven to be both exciting and extremely challenging, as I seek Sue's expertise and professional judgment; she too seeks mine. I have the utmost respect and admiration for Sue, and have come to believe that she in turn feels the same toward me. I believe that this mutual respect has existed since the beginning, and has played a key role in our lasting relationship. I am quite aware that I have used the term relationship throughout this entry. I suppose most student teacher relationships remain just that, student/teacher. This relationship is so rich, and has so many aspects to it, that it goes beyond even friendship. There is such an intensity involved in the type of early work done together that intense emotions are consistently dealt with during this journey. This creates a bond, and an understanding and appreciation of one another that is rivaled by few other relationships in life. It is this relationship that helped me to break the barriers which I had created to protect myself from the failure and insults of growing up with a learning disability.

Unfortunately, the process of engaging in this type of a relationship is not without its pitfalls. I have become increasingly and uncomfortably more aware of this fact as time

has progressed. I am consciously aware of several instances when I have fallen back into the old comfortable role of being Sue's protégé and yet not wanting to be in that role, nor having it be appropriate to be in that role. Times when it is important for me to be the leader and the one in control continue to be challenging times for us. I believe that it is difficult for both Sue and I to adjust to being colleagues, friends, and generally equals. It is at this time that I am actively seeing how many mentoring relationships can fall apart as time progresses. Something as natural as asking a question of someone who will probably know the answer now has become a conscious decision. It is now that egos may get in the way of this relationship, as it is difficult at best to monitor these relatively new roles we are suddenly placed in. I do, however, believe that my friendship with Sue will continue to grow and mature and will exist throughout this lifetime. The reason that I am confidant about this, is simply our expressed understanding of the reality of the existence of pitfalls, as well as our continual monitoring of ourselves in relation to the other.

It seems as though the conversations that were sparked by the writing of this chapter have served to increase the understanding of a process which is confusing at best. It is not as though the past 9 years has been filled with poignant life changing moments. During the years we were working closely together, much of the movement that we are now able to clearly identify was evolving introspectively and beneath the surface, and in reality there have been years since graduation that have gone by with relatively little contact. We can see that respect, and the recognition for the need and acceptance of growth are foundational to the success of a mentoring relationship. This has certainly proven to be the case in our experience together.

Knowing that we have only just begun to reflect upon the many variables of this relationship which began nine years ago, it is difficult to write a conclusion. Instead, we find ourselves looking ahead while reflecting upon the past.

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Parental and Professional Perspectives: Looking at Students' Issues as a Parent and as a Professional

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In this chapter the author, a teacher of students with learning disabilities and the mother of a young adult with learning disabilities. Reflects on the convergence of her two roles and the paradoxes and insights these dual roles engender.

Dual Perspective

I entered the educational field as a teacher fresh from a graduate program, filled with wonderful theories and philosophies that I was anxious to put into practice. For several years, I attempted to make use of all those lofty ideals in my classroom until I was temporarily sidelined from the school systems to I stay home to take care of my own young family. Upon return to the classroom, I brought with me a new "twist" to my educational theories that I was also eager to put into practice: the parental perspective.

The situations described in this chapter involve students with learning disabilities, including my son, who have dealt with issues such as dependence, fear of failure and/or success, and denial/avoidance. These particular elements were chosen because they seem to be recurrent themes with many of my students. I attempt to discuss the ways in which my role as both a parent and a professional affected the manner in which I addressed the individual circumstances.

Bob and Russ

Bob walked into my office quivering with lack of self-confidence and hesitating with each word he managed to push from his mouth. It was our first scheduled meeting where I usually introduce myself and try to establish a rapport with each student individually. I also try to explain what the PAL program means to first year students like

Bob who had not experienced the Summer PAL program. Before I had a chance to get very far in my initial explanation, it was quite obvious that Bob had a totally different agenda that was crying out for attention, so I quickly switched gears.

He was completely absorbed by his difficulty in understanding the schedule he had just received for his first semester courses. He had called his mother for help, but of course, it was impossible for her to decipher the computer printout through a long distance call. Once Bob was able to relax, we were able to address his understandable confusion, and sort out his schedule. This incident was to repeat itself again, though, as I got more panic visits and phone calls from Bob over the next week involving daily living issues. There was the problem of how to cash a check, and the question on how to do the laundry. If he couldn't reach his mother, he could always reach me! Separation from a very dependable person was difficult for Bob.

I was becoming a substitute mother to Bob, and having a difficult time getting to the metacognitive issues that I knew were so important for him to become successful and independent. When I worked with Bob, I often thought of my own son and his college experiences which were filled with anxiety, doubt, questions, and uncertainties. So I continued to be a substitute parent for Bob when I felt it was necessary and constructive because I know it takes time to transfer confidence to a teacher, and slowly I managed to pull the professional and parental aspects of the job into sync. Once his initial panic had subsided, we were able to talk about what it means to be independent, and ways to get there.

I never want to turn Bob's questions away, but I do expect to offer him the guidance he will need to be able to solve his own problems, just as I hope that other professional educators will do for my children. Finding the fine line between the position of the "in loco" parent and the professional is often rather elusive, and continually brings to mind my own personal situation.

My son with learning disabilities had gone off to college in another state to begin his freshman year. Since I had always promoted independence and self-advocacy in my children, I was confident that he would be able to handle whatever challenges he encountered. What I hadn't counted on was his need to use me to help him with those challenges!

Russ called home daily with one question after another. The phone service, the food service, and the book store seemed to present amazing obstacles to this new student, and the seemingly best place to find answers was 100 miles away, at home. The situation that became a major juxtaposition of roles for me, though, was the incident with the computer.

I encourage all my students and my children to use the computer and it is the rare young person who manages to elude the pressure I exert on them to use this tool for written assignments to assist with spelling, grammar, corrections, and written expression. Yet, my own wily son did manage to escape my technological demands and never truly enjoyed the benefits of a word processing program while in high school; consequently, he went off to college a computer illiterate.

Within the first two weeks of school, the phone calls became focused more on the need for a computer than the need for food or laundry detergent. Fortunately, I had anticipated this need and arrangements were made to get him his own computer and printer. Then the phone calls became even more frequent because Russ had a million questions on how to use the machine. I found myself becoming a long distance computer instructor! How do you underline? Bold? Change font size? Save a file? Every evening brought a new question that apparently needed to be filtered through me rather than someone at school. I was caught between roles of teacher and mother while trying to do both long-distance for this seemingly needy child.

I contacted Russ's college advisor to alert him of the situation since I realized that we needed to break my school mentoring role fairly quickly and transfer it to the proper

person so I could go back to being his mother and relinquish the task of instructor. I constantly examine my role as a professional college instructor in a support program for students with learning disabilities, and my role as a "sometimes" parent for my students, and how those roles are so closely mingled. Both my student, Bob, and my son, Russ, help me keep the perspective necessary to know the difference between the need for independence and the need for dependable support.

Chad and David

Chad was terrific at failure. He barely made it through high school, and then failed out of two colleges. He came into my office with a long ponytail and a major attitude about life, school, and himself. Over time, the hair got shorter and the attitude dissipated while Chad's fear of success was finally defeated by success itself. On the other hand, David was terrifically successful. He had all the support money could buy and he was full of accomplishments, yet he remained terribly fearful of failure. The patterns he learned during the first eighteen years of his life were fixed firmly in his mind and he was not going to change them for fear of something going wrong.

Chad and David never met, but they have encountered each other in my mind countless times. Their opposing fears bounced off my thoughts endlessly! Chad came to my office convinced he could not read or write, doubting his ability to do college level work, and subconsciously challenging me to make him do it. He was actually afraid to be successful since his past school paradigms consisted of failures, and he did not know how to change that. His excuses, procrastinations, doubts, and denials merely fueled his owns fears.

Chad's father came in from California early into the first semester to discuss Chad's progress with me. He began by relating all of Chad's problems, shortcomings, and failures making sure I realized that Chad would "probably not be able to do the work at Curry because he was dyslexic and hyper-active." It was certainly easy to see where Chad got his negative attitude about himself! I made it clear, professionally, what

assistance we could provide Chad and what progress he had already made. Then I spoke as a parent, suggesting the difficulty we all have in watching our children fall down and get hurt, not knowing whether and when to pick them up or to leave them on their own. As a parent I was also painfully aware of the financial risk we take when sending a child to college. Chad's family had already invested large sums of money at two other colleges for his education which put a real strain on them, especially because Chad had failed twice before. Basically, we both had to trust in Chad, himself.

Chad's father called me periodically to check on his son, and I continued to offer reassurances and positive updates. There was a lingering uncertainty in my mind, though, wondering if it was my money, would I be willing to risk another failure. Was it right to encourage this young man to pursue an expensive, four year academic degree with his poor scholastic record? I managed to suppress the parent in myself during our conversations, letting the confident professional take the lead. This was a situation where my parental perspective needed to take a back seat to more objective guidelines. Chad's testing gave evidence of a person with tremendous potential and strong intelligence, laden with areas of major learning disabilities. A wonderful challenge!

Just as a parent patiently guides a child through the first ride on a two-wheeled bike, I steered Chad through his first true college paper. He wavered and tottered and squawked while I assisted and encouraged and assured. Sometimes I felt I held onto the "bike seat" to support him more than I should, but then I would balance that support with stronger demands that he produce another phase of the project independently. The next paper was equally filled with anguish and frustration, as were many subsequent ones. I knew the battle over Chad's fear was going to be a long one!

Eventually, after many months of intensive labor including many setbacks and sidetracks, Chad was able to put his intelligent ideas into well-constructed essays with minimal help from me. He was on the verge of conquering his fear of success, because he was able to experience success on his own. After a defiant beginning, Chad was slowly

willing to try new strategies more in keeping with his own learning style which paved the way toward personal progress. He is able to pedal the bike on his own, now, and when he stumbles I know he can pick himself up and keep moving forward.

David came to my office with a fear as strong as Chad's, but where Chad was afraid of success, David was dreadfully afraid of failure. David had been able to maintain a structure in his life where most things went according to his own plans. He had wonderful family support and the best education private schools could provide. Everything was set up for him to be successful so he would never really experience the pain of failure, since living with a learning disability was difficult enough.

David thought he knew exactly what he wanted from me for support in PAL during his first year at Curry. He was going to keep everything just the way it had been during high school except for changing the players and the location. At the beginning of the semester he informed me that I was to help him write papers using the same writing techniques he had always used, and he did not care to discuss any other issues. It quickly became evident to me that time management was a major difficulty, and he wasn't getting papers done at all!

David was beginning to experience a major panic because his fear of failure was so intense. My parental instincts began to kick in to protect him from the pain of a poor performance. I wanted to jump to his aid and help him with everything so the problems would go away. A bit of reflection reminded me that just as Chad needed to experience a bit of success to move beyond his fear of success, so too, David just might need a little jolt of failure to move him beyond his fear of failing. It is difficult for the parent in me to watch a person struggle knowing I possess the ability to lessen their agony. Yet as a professional I understand completely that it is more important “to **teach** a hungry man to fish because he can then feed himself for a lifetime rather than **give** him a fish which would feed him for only one day.”

By mid-semester, David had done poorly on some tests and papers, and had neglected to turn in some assignments. At first, he started to blame the professors for his problems, maintaining that they graded unfairly and were demanding too much. He even tried to blame his computer for not working properly when he was using it so his papers weren't as good as they should have been. The blame was also thrown onto his roommates, so he decided to change rooms. All of the structures that he so desperately needed to escape failing were not working for him, and he had no idea what to do about it.

As the end of the semester approached, David finally had developed the courage to discuss these setbacks with me. I suggested that he talk to me as if I were his mother back at home, within the boundaries of the familiar and safe. Within this context, these negative experiences then became issues that he was willing to confront. He acknowledged that there **might** be more to college than he had anticipated and that his old high school strategies might need to be re-examined. He also found out that he was no less of a person and his parents did not abandon him because he received a few poor grades.

His patterns had become fairly well fixed during his relatively short lifetime of eighteen years, but his gradual willingness to reflect on what he was doing and why he was doing it made me believe that these small encounters with failure were the beginning signs of overcoming his fear of those failures. The ability to acknowledge and confront the fears was the first step, then the courage to make necessary changes to move forward came next. We both knew that there was a long haul ahead to make the necessary adjustments. Chad had to develop a style that would not only work for four years in college, but would also be flexible enough for a lifetime. Once that fear of failure was conquered, though, his successes were bound to be more plentiful and more meaningful.

Al and Brenna

Al denies the existence of a learning disability in his life and avoids any mention of difficulties he might have, while surrounding himself with friends for protection. Brenna, likewise, wants to deny her learning disabilities and avoids confronting them at all costs, yet she puts herself into a self-styled seclusion to protect herself from the outside world. Both Al and Brenna deny and avoid realities, with Al choosing a social life filled with friends to create a barrier and Brenna choosing a form of isolation for her wall. Their personal walls help them keep the truth at bay.

Al has all the trappings of a well-organized, well-prepared, college freshman: personal computer, leather daily planner, color-coded notebooks, and multi-colored highlighters. He also has a long list of intricate, well-worn excuses and quick replies. Al has a wonderfully outgoing and friendly personality with a sense of self-confidence that helps put him in a leadership role during group activities. His strong verbal skills belie his skills in putting thoughts on paper, though, which is why he surrounds himself with interpersonal situations attempting to mask his areas of weakness. It was interesting to note that somehow Al always managed to make it to his **group** PAL sessions while finding excuses for why he couldn't make it to the individual ones. I was trying to penetrate his private fortress and he was scared.

I felt like a mother trying to get into her son's room to clean when I worked with Al. I knew I was entering a very private and sacred area. If I poked around too furiously, he would probably throw me out! Very cautiously, I asked permission to look at his notebooks, which appeared to be quite orderly on the outside, but proved to be a picture of confusion on the inside. Business notes were intermingled with English essays which were sprinkled with phone numbers and colorful doodles. Naturally, Al became defensive when I saw the notebook and spouted one excuse after the other for the chaos within. Just as a mother offers unconditional love for the wayward child, I too offered unmitigated understanding of his situation, providing no accusations, blame, or admonitions.

When Al let me look into his notebook, he unknowingly let me look through a crack in his personal wall. We looked at each other through that chink, and both of us smiled. That was the beginning of a very carefully crafted process of tearing down a wall which would open him up to the light of reality. Once given a series of organizational strategies and sequencing techniques, Al was on his way to developing patterns for note taking and essay writing which were comfortable for him so he would no longer need to hide behind crowds of people to cover up his shortcomings. His denials turned to declarations of need and his avoidance gradually became an affirmation of his strengths.

Brenna handled her challenges in a much different manner than Al, although denial and avoidance were similar issues for them both. Where Al surrounded himself with friends for protection, Brenna secluded herself from others to find safety in isolation. Initially, Brenna would come readily to PAL meetings but the inability to work with other people put her at a real disadvantage in groups. Social skills were a major concern that needed to be addressed. She often spoke too loudly, out of turn, and inappropriately. It was difficult for her to recognize social clues, so she did not even realize it when others were sending nonverbal messages for her to modify her behavior. Then her attendance began to slack off.

In our individual meetings, she would deny that working with others was a problem and avoided discussion of the topic to the extent that she would walk out of the room when I broached the issue. In groups, her behavior was so outrageous that serious discussion of her actions was impossible. We were caught in a vicious loop, and she was beginning to isolate herself even further from me, the group, and everyone else.

My parental instincts began to surface, so I invited Brenna to join me for a picnic meal where we could just chat about whatever came into our minds. I was trying to reconstruct the familial home environment. She was relaxed and comfortable, yet initially we stayed away from any personal issues. Towards the end of the meal, I began to model Brenna's behavior to her; her lack of eye contact during conversations, her changing the

topic in mid-sentence, her body language, and her overly loud voice. We still did not discuss her behavior or my modeling at all during the meal. The next day she came to my office on her own, and asked me why I had acted so strangely the day before. I was thrilled that she had noticed! I immediately began to model her actions again, and we gradually were able to talk about what I was doing and then relate it to what she had been doing with other people all along.

This was a good start down a very difficult road since Brenna had spent so many years of her life hiding from other people because she did not know how to act around them. She has discovered many obstacles, roadblocks, and detours, but she no longer denies that there is a problem in her life and she is willing to encounter rather than avoid other people in order to move forward personally.

Parent and Teacher: Clarifying and Choosing the Roles

Bob and Russ are well on their way by now to becoming independent, self-confident learners with a strong sense of personal focus and direction. Their needs demanded that I acted from the combined perspectives of parent and professional. Until they could separate from their own family situations, it was imperative that I take the role of the "in loco" maternal caregiver, even while I was 100 miles away from my own son. The plan for each student was to meet their immediate needs so we could begin to establish workable, longer-term goals that would take them from a state of continual dependence to one of constructive independence.

Chad and David battled with the fear of failure and the struggle of success to the point where each of them had to experience both success and failure in order to move beyond their fears. The parent in me wanted to protect them from being hurt emotionally, yet the professional knew they had to acknowledge the problems in order to conquer them, so I struggled right along with them while attempting to balance the pain with the progress.

Al and Brenna mastered the art of denial and avoidance and crafted clever walls between themselves and reality. When those walls began to totally overshadow them, they slowly reached out to the parental hand I offered to bring them to safety. My parental perspective offered them the comfort level they needed to be able to adjust to the demands of the academic life in college where my professional perspective was then able to bring them to a higher level of academic achievement.

All of these situations reflect common issues that are interwoven with the learning disabilities that are a part of my students' lives. Just as one issue cannot be totally separated from another since they are integrally connected, so too are the parental and professional perspectives within me. I continually dance down a two-lane road: sometimes staying straight and narrow on my side of the solid white line in my professional sedan; sometimes crossing the dotted line and going in the other direction in my parental minivan because the situation demands it. In the end, I know I have made the right choices when I feel I have met the students' needs, because only then will they be able to outgrow those needs, and move beyond them.

The Relationship Between Psychological Trauma & Learning Disabilities: A Look at Classroom Trauma

Jane Utley Adelizzi, Ph.D., Certified Educational Therapist (AET)

Through the integration of two case studies and theories on psychological traumatic exposure, the author connects psychological traumatic episodes (both in and out of the classroom environment) to an individual's ability to learn and function in daily life. Implications are drawn in terms of the role that Posttraumatic Stress Symptomatology plays in the diagnoses and mis-diagnoses of LD/ADD/ADHD.

When we hear about psychological trauma we are often led to think that this pertains to events which are catastrophic, emotionally affecting specific groups of people. Most people instantly relate this to physical kinds of trauma as well, possibly associating the concept of psychological trauma with a brutal murder they learned about on television the previous evening. It's true that any kind of abuse or trauma affects each person psychologically. When we experience emotional pain (which may be connected to a physical/sexual abuse as well), degradation or humiliation that unseats us from our daily routine, we are traumatized. And yes, it is catastrophic for each and every one of us. The imprint or psychological "bruise" with which we are branded as a result of psychological traumatic insult is uniquely different according to the individual who is effected.

Defining Psychological Trauma

Judith Herman describes psychological trauma as :

> *. . . an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of human beings, we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning* (Herman, 1992, p.33).

Stressful situations are not synonymous with psychological traumatic exposure (PTE), although everyone's tolerance and perception of what it is that is experienced as traumatic is different. Stress may be defined in terms of stimulus-based reactions or neurological responses. Each individual is affected differently by stressful situations; no one's experience can be minimized, invalidated. If viewed on a continuum, the stress phenomenon may acknowledge an external event which interferes with learning and functioning; on the opposite end of the continuum is an external event which leaves the victim rendered helpless. It is important to distinguish between those events which cause distress or unhappiness and those which stand as traumatic landmarks, impeding development, learning, and causing changes in affective responses and emotional well being.

Manifestations of Psychological Traumatic Exposure (PTE)

In my work with adolescents and adults who are learning disabled (LD), I have witnessed external events which may be classified as stressful, yet harmful to students' emotional and academic well being. Preparing for an exam may be stressful for many college students with LD; their past experiences have conditioned them to be careful, conscientious and often untrusting of their own perceptions about being sufficiently prepared for the testing situation. This group of students will demonstrate varying degrees of anxiety, but will usually survive the episode relatively unscathed. They are aware of the steps they need to take "next time", and can talk through their feelings and concerns about the outcome with their instructor and/or with peers. Other students have historically been so psychologically brutalized in traditional educational systems that the mere thought of "test" precipitates physiological symptoms which are synonymous with many of the symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). What I question is, are these symptoms "like" PTSD symptoms or are they actually symptoms of PTSD? Their classroom traumas have been experienced repeatedly, and for some individuals it became part of daily life at school.

Some individuals appear to sail through various stressful situations with seemingly few psychological or physiological symptoms. Others, however, appear to respond both emotionally and physiologically immediately following an external threat or traumatizing event. Additionally, they often appear to respond or react to these stimuli in a different and earlier stage of emotional development. The wide range of individual coping and adapting skills depends upon differences in cognitive processing, socio-emotional development, neurobiological characteristics and cultural background. More importantly, coping and adapting to stressful and traumatic events both in and out of the classroom environment depends upon the quality and quantity of past psychological traumatic exposures. Each one of us possesses our own unique "trauma history." Often an individual will immediately respond to these stressful and/or traumatic situations with behaviors reminiscent of a former stage of development where an original trauma first occurred.

Looking at stressful events and significant psychological trauma is like visualizing a continuum where on the left a seemingly small and non-threatening event may be recorded (e.g., blushing or being embarrassed when called upon in class to deliver the correct answer or an oral presentation). Somewhere in the middle of the continuum there may be an example of a student who has been sexually harassed in a classroom situation, or a student who has been targeted by the instructor (or peers) as an "example". This individual may be repeatedly called upon to deliver answers which are incorrect or inadequate and consequently made to feel "less than", and inevitably "stupid". Onlookers observe while this person experiences deep humiliation, degradation and a general sense of disorientation in combination with a variety of physiological symptoms such as sweating, stuttering and a "sick" feeling. Ultimately, the "victim" may be rendered silent by his/her sense of helplessness. The onlooker and the victim may experience stress, and depending upon the individual, their experiences may be considered psychological traumatic exposures. Often these victims remain the targets of

such incidents both in and out of the classroom environment, and it has been my observation that many of these individuals appear to be "trauma-vulnerable." It is important to remember that one person's slight embarrassment may be another person's nightmare and significant psychological trauma.

I have witnessed students sustain severe kinds of psychological trauma which have left them feeling hopeless and helpless, emotionally unseated, and unable to function in both their personal and academic lives. Some students do not weather the many stressful storms of life, yet some survive severe kinds of psychological trauma with relatively few residual symptoms, forging ahead with a new and stronger determination. It's difficult to predict a student's ability to cope, adapt and survive. The symptoms that traumatized college students who are LD most obviously display to their caregivers within their academic setting are poor attendance, social isolation, and harmful behaviors to the self which may range from substance abuse to suicide attempts. There exists a plethora of other symptoms and behaviors which may not be immediately apparent, but that are insidiously painful and damaging.

My Observations

During my first year of teaching in PAL, I worked with a young man who had been diagnosed as being dyslexic. He had great difficulty expressing himself in writing, and although he could articulate his fund of knowledge through discussion one-to-one and with a small group, he found it nearly impossible to communicate his quality of thought in written expression for an essay exam. Upon further investigation I discovered that his language skills were far better than had been initially assessed. We worked together on organizing his language in order to bring clarity to his writing. It was when he was presented with the "testing situation" (and not the actual writing) that he exhibited the greatest degree of anxiety. I just didn't seem to be able to help him make the transition from being able to express himself in writing during our sessions together to expressing his thoughts during the test. By the time mid-term arrived he was fainting, falling down

and having panic attacks on a regular basis. One professor asked that I be present while she administered an exam because she was afraid that my student would injure himself.

When I studied his face during the testing situation, I observed a series of rapid changes; his face flushed, his breathing became audibly strained and uneven, and he began to sweat profusely. At one point he looked at me with "terrorized" eyes, and proceeded to fall over and faint. Needless to say, he was unable to complete his essay exam. The professor granted him a second chance which he took advantage of the following day. He was able to complete and pass the exam. What was different about this situation was the testing environment; he worked alone without other students in the room.

As I became better acquainted with this young man I discovered that as a small child he had suffered repeated humiliations by his peers because he was overweight. He spoke of how he would often avoid group interaction so that he would not be teased. Additionally, his home environment had never felt like a safe haven because his father often humiliated and degraded him in the same manner in front of his siblings. He discovered at an early age that he was able to feel more secure and function more effectively both in and out of the classroom environment when he could isolate himself from others. If he dared to risk too many group interactions then he increased his vulnerability. By the time he reached college, the mere thought of taking a test with a group of students, or even participating in a social event which required that he interact with others, sent him into a disoriented state where he demonstrated significant physiological symptoms.

Eventually this student was able to work in a collaborative model with me, his psychiatrist, and his mother. Very slowly over a long period of time, he was able to desensitize himself to a testing situation. We "practiced" testing before each test, he took his exams in our library, untimed, and gradually was able to sit with small groups of peers when being tested. Although he was able to eventually function in group situations,

he continued to experience PTSD-like symptoms each time a new group situation presented itself. Medication seemed to help, but I knew that it was just masking some of the feelings that were attached to the physiological manifestations. My hope for him was that he was able to work through his very old and deeply rooted pain which inhibited his learning and functioning in the metacurriculum of life.

According to Bessel van der Kolk (1987), "Trauma occurs when one loses the sense of having a safe place to retreat within or outside oneself to deal with frightening emotions or experiences. This results in a state of helplessness, a feeling that one's actions have no bearing on the outcome of one's life" (p.31). Many college students who are LD have been sufficiently traumatized by the mere fact that they are living with a hidden disability. Often they experience learned helplessness, a syndrome which afflicts those who have been exposed to repeated feelings of failure and fear of humiliation for extended periods of time. For some, the trauma they experience as a result of their LD feels like a parasitic kind of co-existence and one which requires a great deal of mental and emotional energy in order to "keep the secret." The revelation of their disability to the outside world can be devastating. Many of these individuals become hyper vigilant, always on guard, always watching and waiting for another situation where they might be humiliated or shamed yet again.

Classroom Trauma

Classroom trauma, which commonly occurs throughout the education of a child with LD, and grows with him/her into adulthood, can paralyze the individual into a state of helplessness. When many of our PAL students reach Curry College they can finally breathe a comfortable sigh of relief, sensing almost right away that this is a safe place to disclose their feelings about their learning differences and their classroom experiences. However, their hypervigilance about future classroom traumas never ceases; their radar is always on alert. They are constantly scanning the environment and the professionals with whom they interact for any sign of threat.

Classroom trauma is a significantly unpleasant (or horrific) external event or stressor which occurs within the confines of an educational environment (e.g., a traditional or nontraditional classroom, a small group or a one-to-one tutorial). This type of trauma, which is also a psychological trauma, may leave the student with diminishing self-esteem and in a state of fear, humiliation or learned helplessness to the degree where similar situations will be avoided by the student in the future. The specific and original cause may be a person (such as a teacher, facilitator, or peer(s)), although with each repetition, a perpetrator is not necessary to induce fear or humiliation. A situation which is just reminiscent of the original classroom trauma is sufficient to resurrect feelings of fear or humiliation which may impede learning and functioning. This type of trauma may occur repetitively, especially in students with learning disabilities (1994).

To many clinicians and practitioners, classroom trauma does not compare to other kinds of psychological traumas. Children and adults with LD are treated, and often medicated, for symptoms which are indicative of PTSD. The root of the problem may be diagnosed as psychological trauma such as verbal and emotional abuse from a parent, sexual harassment, and a wide variety of other documented traumas. How often is the psychological trauma experienced by children and adults with LD in a learning environment treated by health care professionals? What many professionals do not carefully observe is the behavior these students exhibit during a threatening and/or humiliating episode and the physiological manifestations which follow the event. PTSD has been attributed to the aftermath of a variety of psychological traumas. In most instances we hear about the phenomenon of PTSD in relation to the survival experiences of war veterans, holocaust victims and those who suffer from survivor guilt. What is not commonly addressed is the similarity in symptomotology when an individual, in this case college students, experience stressful or traumatic situations as a result of their learning disabilities or because the existence of LD influences the PTSD syndrome.

According to DSM-III-R (the American Psychiatric Assoc., Washington, D.C., 1987), PTSD occurs as a result of "serious threat to one's life or physical integrity. . . . The trauma may be experienced alone or in the company of groups of people. . . . In addition to the reexperiencing of the trauma, there is persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with it, or a numbing of general responsiveness that was not present before the trauma." Symptoms associated with PTSD include difficulty in "concentrating or completing tasks", similar to those symptoms which characterize LD or ADD/ADHD. In addition, the individuals may experience reoccurring symptoms when they are placed in situations which are reminiscent of the original trauma(s).

Although the description of occurrence and related symptoms of PTSD are most often attributed to traumas which fall into the category of "atrocity" or "catastrophe", other psychological traumas such as classroom trauma may be perceived as insignificant by some practitioners or clinicians, are able to manifest some of the same kinds of symptomotology. One adult I interviewed spoke of his intense fear of being called upon to read aloud in class. Memories of tragic classroom experiences in earlier years left him feeling immobilized at even the thought of being humiliated yet again in front of his peers. When he returned to the classroom setting to begin college coursework, he spoke with his professor before class, informing her of his learning disability and his difficulty with his halting speech and general discomfort with reading aloud. She listened patiently. He assumed that he could breathe a sigh of relief and feel safe within his learning environment. To his horror she called upon him to read a passage in class. He "froze." The victim, the student, was rendered silent and helpless by his teacher.

The student who experienced the classroom trauma had endured the same painful and damaging experiences in his earlier years of education. The situation was familiar and reminiscent of past threatening experiences; certain factors about original traumatic incidents became triggers for future experiences. He immediately began to experience physiological symptoms which are synonymous with PTSD. When he "froze" he

experienced a "downshifting", causing his need for fight or flight (Hart, 1983). His mind went "blank", his heart pounded, he began to sweat and feel ill. He may have frantically scanned the room for an exit. When the body and mind plummet to the depths of a primitive kind of panic, the brain is immediately thrust into a change in order to accommodate the perceived threat or insult upon the self. The amygdala and hippocampus are only two areas in which chemical change takes place, making it possible for an individual to move from one stressful or traumatic episode to the next, in constant search of a sense of equilibrium and rest. Possibly this student's physical integrity was not as insulted as his emotional well being, although the two go hand-in-hand, the mind-body connection being ever-present.

This student later reported that in the future he would strive to avoid further risk of humiliation. Indeed he would become increasingly hyper-vigilant against further attack. When he began his college coursework he felt that he was at less of a risk for humiliation than when he was a child. After all, he reasoned to himself that he was an adult now and able to reason with his instructors. He thought that he could finally trust. What he didn't count on was the fact that his instructor was new, very nervous, and had completely forgotten her agreement not to call upon him. Becoming the perpetrator of such psychological insult left her feeling guilty and inadequate as a caring educator. Thankfully, both student and instructor were later able to talk about the episode, both surviving what could have escalated into further psychological damage for the student.

Classroom trauma is significant in itself, but it does often co-exist with a variety of other types of psychological trauma which make the survival, coping and adapting of the aftermath complex and overlapping in both psychological and physiological symptoms. There are three psychological processes which pose great difficulty for trauma survivors: 1.) dissociation which is an intrusive symptom ("an alternation of consciousness" according to Herman, 1992, p.1), 2.) learned helplessness which is the belief that victims have no control over their lives (or, "why should I bother, I'm only

going to fail" attitude), and 3.) repetition compulsion, a form of biochemical mastery for some victims of PTSD (endorphin release experienced by the replication of original traumatic event; or the need to mentally "repeat" the episode until it finds a place within the internal memory or schema) (Flannery, 1993). On many occasions I have heard teachers refer to adolescent and adult students as "dreamers". Often I have heard many students accused of "zoning out" or "not paying attention." These are behaviors often attributed to students who are learning disabled, but are often mis-categorized. "Dreaming" and "zoning out" are often dissociative behaviors in their adaptive nature, and frequently the result of fear or the reaction to a situation which is reminiscent of an earlier significant trauma. These individuals retreat into themselves, seeking a safe place to establish equilibrium. By the time many students who are LD reach late adolescence they may become learned helpless: why try if you're only going to fail, or at best be criticized and humiliated again? By the time these students reach adulthood, patterns can be identified which lead the trained observer to believe that repetition compulsion is actively functioning in the lives of these individuals. If earlier traumas have not been adequately processed, and not been accommodated into the mental "filing system" for trauma-history, then a multitude of external stimuli may trigger psychological and physiological responses, creating a reenactment of revisisitation of the original trauma. In the case of the young man I mentioned earlier who was not able to tolerate group interaction or test-taking within a group situation, his earlier psychological trauma(s) kept revisiting him through his physiological symptoms. He coped by instinctively avoiding certain situations which would leave him vulnerable although paradoxically, he kept finding himself in the same kinds of circumstances as a result of his learning disability (e.g., even untimed testing often put him into larger group situations).

Multiple Symptomatology: Layers of Trauma

College students who are learning disabled encounter a special kind of struggle in order to survive the abuse which has been dealt them both in and out of the classroom

environment. Their coping and adaptive skills are finely tuned; their mental scanning for potentially dangerous and threatening situations is acute. When these experiences have been compounded by the existence of other types of psychological trauma, then their hypervigilance is always at a peak. There is no rest. When a child or adult must invest that much energy into surviving from day to day, always on guard for trouble, then it becomes not only physiologically and emotionally wearing, but if often becomes too taxing to concentrate in the classroom. Gaps in learning occur. Short-term memory suffers. Learning becomes a tumultuous storm which is exacerbated by cognitive deficits and consistent downshifting in the brain (Hart, 1983). An overlapping in symptomatology occurs, blurring the borders of LD behavior, Attention Deficit Disorder/ Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD) symptoms, and attributes of PTSD.

Several years ago when ADD/ADHD was relatively new terminology and unfamiliar territory to many professionals, I worked with a female college student who had been diagnosed as being LD/ADHD. What I did not understand at the time, and what is still misunderstood and unacknowledged by many practitioners and clinicians today, is that there exists many common symptoms in PTSD and ADD/ADHD. "We need to explore whether abused children are more likely to show situational ADD, and whether the situations that evoke hyperactive behavior are related to their past experiences" (Fish-Murray, Koby, van der Kolk, 1987, p.105). I feel that in many cases, students who are reacting to specific experiences in an educational environment may be reacting to longstanding and repetitive traumas from the classroom, being triggered by sometimes very subtle kinds of threats or reminiscent scenarios. This is not to say that the existence of other kinds of psychological traumas do not add to the complexity of any given situation.

This particular young woman arrived in my office on her first day of classes very excited about her coursework and new friends. I found it difficult to focus her on our conversation in terms of what she needed to do to organize herself (e.g., time-

management, previewing texts, perusing her syllabi). Her conversation was "all over the place." For the first month of school I found her behavior erratic. She developed insomnia, began overeating, and was drinking heavily during the week as well as on the weekends. Eventually she began experiencing panic attacks which would render her helpless, preventing her from attending many of her classes. Her concentration suffered and she was unable to sit through even the shortest lectures. She was terrified of most of her professors and claimed that they "didn't understand her." Admittedly, I didn't either, although I tracked her behaviors, monitored her sleeping and eating routines, tried to talk her into psychological counseling, and was in touch with her parents on several occasions. I instinctively knew that I was dealing with more than just LD/ADHD and more than freshmen dis-orientation.

She was able to verbally articulate her reading and understanding of lectures to me. This remained fairly consistent as long as I could establish some sort of "calm" in our sessions. However, her written language deteriorated as time went on, as did her other behaviors as well. Syntactically, her written expression was not cohesive, sentences consisted of the first two or three words of her thoughts or interpretations, and punctuation became non-existent in her writing. Her writing skills upon her arrival at PAL were marginally in need of some work, but they had plummeted in quality along with her behaviors. At times I felt panic well up inside of me because I was running out of ideas; there were times when no matter how much time, effort or professional strategies were employed, she either remained the same or deteriorated significantly.

One day we just sat and talked, ignoring the books piled on the end of the table, and ignoring the fact that she was over her head in work. It took some time, and a lot of discussion about school, family and friends, but together we uncovered one of many contributing factors to her difficulties. One of her siblings was terminally ill. With every twist and turn of her sister's illness, my student would react with many of the symptoms of PTSD. I often wondered if her behaviors were indicative of the traumas which she

faced on a weekly basis or if they were behaviors linked to the diagnosis of ADHD she had been issued by a psychiatrist only months ago. It took a very long time to sort out the behaviors, the sources, the adaptive responses and compensatory strategies she employed for her own survival, both personally and academically.

Just when I felt that I was running out of energy, running out of fuel to feed her insatiable fire which kept her functioning, her behaviors changed. It wasn't even subtle. She called me one morning to tell me that she would not be there for our session, but wanted me to listen to what she had been doing for the past 24 hours. She had tacked her calendar on the wall, reorganized appointments in order to accommodate deadlines for papers, and began to work. She didn't leave her room for over 24 hours. She sat at her computer and literally attacked one assignment after another. She planned her meals and had friends bring food to her room. To my dismay, she also chose to not sleep, but was proud of the paper she read to me over the phone. I was puzzled as to the sudden change in the organization of her written expression and asked if I could "see" it. She had a friend deliver two of her papers to my office. While not without error, the language flowed, the ideas were representational of clear and creative thinking. This was the writing of the young woman who originally applied for PAL before she engaged in daily combat with intrusive symptoms which incapacitated her learning and functioning.

Later I discovered that she had returned home prior to her chosen isolation in her dorm room, and had spoken with her sister who was experiencing a relatively comfortable period in her illness. They talked at length and sorted out many sibling and family issues which this young woman later referred to as "unfinished business." She finally felt that she not only understood her sister's fate, but that she would be able to walk with her throughout her journey. A calm had come over her with her new understanding. The uncertainty and mystery which shrouded her understanding of her sister's situation had been removed. Her thoughts and behaviors lost much of their chaotic

quality, and many of her symptoms subsided. Additionally, she was able to address her overeating and drinking patterns in order to successfully complete her semester at school.

For many students, the transitional period between chaos and equilibrium occurs in tiny increments with many halting or regressive steps. By the end of the academic year, my student did not present a profile of a college student who was not only LD but ADHD as well. Indeed, her LD presented her with sufficient challenge to keep her in PAL for another semester the following year, but her other symptoms had diminished. It took considerable time for her to learn how to maintain a level of equilibrium, functioning adequately without abusing herself in order to "catch up." Her stressful and often traumatic encounters during her visits with her sister, and their subsequent physiological and emotional symptoms, had a very definite effect on her learning and ability to move from one day to the next.

Acknowledging the Phenomena

In educational settings, "not enough attention is paid to the traumatic elements that interfere with perception and cognition"(van der Kolk, 1987, p.18). When a student has been traumatized as a result of an unpleasant classroom experience, from other types of external stimuli, or from a combination of both, then learning and functioning will become a struggle. If a student tries to cope and adapt to specific kinds of psychological traumatic exposure and is further impeded by a learning disability, then the intensity of PTSD increases. A sense of equilibrium may be more difficult to achieve. I always refer to the idea of internal equilibrium as the gyroscope within each of us. When a new stressful or traumatic stimuli assaults our systems, it is thrown into what we might imagine to be a neatly organized internal filing system which is built into a gyroscope. This gyroscope keeps us mentally, emotionally and physiologically "balanced." The filing system is where all our past experiences are categorized, not necessarily chronologically, but according to their association with other groups of familiar events or categories. When the "new" event is thrown in, especially by surprise, it is not always

able to find the right category in the filing system and may keep "bumping around" in order to find an appropriate place to exist or "fit in." It's in search of a former piece of knowledge with which to associate itself. In the "bumping around" stage, our systems feel disoriented, and we may experience physiological symptoms such as sweating, rapid heart beat etc.; some people are thrown into panic attacks. Eventually this new event finds a place to rest, and often it is within a category of the filing system which offers a certain familiarity and promise. Piaget spoke of assimilation and accommodation; stimuli is accepted into the organism, scanned, organized, shuffled and made to "fit". When the actual "fit" is made, the information is stored. Often in the scanning process, the fit may take place in a previous stage of development, somewhere where there resides familiarity and self-perceived success in coping and adapting to psychological traumatic exposures. This often appears to be coping in an "immature" manner.

In the case of the second young man who was learning disabled, his frantic mental scanning for safety and accommodation probably began when he heard his name called to read aloud. The "fit" may have been at a much earlier developmental level, but one that nevertheless felt effective for the assurance of his safety. His significant history of classroom trauma was sufficient reason for experiencing the symptoms he exhibited. The young woman who was affected so deeply by her sister's illness was disequilibriated by feelings of panic and persistent unpleasant external stimuli. Her internal gyroscope was constantly being tipped, leaving her disoriented and panicked. Her learning disability exacerbated her symptoms because she not only had a language based learning difficulty, but also experienced a deficit in visual-spatial perception which affected her judgment and general perception of self and others in her world.

Students are not always able to identify and categorize their symptoms in response to a traumatic event. Educators need to be responsive and sensitive to symptoms such as non-participatory or antagonistic behaviors in the classroom. Often these behaviors are masking underlying feelings of fear and panic which ultimately lay the

groundwork for dissociation and/or disruptive and destructive behaviors. As educators we may not possess all the answers, all the cures, but we can become astute observers of our students who are not only affected by their own trauma histories, but live with learning differences which shift the focus of the lens in which they view the reality of self and others.

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Twice Oppressed and the Right Brain Exit

Stacey Harris, J. D.

The author of this chapter is an intellectually gifted dyslexic student, a graduate of Curry College who participated in the Program for Advancement of Learning while an undergraduate there. Later she graduated from the Suffolk University School of Law. She eloquently describes the challenges she faced as a child and adolescent trying to come to terms with her identity. She gives us a student's perspective of the PAL program at Curry and describes how she learned to appreciate and utilize her unique gifts.

As a short, Jewish, dyslexic lesbian from the burbs, I had little hope growing up in the early seventies of acquiring a complete grasp of equality, freedom, or accomplishment. There were no positive gay role models to let me know that I was normal, powerful or even not ill. Most dyslexic tests were geared to study young boys who were acting out and showed obvious signs of letter reversal. A person with a learning disability back then, certainly did not have my grasp of language or, as my mother would have said, my ability to manipulate any situation with my words. I was articulate, something people did not associate with learning disabilities. So I was left alone, destined to be another statistic. Few doctors knew how to pick up the signs of dyslexia in a female child, let alone homosexuality. And so, as my societal prophesy chose, I became a statistic, for a while.

I was raised in a small, white, wealthy, Jewish suburb by a doctor and a shrink who were not at all prepared to be faced with a daughter of difference. And dealing with my left brain limitations was the least of their worries.

From a very young age, I'd say three, people, my parents primarily, began to notice that I was different. Not different in the "something suddenly changed about Stacey" sense of the word. It was more that they just began to clue in to the reality that I was, in fact, quite unlike other children my age. Actually, I was quite different from most

people. It wasn't anything that they could put a label on, or identify. I simply was just different. It was not long before others began to notice my difference as well. It was as if a silent notice had been broadcast through the wind, "Stacey doesn't fit in." And thus the confusion began. The eternal quest under the microscope of society to find out what was wrong with Stacey. Why didn't she fit in? Why is she so argumentative? Why is she such a tomboy? Why is her attention span so short? Why isn't she like us? Why?

By fifth grade I had been to see three therapists, was in a special hand-writing class at school, fought constantly with my teachers, parents and anyone else who would take me on. I was constantly in detention, moderately chubby, completely depressed with myself, my life and absolutely feared and hated the concept of going to school. Yet no one seemed to have any clue how to reach me.

"It's just a phase", they told my parents, "All kids go through it. She's just stubborn. All kids hate school. So she's a little tough-- totally normal. A little lazy-- probably needs an earlier bed time. . ."

By eighth grade my world had fallen apart. My parents could not understand me. I could not understand school. Every person I encountered seemed to urgently need me to change, as if what they saw in my eyes was taboo, evil, and impure. I began to hate myself, my life, everything. What else could I do? I had heard the diagnosis just as everyone else had. I was simply an inappropriate person. I knew it. Everyone knew it. And no one could do anything about it. But everyone had a comment. Everyone told me. Everyone claimed to know what the problem was. Except me.

Although I tried desperately to find explanations for what I was feeling, what I needed, where it hurt, I did not own any language that others could comprehend. There were no words for me. Silence became my only solace.

A new change, my parents decided. Prep school would help. With me away from home we wouldn't fight. I would pass through my little adolescent phase and become everything they wanted me to be-- educated, feminine, full of worldly etiquette and poise.

They would be proud. I would be different. A new beginning.

By what was supposed to be my sophomore year in high school, I had accumulated a resume consisting of five suicide attempts, three high schools, one shelter, 13 hospitalizations, eight kinds of medication, tons of therapists and one family in shock. I could barely read, could not write, was diagnosed as borderline psychotic, and was told that I would never graduate from high school. My parents were told that I would probably be institutionalized for most of my life. And I, under all of that medication, felt nothing. All I knew was that from day one I had been told I was different, unnatural, wrong and I must change conform my bones to fit into a box which I could not meld into. But I tried. I tried and tried and pushed and pushed until I broke. I broke at my own hands.

And that was where I found me. At one of the lowest points in my entire life, I began to live.

Somehow, after years of being lost in a system of cyclical diagnoses and treatment, the cycle broke. One doctor sent me to school. Granted, it was a therapeutic environment full of troubled teens, but they had books. I was expected to go to class. To function. And function I did.

Although still needlessly medicated and academically defunct, I had finally freed myself enough from hospital-learned helplessness to address my sexuality. A five second issue I must add, for as soon as I found the label which fit, I flew. I belonged. I was free. And freedom brought me back to life.

By eighteen I had crashed out of the closet, gone cold-turkey off of all of the medication, moved in with my best friends in Cambridge, become engulfed in gay youth politics and activism, and actually went back to public high school. I received my high school diploma after taking less than one year of academics, including mostly art classes and one supposed remedial English class. I graduated being barely able to comprehend a sentence I read, unable to write and absolutely horrified at the thought of ever entering a library. Personally I think they graduated me because they couldn't handle having a

powerful, defiant, punk-looking lesbian in their sacred high school corridors for fear of what the other suburban parents might say. But I graduated.

Having little ability to function nor the knowledge to understand why I needed to, I found myself enrolled in hairdressing school for practical reasons--I was artistic and it involved little reading. I never looked to the future, I never reached out, and I never knew I had any ability to grow. I never knew why I would want to. I had spent the better part of three years locked inside a psych hospital with nothing to stimulate my brain except therapists telling me I had to change, nurses asking me to take my pills, and depressed co-patients who, most of the time, were busy trying to plot the destruction of the world or seduce their therapists. I had survived a life without ever living it. I had always been told where to sit, what to wear, and what not to say. I never knew I had options. I never knew there was a world out beyond the barred windows and sterile walls. I never knew I could be anything that I was worth any thing, that I could own anything. I never tasted the air or danced with the wind. My foggy memories of youth were either lost under years of therapy and medication, or numbed by the amount of medication I was on. I never knew I could function, or what functioning was. I never knew. Until, suddenly, after a few weeks of living out on my own, with my friends, without the hospital walls to guide me, the medicated fog began to disappear. And I, for the first time ever, was left standing in front of a mirror doctorless, naked and weak, naive and alone. But alive. My lungs gasping for new smells, new experiences, to take my first step. I began to live. Finally.

I began dating someone who was in college. College, what a weird thing. I just didn't get it, but I liked the way she and her friends seemed to be able to draw pictures with their words. That part I wanted to make my own.

I learned of Curry College's program for students with learning disabilities, PAL, from an old friend who remembered that I had trouble reading. Although I had never connected that trouble to a learning disability, I reviewed some of my old testing from my hospitalizations and found out that, at some point, people suspected that I had a learning

disability, but never followed through on finding out what it was about. (Kind of like seeing my androgynous drawings, tomboy looks, and attractions for women, and not realizing that there might be an issue there. HMMM.)

Without really telling anyone, and inherently knowing that I would not be accepted (although having never had any previous contact with a college I had no concept of what to expect), I applied. The application asked for an essay. That was almost fatal in and of itself. But I sat down with a crumpled piece of paper and a pen, and scrawled out a page and a half in pseudo-cursive writing about a women's group I facilitated and the things we discussed. I folded it and put it in the mail. I had no context for what I had just done. I did not understand. I did not have the knowledge or ability to comprehend that I had just applied to college. To me, I wrote a paragraph and folded it up. But obviously I had been mistaken. People at PAL knew something and saw something in me that no one had ever seen or taken the time to explore before. A brain.

I arrived at Curry with a black flat-top hairdo, black leather jacket, black sun glasses, and a huge attitude to match. What was I doing there? I had never read an entire book in my life, never wrote an actual paper, never been a part of--well, anything. But there I was. And there was Diane. Diane Goss, my PAL instructor who had handpicked me from a pile of applicants. Handpicked *me* to work with and teach. Handpicked me to get to know one-on-one two days a week. Who the hell was she? And what did she want with me?

Day one, Diane asked me to go into the computer room and type for her a paragraph about myself. What was she insane? "I don't type!" I told her. "You do it!" Diane just looked at me from deep within her soft eyes and soothing voice and said "Write or you will die in this world." And I wrote. Hurriedly, misspelled and with no grammar whatsoever, but I wrote. For the first time ever.

Our battles did not end there. Day two, I think Diane realized that I was a right-brain woman and she lives within the linear constructs of her left-brain. Trying to

connect, at times, was painful.

By the end of first semester I had weaned her off of weekly classes and tutorials, to weekly coffee and discussion sessions. She forced me out of the clouds and at least close to a computer. I pulled her into a world of pictures and colors and she created a world where I could learn. She drew up funky graphs for vocabulary definitions with spaces for me to draw pictures, and allowed me the freedom to begin to learn how to let my artistic side compensate for my left-brain structural dilemmas. Diane painfully sat back and gave me the freedom to ramble off six topics at once while I let her take notes and ask questions I hastily assumed she already knew the answers to. She helped me to write on a computer, to realize that when I used one I could read my writing, and that my writing was actually something people might want to see. My first English class was taught by Diane, who painfully tried to keep me to the assignments of the class. Yet, to her pleasant dismay, each new assignment I was given I would take off in my own direction, never completing her assignment, but creating a new masterpiece just the same.

I learned that I had a brain. I did not quite yet know how to access it but it was alive, with a fever burning a poetic fury within. I had arrived.

It was a complicated task using my brain. It was as if my whole life I had been depending upon a broken leg to carry me about which had now somehow been magically replaced by a new one which I did not know how to use. But I was running instead of walking.

By second year I had formed Curry's first lesbian and gay student group, written tens of poems and taken to hanging out at Brown University to be with other students who seemed to match my brain speed. We would talk over coffee about activism and society, words so far from my history. But I was owning them.

Although each new class brought forth a 4.0 I was still terrified at each turn. "Diane, I'm going to fail. This is college, I can't do it," I would say. She would just smile at me full of wonder at how I could still find failure within myself, but it was all I ever

knew. With each new "A " I would say, "Well it's a dyslexic program it must be easier." But I was learning. Philosophy became my passion. It makes sense now that something so theoretical was so easy for a right-brain person to grasp. I saw it in colors and people and places and in the wind. It was alive within me. I was eating philosophy books for breakfast, writing poetry for dessert, and reading, just to read. I still wouldn't go near the library. Some habits are hard to break.

One day early in my college life, I let Diane read one of my poems, and she cried. Cried tears. You must understand, I didn't know that by reading you could obtain an emotion. They were just words to me when I read them. I had never connected that all of my pain, all of my fears, all of my history when put down with ink on a piece of paper would evoke an emotion. But it did. And I was stunned. As stunned as realizing that I had a brain. The fact that I could have the ability to own vocabulary, mold that into a picture, pass it to another and create an emotion which I had felt within my gut, was unbelievable. But true.

In contrast to my high school resume of hospitals and stitches, my college resume seemed quite peculiar to me. Dean's list, Alexander Graham Bell Honor Society, Who's Who Among American Colleges and Universities, student teacher of philosophy, a Truman Scholarship finalist, first prize poetry award, and an honors thesis in the works. I could not believe what I was accomplishing. Although most of the time I was not aware of the magnitude these honors held in the world of academia. For me, I was partaking in a piece of society which I had never been invited to even observe. I was beginning to explore, to break down old scars and reshape myself. Into me. I was not only functioning, but thriving, creating new wrinkles in my brain, and feeling, feeling everything with an explosion of new colors, shapes smells and sounds. Not to mention that my activism had begun to form: five talk shows, lecturing at high schools every month about diversity, speaking at public hearings to help pass gay youth legislation. I had found my *raison d'etre*: to speak, to thrive, to educate, to change the world. I was alive.

And with my rebirth came my quest. I had figured out, finally, what had been wrong all of those years. Nothing within me could ever be severed again. Each distinct piece of my existence together was my power. Together I was complete. My woman-ness, my strength, my lesbianism, my learning disability, my activism, my paganism, my passions, my enthusiasm. All aspects of me which I had to battle to find and learn and cultivate to grow. Alone. The same world which kept me from knowing my sexuality also kept me from knowing I had dyslexia. But more importantly kept me from dealing with these issues, learning about them and functioning, living, surviving.

My eternal quest was not a chosen one, but is one I will embrace until I can speak no longer. To educate.

With all of my experiences, with all of my strength, with all of my courage, I will spend my life helping to educate others on issues of diversity, from learning disabilities to sexuality to racism. For me, issues of differences are what almost made me lose my entire life. I had to remove the ropes which held me down, kept me oppressed and small, and take my anger and refine it into fuel for change. This lesson became clear to me at Curry. Curry provided me the bridge I needed to cross over to the world of the living. Curry gave me the tools to access my brain and the skills to teach me how to compensate. Curry helped me begin to see that I was an effective person, that I had the ability to promote and initiate change, and that people would listen. I knew that I needed to spend my life helping others identify, accept and promote differences, so that no other child would ever go through what I went through just because society didn't understand. Just because a teacher thought it was wrong. Just because parents could not accept. Just because a therapist, doctor, counselor, or tutor was not properly trained. Just because the laws did not include those people, or "We were not aware of that problem." To me that was unacceptable. I knew I needed to channel my energy into speaking, politics, debating and theory. Focusing on my strengths. I had the story to tell. The right one. The effective one. The one in which I had survived, the one which could help others. I needed to learn

a language, however foreign to me, that would reach the most people who needed to be affected. I needed to learn more. I decided to apply to law school.

I never had any contact with anyone in law school--any attorneys, any real politicians. But somehow, although I didn't really understand it at the time, I inherently knew that law school was where I needed to be. Even Diane thought I would hate it. "Too linear," she said. And I was terrified. Although my world had dramatically grown, I still had an extremely limited view. I never watched the news, read the paper, or even had any understanding of how the government worked. I knew there was a Supreme Court and I figured there were a few smaller ones scattered about the country for people who couldn't make the trip to Washington DC. I had no concept of Democratic parties, elections, laws, or history for that matter. But the healthy part of my life was always ruled by my heart, my head and most importantly my intuition. And my soul said go. I didn't do any real research in looking at schools, I didn't even know they were harder to get into than college. I had never given it much thought, just knew it was for me. Again the applications arrived with the annoying insistence of an essay. But this time I had no idea of what to write. I had no idea what a law school would want to hear or even where to begin. The only edge I knew I had was that I had spent the last four years learning how I learned. Learning how my brain functioned. Learning how to best utilize what I owned, to access, translate, and process the information before me. In whatever color, order, or shape necessary to access the area of learning I wanted to approach. I owned my learning process, something most students never had to think about. I knew how I worked. So I did what came most naturally and I wrote them an essay about my history--explicit, true, and right to the point. I told them why I needed law school and what I wanted to do with it. I applied to seven. Within two weeks of my application, Suffolk Law School accepted me as an early admission. I was rejected from all of the others. At least they were honest about what they did and did not want. So Suffolk it was.

And here I am, halfway done, a year and a half to go. Average law student. I go to

classes, study at home with my partner Jessie. She reads me the cases when the words decide to reverse themselves, or when I'm frustrated. She is my study group. I write my law briefs on seven different colors of paper. Each color represents a different area of law. The other law students think it looks crazy. But hell, it works. I passed first-year and nothing is going to stop me now.

You know, no one at law school knew I was ever hospitalized. Some know I have a learning disability. I'd say it's safe to assume they all know I'm gay. But the really amazing part is that sometimes, when I look in the mirror, I still see that sixteen year-old with the Mohawk who couldn't read a book, and I turn around to see if anyone is looking. But no one does. They just see me. A law student, with a B.A. and a J.D. on the way. They just see a peer, and not a freak. They value my opinion, and you know what? So do I. Finally.

I am free.

I am free to release my emotions without a therapist.

I am free to get an emotion out of a book.

I am free to write an emotion which can move another person.

I am free to love.

I am free to ask for advice and decide not to listen.

I am free to try to change the world.

I am free to fail and try again.

I am free to live untouched by the walls of illiteracy.

I am free to read to a child.

I am free to explore my brain.

I am free to create,

I am free.

I am free,

I am free,

Thank you!

I am free.

The Circle

Andrea L. Baldi, Ph.D.

Through a moving account of her own struggles to cope with a learning disability, the author opens a window into the world of the learning disabled student. She also offers hope by describing her emergence from this struggle with the empathy, knowledge and strength, which allow her to help others.

Part of my role as a learning specialist in the PAL program at Curry College is to interview prospective students. It never ceases to amaze me when they share their educational horror stories with me. Stories of ridicule, frustration, and despair. The same themes I experienced as a student over thirty years ago. Most of the students that I see have been serviced in some way, but those who have not are the ones I empathize with. Like them, I floundered through the ranks of public school with an undiagnosed learning disability, though for me it was a few years earlier, from the late fifties through 1970.

A Personal Journey

When I considered writing this chapter, I knew I would be forced to circle back through a mixed bag of emotions and memories both painful and hopeful. Doing so I hope will add insight to others with learning differences and those who work with them. Let me begin with fear. It's the emotion that always pops up for me when I reflect on how it all began.

My elementary school years were mainly filled with confusion. I drifted through the lower grades as though I were in a fog. I mimicked the actions of my classmates in an attempt to keep up, always feeling that something was wrong because nothing made any

sense. I was always kept after school writing words on the blackboard, or memorizing vocabulary that continued to pile up every day. Since I lived adjacent to the school and my mother worked in the cafeteria, teachers never seemed to mind keeping me till almost 5:00 PM most nights. Living just a doorstep away was a major problem. Another problem was that because my mother worked in the cafeteria and knew the school administration and faculty, I was pushed along from grade to grade even though I was totally lost academically.

The walk from the school to my house was never long enough. During that daily trip my confusion began to turn to fear and anxiety. When I reached home, I was usually late, no way to hide the time on the clock which told my mother I was kept after school once again. Her frustration with me was my greeting. Four to five days a week I sat at the dinner table in tears, the food on my plate a wet blur.

As I grew, my fear turned to depression and anxiety and manifested in numerous ways. I could never understand why people would always say to me "Smile Andrea," "Lift your head up Andrea." Moving into Junior High was supposed to be exciting but the building was attached to my elementary school and my mother was still working in the cafeteria keeping an eye on me. Her politicking continued to push me through four years of middle school.

I became more depressed and anxious as I struggled through adolescence when I really began to see that I was different. Because my grades were so low, school officials didn't know what to do with me so I was placed in what I remember as predominantly male, non-teaching, controlled, low level classrooms where frequent rumbles occurred. I

remember chairs, books and stacks of paper going out the windows. I was in total chaos, quivering with fear in a corner of the classroom.

I began to experience bouts of hives, freakish swollen lips and eyes with itchy red welts that came on with no warning. This led to sweaty palms and dizziness which sometimes resulted in fainting spells. I often went home from school sick. These panic attacks began to spill into my non-school life as well. Being in any closed area where I could not exit without making a disturbance would bring on an attack. Places like church, a supermarket line, a movie theater or a restaurant were frightening to me. My mother took me to the doctor who asked me if I was afraid of the priest. I remember perceiving that to be a weird question.

I also remember walking out of the building in Junior High quite often and heading home in the middle of the day. A bell would ring to signal the change of classes and I would flip into a space and time of great relief and would truly think it was the end of the day. Many times I was stopped by a teacher and questioned. I remember feeling like I was being awakened from a dream into embarrassment. Today I still have dreams of lockers, many of them. I'm not able to find mine and time is slipping away. When I do find my locker, it's been ransacked; books and things that I need are missing. I'm late for class, I'm lost, and I'm totally out of control.

Towards the end of Junior High, my friends were all college bound and registered for the appropriate high school classes. I desperately wanted to do the same but guidance counselors discouraged my parents saying that it was a "waste of time and money".

Against advice, I enrolled in the high school college prep courses. They were low-level classes, but at least I was in the same building as my friends and it wasn't next door

to my house. But guess what, my mother transferred to the high school cafeteria. I thought I would die. Now as I reflect back, I wonder if this was her way of advocating for me.

So what was to become of me? In the refuge of my room at home was where I did my greatest work. I struggled with the fear, depression and feelings of hopelessness. I experienced frequent fits of crying coupled with sheer anger and rage. I remember telling myself I would rise above this, do something with my life and just be happy. It became a little easier by my junior year in high school. I was barely passing, my mother still politicking, but I had learned to turn my frustration into humor. I became the class clown. Finally I could do something. Life became a little easier. I was making a fool of myself but people were laughing and I was popular.

Then high school ended in 1970 and so did the laughing. My friends went on to college, but I couldn't get into the schools they were accepted to. I applied to Curry College just before PAL came into existence. I was denied admission because of my low SAT scores and high school grades. Instead, the admissions office suggested I attend summer school and take an introductory liberal arts course and a study skill course. If I did well, I would be accepted. I didn't and I was crushed. I then enrolled in a local community college. I was in a desperate pursuit of a college degree, but went on to fail out of three different institutions.

I wrestled with the perception that I was not "college material" and the reality that I had to do something with my life, so I went to work in the basement of a bank counting checks. Again I began to experience intense panic attacks which came over me every morning in the elevator on my way down to the basement and I often went home sick.

I then talked my way into a legal secretarial position for a local law firm. My typing was quite fast but it was my spelling that got me into trouble. One of the firm's clients witnessed my boss's anger in the courtroom as he attempted to read the briefs I prepared for the case. He must have been really mad because the client sent me flowers the next day. They arrived just before my boss fired me.

Even though college was out of the question, I still had a great desire to be connected to the learning environment. When the Chapter 766 rule came into effect, I landed a job in an elementary school as a teacher's aide. As I worked with the children, I began to relate to their frustration and their pain. I was fortunate enough to be working with a gifted teacher who through my work with the children recognized my learning gaps and my potential. Knowing my struggle and desire to attend college, she suggested I receive some educational testing and recommended Dr. Gertrude Webb at the Curry College Learning Center. I took her up on the suggestion and in 1976 learned for the first time that I had a learning disability.

As Dr. Webb explained my options to me I was elated, hopeful and relieved. At the same time, I was angry at all those who had said I couldn't succeed. But mostly, I was angry for all the wasted time and frustration and wanted desperately to catch up. On the drive home after our conversation, I reflected on twelve years of floundering through public school and the six years that followed. They were just an extension of the pain as I faked it through various attempts at employment and waited to be found out. Then all of it finally made sense to me and suddenly I wasn't confused any longer. Then it hit me, I felt like I was on a steamroller plunging forward in an attempt to make up for lost time.

I went through Summer PAL in 1976 and with the help of exceptionally gifted learning specialists I began to know my own power and brightness. That summer experience was all I needed to fuel my drive. I could not afford the tuition for my first semester which was a major blow for me, but I refused to give up. I worked for a couple of years to earn some money while taking classes part time along with PAL and matriculated in 1979.

From the moment I was tested and informed that I was in fact "college material," I knew I wanted to teach LD college students. However, even though I was being told I had the potential to succeed academically and had demonstrated it, eighteen years of failure, anxiety and ridicule take their toll. The voice of the demon inside me was always at work reminding me that I really didn't ace that exam, it had to be curved. Or, that term paper wasn't really superior, the professor just liked me. How in the world could I possibly teach? I must be out of my mind.

I graduated with a bachelors degree in 1982, with honors. I then went on to earn two masters degrees while taking evening classes and working in a sales and marketing career. This career path traveled through two years in cable TV sales and advertising followed by four years as an account executive for several printing and graphics companies and concluded with three years of marketing life insurance and investments. It was my second masters degree in education with two certifications in secondary education that circled me back to Curry. In 1991 once again Dr. Webb offered me the chance to succeed in another way, as a teacher. I found myself at thirty-nine years of age, half way through my thesis work and interning in Summer PAL. I loved my work with

the students and was finally doing what I had always dreamed and struggled so hard to achieve.

Translating the Personal into the Professional

The strategies I learned as a student in PAL were enormously helpful. I had utilized them in graduate school and in a marketing and sales career but still I felt unsatisfied and had the urge to reach higher. I always wanted to work with the learning disabled adult population and so it was this desire to give back some of myself that circled me back once again to PAL as a Learning Specialist. I believe that it is my nine years of work experience, my graduate work and mostly my own inner understanding of learning disabilities that is the foundation of how I engage with my students. Living successfully with a learning disability affords me a unique perspective on my teaching. Beyond this foundation, the direction my work takes comes from the students themselves. Having lived in a place of silence and darkness where educators and parents did not listen to me nor see me, I know a place that many of my students also know well. It can be hard to emerge from such a place and let go of the darkness, reach for the light and be seen and heard. Many of us have spent so long hiding and expending so much energy covering up and trying to keep up that the pattern becomes familiar and even comfortable, as painful as it is. Because I was fortunate enough to work with caring learning specialists who really wanted to listen and see me, I was able to begin to reach. Therefore, before introducing learning strategies to my students I find it's important to understand where they are coming from so that together we can decide our course of direction. Building an atmosphere of trust so students can feel safe to take risks and share

is key. Understanding that a failure can be a success and embracing what is difficult for you is as important as capitalizing on strengths. This is where we begin our journey.

Like myself, so many of my students put an enormous amount of energy into the struggle to stay afloat, to move ahead and succeed. In an attempt to make up for the lost time, many of us were forced to leave behind the unfinished business of dealing with the painful memories and experiences of early school years. That pain simmers just below the surface of our individual struggles for success. We need to go back and rescue that part of ourselves that we left behind so that we can heal, embrace and celebrate the whole of who we are. That is why accepting my own learning disability has been vital in my moving ahead and accomplishing my goals. Very often I will work with students who are hopelessly struggling with this acceptance. I can only support them while challenging them to own their learning disability. I often do this through sharing my personal experiences with them as well as information and research on characteristics of successful learning-disabled adults.

In addition to building a relationship with my students and the obvious instruction in learning strategies, I have developed what I see as key areas of focus. They are control, acceptance and action. Through my own personal experience I have realized the importance of these elements in overcoming and meeting the challenges presented by learning differences.

Control

Becoming more in control of their lives is key for learning disabled students. It helps to stop the spinning and confusion. It is essential to focus on organizational skills, planning, goal setting and time management.

Planning and goal setting help to drive me and keep my focus looking ahead. The goals do not have to be big. I had one that I used in order to help combat classroom anxiety. I sat right near the door or in an area where I could exit the least conspicuously. This helped me to feel less trapped and more in control. I then began to challenge myself to raise my hand in class. The reward was that learning started to become fun.

I've found that time management is basically getting control of time, not letting it control you. One strategy I like is what I refer to as the "9 to 5 plan". I encourage my students to look at their weekdays as a nine to five job. Students typically have more free hours in their days than they often realize, hours that could be spent on reviewing or preparing for course work and meeting deadlines. The evenings are still open and can be used for reserve, and weekends are weekends.

Acceptance

One of my major tasks in working with students who have learning difficulties is to guide them in understanding and accepting both their strengths and their limitations. Sometimes I have to do this very subtly because the students have built up many protective defenses around themselves.

Then there are those students whom I know I can directly challenge. One in particular comes to mind. Leo wanted to be a nursing major, but the course work challenged his greatest weakness. When meeting with him I could see he was visibly frustrated, often angry about his failures and always questioning why he was so unsuccessful. At first, Leo never wanted to address his learning disability and never made any reference to its existence. He needed to be challenged which brought us to reframing his thinking about his strengths and areas of need. We talked honestly and openly of his

weaknesses and how they were holding him back because he wasn't tapping into his strengths. We worked the negatives in order to make them positives.

Leo finally grew tired of the struggle to succeed in a program that wasn't well matched to his learning profile. As I stayed with him, I watched him make an important leap from the reframing process to realizing the importance of anticipatory skills. One day he verbalized to me a new plan he had that if he failed his next major nursing exam, he would transfer from the nursing program to the health education program. In doing this he ran what I call the "what if tape". That is, with every challenge I face, I have an alternate plan in the event failure is obvious. These anticipatory skills help in two ways: first, they soften the feelings of defeat and second, they help keep you moving forward towards yet another goal. You see, we can't "miss a beat". To this day I clearly remember Leo coming to our session very proud, determined and relieved about his acceptance and his new goal. He was clearly happy and redirecting his energy and strong desire which is critical in achieving academic success. Leo had learned the value of reframing and anticipatory skills.

Building on strengths and bypassing difficulties is the same as knowing what you like and dislike. I encourage students to accept it as a way of life beginning with understanding how they learn. Capitalizing on strengths is a given both socially and academically. It's the fun part. But, acknowledging and embracing those things that are next to impossible can be a bit more challenging. My experience has been that difficulties never fully disappear. I refer to them as negative voices and demons that I simply go around or jump over on the seat of a strategy.

Action

Action tasks are my favorite because they involve the use of the body. I have found that life is often one fear, challenge or obstacle after another. You can do all the planning, organizing and thinking you want, but moving forward requires taking action which also involves some amount of risk taking. You have to face the possibility that you might fail and think about how you will handle it. I tell my students to always reach for something better than they are used to. I personally made a point of taking courses that were more challenging than I might be comfortable with just to stretch myself. This can be important socially as well. I recommend that my students surround themselves with people whom they see as successful that care about their academics and their goals. This can be a real motivator. These are not easy actions to take and can be very risky, but all I am suggesting to them is that when they feel comfortable, it may be time to reach a little higher, to take an action toward their next goal.

Experiential learning is another way for students to put their ideas into action. It's never too early for students to investigate options in the job market. I know the value of a good internship because I never had one so I encourage my students to connect with the Experiential Education Office. Through such an experience they can learn, what kind of work might make them happy and most importantly, what they don't want to do. It builds confidence and connects academics with the real world. Having reasonable expectations of one's self is critical. Often students I see struggle with a lack of direction and so feel they do not have a purpose. They often find this a pressure particularly if their peers have set career goals. This brings to mind a freshman, Cindy, whom I have been working with

that shared with me her concerns about this. She was obviously pressured and so we began in a non-threatening way to address her needs through the use of visualization. I began by asking Cindy to visualize and imagine herself after college and how she might want to spend a typical workday and to see what that setting would look like. In addition, I asked her to make a list of the things she wanted to experience in her day. I also told her it was as important to think about and identify those things she didn't want included in her daily experience. After running through this exercise, Cindy was able to verbalize that she really wanted to explore teaching dance and/or possibly directing a small dance school. What was really important in this exercise was Cindy's realization of the importance of reaching for something that she had a passion for and her acceptance that this was a real possibility for her. She was then able to set some short-term goals and had also acquired a skill that she knew she would utilize again.

Connecting with others who have learning difficulties and are experiencing success in their occupations can also be extremely useful. It's helpful for students to set up informational interviews with these people, ask questions about how they utilize their strengths in their careers and bypass their difficulties. I am in the process of developing such a program at Curry and I often talk with LD alumni who tell me how they wished they had such an opportunity when they were in college. Building such a network is not difficult. Because of the nature of the people involved, it begins to become self-driven, a real win/win situation.

Learning differently is tough. It takes work, time, commitment, and facing the unknown. I believe that exercising and eating well will help a student to pull this off. Daily cardiovascular exercise helps fight anxiety, fatigue, illness and depression. Along

with cardiovascular exercise should come a basic awareness of nutrition. I encourage my students to watch the fat intake (it drags them down), to stay as close to the healthy food groups as possible, and to drink a lot of water. Obviously staying clear of elicit drug use, nicotine, and over-use of alcohol and caffeine go without saying. Taking action for a healthier body and mind is extremely important.

Continuing the Journey

In working with my students now, we address the obvious learning strategies, along with the key areas of control, acceptance and action. Together we address these issues through the vehicle of discussion as we explore their course work as well as their hopes, fears and ambitions. In this development process, there is a great deal of modeling taking place between myself and my students and also among the students themselves. We deal with trial and error as we share strategies and difficult educational stories of the past and present. Learning disabilities do not disappear, and recently I was once again reminded of this.

I enrolled in a music theory class and although the instructor, a wind musician had wonderful energy; he had a non-inclusive teaching style. In fact, his method was to verbally drill us on musical note recognition using no visual cues. At my first class, I found myself anxiously waiting for him to call on me as he systematically went around the room at rapid fire pace, pointing at students for the answers. An old familiar reaction welled up inside me as I experienced a ringing in my head and my mind went blank. I struggled to keep up and to cover up. Then suddenly my anxiety turned to anger and then quickly to laughter as he pointed his fat little finger at me. With a calm voice I smiled at him and replied, " I have no idea. I'm finding it very difficult to learn this way." What I

did have were some suggestions for him that could address my learning style and probably improve on his teaching methods. After class we talked about it. He was very open, and what was an unpleasant situation turned into a benefit for both of us. Investigating and sharing the strategies that work and those that don't is a learning curve along the circle that brings us to the best parts of ourselves as we strive for success.

Professionalism Without Detachment

Marguerite Wengler, M. A.

In this chapter, a successful and accomplished teacher describes her personal battle to overcome the effects of a learning disability. She also details the strategies and attitudes which allowed her to achieve her potential and describes the way she translates this into her work with learning disabled college students.

You are at the bottom of a deep, dark pit.
Others are there with you, and you can't help wondering
why they just lay there, waiting to die
Up on the ground, you hear the sounds of people eating,
dancing, laughter, merriment
You want to go up and join the fun
Yes! You will climb up and out!
You begin your ascent, but it's slow and tedious work
It seems to take forever for you to see any progress
Still, with much hesitation and fear, you persevere
Just as you are starting to feel that you might make it.....
Just as you think you may have a chance.
Someone from up above throws a bucket of water down the pit.
There is much laughter, as others join in, muddying the walls
You wonder why they are doing this, as you slide back down
to the bottom.

When an individual is lacking in self-respect, it is as if he or she is at the bottom of a deep pit, in which everyone is throwing water. In our society, we do not respect people who don't respect themselves; rather, we tend to blame those who are unsure of their own abilities. The popular adage, "You have to earn respect" clearly expresses that it is the responsibility of the individual to earn the respect of others. However, individuals who do not believe in themselves are unable to do this. Subsequently, others may reject them, reinforcing the notion that the person is inferior, and perpetuating a vicious downward spiral.

This seems particularly true of learning disabled individuals. One of the most difficult things about a learning disability is that it's hidden. You may be functioning well on the outside, but inside you feel that you are flawed. You are fooling everyone, except yourself. This creates feelings of guilt, resulting in a lack of self - respect. I know that this is true, because I, myself, have a learning disability. Growing up, I was skipped two grades in school for being ahead of the other students, but I graduated from high school feeling that I was literally retarded. It seemed to me that sometimes I was judged to be brilliant and sometimes the opposite -- the control was never mine. I am writing this

personal narrative to help learning disabled students and those who are associated with learning disabled students to understand the hidden pain within.

In my early childhood, I never knew what I was missing. How could I know? Whereas life seemed like the twilight zone to me, it was only natural for me to assume that others viewed it in the same way. As time passed, however, I noticed that others had less of a problem organizing their belongings. While others seemed "crisp" about what was happening in the world around them, I felt like I was looking through a fog. Time and space seemed hazy to me, and I began to have a sense that my family, friends and relatives were more aware than I was. Finally, there was a distinct sense that I could not express myself as clearly as I wished. Yet, I was continually told that I was fine. Moreover, my grades in school were very good to excellent, and I was often praised for my art and musical abilities.

In school, the teachers were always telling me to pay attention, but I had no idea what they meant. I lacked the confidence to ask what I was doing wrong. Then, something very confusing occurred. At the end of first grade, my parents told me that because I was so ahead of my class, I was going to be skipped a grade. Initially, this was exciting, but I didn't like it when it actually occurred. Far from feeling honored, I felt more lost than ever. "Pay attention!" were the words I heard the most. In the fifth grade, I entered a public school and was again skipped to a higher grade. I was again unable to accept and enjoy this honor for very long.

It was hard for me to develop self - respect, because I always appeared to be failing people. I would often say or do the wrong thing, but I had no idea how to improve. Communication was difficult for me, unless it was in written form. Writing was so much easier, because I could always read my words, reflect on them, and then possibly change

them, before showing them to someone else. In conversations, I was often stuck with whatever impulsive statement I had made. In fifth grade, there is little written communication among the students. It seemed that every child in the room could banter, gossip, and even tattle on each other better than I.

Throughout elementary school, I was aware that, no matter how much I achieved, something was definitely lacking in my approaches to solving problems and in my interactions with others. Moreover, I could never keep track of anything. I forgot appointments. I lost important papers, especially homework. I was always being scolded for being disorganized at school and at home. My inability to express myself did not improve. I would sometimes offend people, while being completely unaware that I had done so. I would speak out of turn. I would struggle to make a point, only to discover that the listener didn't have any concept of what I was trying to say. My morale sagged and my grades plummeted to C's, but not because the work was difficult, although it seemed so at the time. In retrospect, I realize my grades were lower because I was confused, hurt, and angry. My anger was always directed at myself.

This is not an uncommon feeling among the learning disabled students I teach. Disabilities are so hidden much of the time and so rarely understood when they do surface, that there is little likelihood of personal acceptance.

In high school, there was the same kind of hurt and confusion. I was very active in all the clubs, but I was continually on edge about "blowing my cover." I knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I was struggling to survive. I could be found out at any time. What was I covering up? My inferior brain, of course!

I can remember three special teachers -- teachers who would later serve as role models in my teaching career. They were special because they had a quiet faith in me. The first was an English high school teacher. She appeared to love everything I did. It wasn't so much what she said, but the quiet look of acceptance that always accompanied her words. She never talked down to me; rather, she talked to me as if I mattered -- as if my words were somehow interesting and profound.

Once, I confided to her that I always lost everything. "My mother says I would lose my head if it weren't attached to me," I told her. Mrs. Leonard looked up from her paperwork and looked at me for a few moments. I can still visualize her sitting there and quietly responding: "Everyone loses things from time to time. All you have to do is retrace your steps. As your mind revisits the places you have been, your memory is jogged into releasing the information you need -- the place where the missing item was left. Your mother has you convinced that you are uniquely poor at managing yourself. You're not, you know." I was so stunned that I couldn't respond. Her comments were somewhat shocking!

First, I had never thought that there was a solution -- an actual process one could follow -- for the problem of misplacing things. I had been living with the assumption that one was organized or not -- that it was an inherent talent similar to being able to play a musical instrument. I was completely flabbergasted to even imagine the possibility of control! I thought that Mrs. Leonard must be brilliant to make such a wonderful suggestion. Second, I was amazed that she had criticized my mother, another adult. Adults always seemed to stick together, especially parents and teachers. Finally, the thought that my mother had been even partially responsible for my problem was

overwhelming. It seemed disloyal to respond or even to seriously consider the impact of her statements, and more than I was able to handle at the time. I hastily changed the subject and mentally blocked out what she had said. It would be years before I would seriously consider the validity of Mrs. Leonard's analysis and advice. I still do not believe she was correct in implying that my mother caused my problems with organization, although I might have engaged in less denial if my mother had understood my problem.

It was Mrs. Leonard's strategy, however, that was the most intriguing. Whereas I had been scolded and punished at home and at school for various manifestations of my organizational and focusing disabilities, Mrs. Leonard was calmly suggesting one small, but important strategy -- a strategy which fostered control and pride.

Another outstanding teacher was Miss Smith, who taught eighth grade math. She was the kindest teacher I had ever met. She challenged all of us to feel wonderful about ourselves. When my parents went to a parent/teacher conference with her, they were surprised to hear Miss Smith say how neat my work was. I had never been neat. My father thought Miss. Smith was referring to the wrong student, even though he was assured that this was not the case. Then my mom heard that I had handed in every homework perfectly completed. None had been lost. None had been half completed. For days, I heard my mother tell anyone who would listen that I was a very different person in math class.

What my mother didn't realize was that Miss. Smith made me feel so wonderful about doing my math, without feeling pressure to achieve beyond my capabilities, that I wanted to move mountains for her. I wanted to make her happy. I did every homework over and over, until it was perfect. I studied for every test -- a first in my school career. I

received a 100 average. When Miss Smith married during the year and left, I was the one who sadly organized the purchasing of a class-wedding gift.

My third excellent teacher was Mr. Morrison, my algebra instructor. He had such a kind face and an upbeat manner. In very subtle ways, he indicated his confidence in my intelligence. Sometimes, he would ask me to tutor some cute football player -- a task that I was only too happy to perform. At other times, he would give me an especially difficult problem that he thought I would find challenging to do in my spare time. Without verbalizing it, Mr. Morrison acted as if he thought I was brilliant. It was due to Mr. Morrison that I earned a 100 on the New York State Regents Algebra Examination, the only one to do that in the history of my high school.

One would think that my self - esteem should be soaring at this point. It wasn't. Whereas algebra was fun, exciting, and easy to master, geometry was the opposite. A teacher who seemed to hate the subject and who also appeared to be terrified of the students rarely presented the material effectively. I was distracted, uninterested, and failing. I quickly reverted to my old paradigm of not being able to learn, which was reinforced by my daily struggles to cope with focusing and organizational problems. I still could not keep track of my belongings, appointments, and time, in general. It was embarrassing and frustrating to discover that I had lost a critical paper *again or* completely forgotten to do some necessary task.

My weak focusing skills surfaced while attending classes, during conversations with friends that weren't unusually relevant or stimulating, and while watching the news on television. My mind would drift, causing a critical point to be forever lost. In my classes, I would try to take notes, but it was difficult for me. Unless the teacher really

made the subject come alive, I felt constrained and restless, as my feet ached to move out of the room and end the torture. Hence, there was this continual sense of playing catch - up. I would spend enormous amounts of time, weekly, if not daily, trying to compensate for missing items, appointments, or important information that I should have heard the first time.

Finally. I was often unable to make myself clearly understood, particularly regarding situations where I needed to utilize persuasive techniques. I learned early how important it was to be able to sell, whether the product is yourself, your ideas, your work, or anything else. Nevertheless, knowing the importance of persuasive techniques was not the same as being proficient at using them effectively.

What I remember most about my high school is a feeling of being extremely uncomfortable. There was extensive covering up, catching up, and almost zero control. When I did something well, it seemed to be a chance happening, having little to do with ability, interest, or attitude. Perhaps if I had examined what was happening, I might have discovered etiologies and possible remedies. Instead, there was such denial, that the false assumptions I had made never surfaced long enough for analysis.

After much gentle prompting to trust me with their histories and current feelings, my students at Curry report the same inconsistencies regarding their own sense of power in controlling learning successes.

It was in my junior year that Mr. Weaver, a guidance counselor, had summoned me to his office. He barely knew who I was, because he had hundreds of students to counsel, and I was not one to stand out.

As I entered his office, he almost attacked me with his exuberance. He literally grabbed me and led me to a seat. His flushed face, excited expression, and tense pose were a bit frightening and embarrassing, as I noticed he was attracting the attention of other counselors and staff in the huge open office area. "GUESS WHAT?" he boomed. "We have just received the PSAT scores. You have scored in the top two percent of the country!" (This score from a person who was failing geometry! It made no sense.)

As I sat there, I felt like this was definitely going to be the worse day of my life. This counselor was getting all excited by some test that I couldn't even remember taking. He had no idea that a mistake had been made and I hated to let him down. What made everything more difficult was that he wouldn't listen. He simply couldn't seem to understand that it was all a mistake. He kept shaking his head impatiently, whenever I suggested that an error had been made. He insisted that I take some other tests and apply for various scholarships.

There are some things that you just know, although there are no facts to support what you thinking. I knew then that this was not good news, in spite of Mr. Weaver 's arguments. I instinctively knew that this would be one of the most terrible things that would ever happen to me, and, just like everything else in my life, there was little I could do to change it. As Mr. Weaver started singing my praises to another counselor who was sitting nearby, I felt God must be playing a very mean trick on me.

I wanted no part of the SAT's, but I didn't know how to avoid taking them. When I hinted that perhaps I would not go to college or that I might not be ready to take the SAT’s, people reacted in an annoyed, impatient manner. Perhaps they thought I was fishing for compliments, since my high PSAT scores were becoming the topic of faculty

conversations (as reported by Mr. Weaver who thought I would be overjoyed to hear this.)

The truth was that I was plagued with fears about letting people down. In spite of my history of extreme inconsistency, there were high expectations. Therefore, I did the only thing I could do. I prepared for the tests by studying extensively. There were no SAT preparation books in those days, so I could only study my textbooks. I believed that this had to help.

On the day of the test, I saw Marjorie Roberts working at her desk. Marjorie was a top student I reasoned that maybe if I observed her, I would see just what the magic was. Would she zoom down the first page, just marking off answers in seconds? She didn't. Would there be something different about the way she was working? I couldn't tell. I reluctantly began my own test. I had to do well! If only I could remember my strategies for the PSAT's. Unfortunately, I could not even remember one thing about the test. It had been that unimportant at the time.

In those days, no one talked about strategies. No one even told students how to plan their time when taking tests. Or, maybe they did tell us, and I wasn't paying attention. At any rate, I had no idea how to take the SAT's. As I sat there staring at the test, I felt completely helpless.

Suddenly, I thought of how to score high. I would check each answer three times. There would be no chance of making careless errors, which were often my downfall. I labored over each question as if my life depended on it. I knew all kinds of shortcuts for math operations that my father had taught me. I normally used these on a daily basis. However, I didn't dare use these for the test. I reasoned that it would be best to use a

conventional method that I had been taught in school. Somehow, it seemed safer. We had been warned not to guess at answers, so I only answered the vocabulary questions that seemed obviously correct. I had no idea that I was setting myself up to do poorly.

Students with learning disabilities can become compulsive about using standard learning techniques, only to find that these methods fail them. Often though, students are not confident enough to analyze or blame the specific technique, choosing instead to blame the failure on an inherent lack of intelligence. Until they realize that they need to find an individualized approach to learning, they cannot begin the process of controlling their rate of learning effectiveness. It is difficult to convince learning-disabled students that an inability to learn via one or more specific mode(s) is not an indication of poor overall intelligence.

My SAT scores were 450 and 430, barely respectable -- certainly not anything great. Although there had been continual words of encouragement prior to the tests from those who had heard about the PSAT scores, there were absolutely no questions or comments afterwards. All talk about my being some kind of a genius vanished. I felt awful, because I knew that people had been counting on me, and I hadn't come through. I avoided Mr. Weaver and the other counselors, and I only interacted with my teachers when it was absolutely necessary.

Mostly though, I felt bewildered. How could I have scored better on the PSAT, a test that I could barely remember taking? I hadn't studied for it, and I probably had rushed through it the way I always rush through my work.

My SAT preparation, on the other hand, had been quite extensive. Hadn't I studied? Hadn't I worked on each problem slowly and carefully? Hadn't I done all of the

"right things" that teachers tell you to do? How could I have scored so much worse? It didn't make any sense. I couldn't help thinking that this kind of inconsistency was the core of my life. I sometimes did so well that I attracted all kinds of attention. However, my accomplishments only served to magnify my weaknesses when they eventually surfaced. After receiving a perfect score on the algebra regents examination, which created a stir even outside my school, I failed geometry the following year. Was this not the same pattern demonstrated by the PSAT's and SAT's I had no control over my own ability to perform.

I don't know why I was accepted to a very competitive college. I've often wondered if Mr. Weaver had something to do with that. It certainly wasn't my grades or my SAT's scores. Since language pragmatics was not a strength for me, I doubt if I aced the interview. However, I was accepted, and I wasn't going to question it. Perhaps, I should have.

College was yet another nightmare. It seemed huge, demanding, and unfriendly. It probably wasn't, but I was a frightened freshman operating in a fog of confusion and fear. At orientation, they told us the old story that one out of three of us would not be there the next semester; only at this college, they meant it. Actually, in my circle of friends, it turned out to be two out of three. I felt lost and a bit terrified.

My first class was Spanish. I looked around the room in horror, as everyone conversed in perfect dialogue. Even though I had expected the Spanish to be difficult, I hadn't expected it to be impossible. I was disadvantaged. One was supposed to have had two years of Spanish in high school, and I had only had one. I hadn't done that well in high school Spanish either. I tried not to panic, but I couldn't imagine passing this course.

My second class was biology, a science where I had earned a B in high school. College biology was much harder. It was what I now know to be a "weeding out" course. Many who flunked out of college would do so because of Biology 101. We had a text which I did not understand. It sometimes took twenty minutes to read and understand one page. Moreover, the corresponding lab period involved dissecting a fetal pig. The stench of the formaldehyde was sickening, and the dissecting process was hard on my squeamish stomach.

My third and fourth courses were in art, my major, and I expected a reprieve with these. The first class was oil painting. I was optimistic here, since I could draw reasonable well. How difficult could it be to color in the spaces of a lightly drawn picture, or draw directly with a fine brush, I reasoned? However, it soon became obvious that I was out of my league. First, drawing ability was not important. Most of the students painted abstract pictures that barely resembled the objects they represented. Instead, they focused on the feelings expressed by line, color and texture. They spoke of various schools of art with the teacher, and how their works might be compared to those. I, on the other hand, had a limited knowledge of art, because I had not visited galleries and museums very often. It was obvious that I had better do some fast visits to the city, if I was to survive here. Having no car and a hectic scheduled, I could see some major problems ahead.

The second art course was mechanical drawing. Although this was a required course for art majors, I swear (to this day) that the room was filled with engineers. The black hippie style outfits of the painting class gave way to crew cuts, vests and white shirts. There were only two other females in the class of thirty students. We were given

bottles of India ink and stick pens. We had to copy complex drawings, showing all sides of some object with various precise nooks and crannies. The drawings we copied only showed one side. We had to visualize the other sides. The visualizing was difficult; the drippy pens were impossible. Mine soon looked like a skewed Rorschach picture. My eyes searched the room to see if the other students were as mystified as I was. Everyone was working efficiently, without any evidence of self - doubt. At this point, I was ready to quit college forever.

English would be my salvation, or so I thought. I had always received B's in English without doing much work. At least there would be one course I would pass. I was even a little excited as I entered the room. My instructor was a celebrated author. I couldn't wait to meet him.

A little man with stony eyes and wild kinky hair entered. He did not start with a "Welcome," or "Hello" He simply said the following, without any hint of an expression. "Ladies and gentlemen, I want you to know the following. This is not an easy class. If you wish to be in an easy class, then leave now." There was a deadly silence as he waited. No one left. I think that everyone was afraid to do anything. "Well.....I see," he continued ominously. Again there was this horrible pause, and he lifted up his arms as if to give up on us. That gesture alone made it clear that whatever happened, it would not be *his* fault. He was clearly washing his hands of whatever we might do.

"I have been teaching on the college level for almost twenty years," he announced with obvious pride. "In that time, I have given out one A, two B's and four C's. The rest were all D's and F's." The silence in the room was as heavy as the fear I felt.

"Why?" he asked us with a rhetorical edge to his voice, while rolling his eyes. Apparently he had been asked this very *stupid* question before. "Why?" he repeated, obviously expecting an answer this time. "You all know the answer to that?" He challenged us, as if we were holding out on him. No one said a word, or even moved. "Do we have a Steinbeck in here? a Faulkner? A Robert Frost?....or perhaps we have a Joseph Conrad? Until you can write even close to their levels of excellence, do not expect an A or even a B. Until you know well the styles of those authors and the many other authors who are exemplary, do not expect to pass. Do I make myself clear?" No one said a word as the arrogant author looked slowly and haughtily around the room, making eye contact with each student. "I take that for agreement. Fine! Read the first short story in your text and write a critique for Thursday (two days away)." With that, he walked out of the room.

A very frightening thought was starting to build up inside me -- a fear of "flunking out. "It was like the sensation of being in a boat with a hole in the bottom. One could only do so much bailing. Sooner or later, the boat would sink. Still, what could one do, but keep bailing and praying for a miracle?

Day after day, I saw people around me flunking out. At that time, college administrators and teachers felt little need for accountability to their students. It almost seemed as if flunking students was a sign of quality teaching in a competitive school. I don't know why I stayed. I had two C's in my art courses, and those were my best grades. I was failing Spanish and I had a 14 average in biology. In English, we had a paper each week. Each week I received an F. The celebrated author rarely wrote comments. When I

asked him about that, he told me that he just didn't know where to begin. Apparently, it was *that* bad!

With evaporating hopes, I decided to find work. The Christmas season was approaching, and I found a part time job in the security department of Abraham and Strauss. I planned to tell people that I preferred working to attending college, since final exams were approaching and my grades were all F's, except for art.

A strange thing happened at this point. Knowing that I was failing so badly gave me a certain freedom. Instead of studying for progressively longer periods of time, as I had been doing unsuccessfully, I took some risks. First I dropped Biology 101. Somehow, I talked the professor into letting me drop the course with a WP, which is indicative of a withdrawal with a passing grade. I think he felt that anyone who hung in there with a 14 average -- anyone who kept trying, in spite of no chance, deserved a break. Second, I spent all of my time in the library, reading all of the other great works of the authors in my English textbook. For example, Joseph Conrad's short story, "The Heart of Darkness" was featured in my textbook. I not only read that, but I read everything Conrad had ever written, which represented volumes. I spent the seven to eight hours per day in the library with only short breaks to stretch my legs and eat dinner. This was possible to do at this particular university, because class attendance was not compulsory. I stopped attending classes altogether, with the exception of art. I probably would have missed art, too, but I needed to complete the work on a term art project. Finally, I crammed for Spanish in the last week before the final. I pulled two "all nighters." People always say that it's not wise to cram for exams, but in my case, I had no alternative. It was cram or fail.

My English exam of four essays must have shocked my teacher. I was able to write about every literary work in terms of theme, style, and relevance to the time period when it was written. I could make comparisons between contemporary authors, as well as authors from other periods. I had quotes memorized from the actual works and from the critiques of respected critics. Since the exam had no time limit, I spent the entire day taking it. My goal had been to give this teacher the perfect answer to each essay question. I reasoned that if I received an A on the exam, maybe he would give me a D in the course. It was a long shot, because I had earned nothing above an F on every single paper I had handed in that term. It was little consolation that the same was true of everyone else in the class. Maybe they could handle failure. I couldn't.

As I look back on those pre - exam days, I am shocked at my courage. I went against everything that I had been told to do in school. I know that wouldn't have ever happened had I not been so desperate. That desperation taught me lessons I would use for more efficient learning throughout my life. Moreover, it taught me to teach my students with much more flexibility than most of us are trained to do.

When my transcripts arrived, I had received straight C's, including English! At least my English teacher could never again boast of only having given one A, two B's and four C's. I would be number 5.

I suppose that gave me a little more confidence to persevere at college; however, there was still this nagging urgency to hide my terribly inferior brain. I had to study hard to maintain a B- average at college, and I saw this as a sign of mental deficiency. Even when I completed four years of college in three, I still lived in fear that my weaknesses would suddenly surface and cause me great humiliation. I was not able to reflect on the

courage or cleverness it had taken for me to get through that awful first semester. It would be years before I could do that. Rather, I felt like I had bailed enough water out of the boat to keep it from sinking for a few hours -- nothing more.

Learning-disabled students rarely appreciate their accomplishments, because they are trying so hard to learn in the typical ways. There is this false assumption that until they can learn in the usual fashion, they are somehow cheating.

I continually struggled with focusing and organizational issues, without quite knowing what the struggle was all about. Once, when I was a senior and cleaning out a closet, I started to sort out all of my research papers. I noticed that on every paper, I had earned a high grade; however, every paper was also marked down to a C or C-, because it was passed in after the deadline. What was clearly obvious was that I had spent so much time trying to be perfect. I should have completed the papers on time, without continually trying to improve them. I wouldn't have earned A's, but I would have saved myself the additional work and incredible stress.

So many of my learning disabled students are perfectionists. It is almost as if they must prove themselves to be superior to protect their psyches from the hidden fears of being inferior. They tend to view the concept of intelligence in terms of black and white; thus, gray areas which surface are a cause for considerable confusion and alarm.

I began teaching on the elementary school level and then in the upper grades. I saw students with all kinds of weaknesses, and I found myself feeling profound empathy for all of them. I would look into their eyes and know how they felt when they didn't know something everyone expected them to know.

My own feelings of inferiority continued until I attended a conference on learning disabilities. I went because I was concerned about the academic progress of one of my own children, but I was stunned to realize that the speaker was talking about me. I related to everything he said. It was almost a religious experience hearing him talk so knowledgeably about all the learning weaknesses I was shamefully trying to hide. What was even more exciting was to hear that my type of weaknesses all centered around an inability to focus. Once I mastered that one issue, everything could be expected to fall into place**.** His talk sparked something inside me that was to change my life.

*My students report the joy that they feel when they finally understand **why** they haven't been able to control their learning effectiveness. It is always reported to be a life changing experience, because these learning disabled students can finally share all the pain and hidden fears that have continually plagued them. Just knowing the etiology is a major step toward empowerment, and this is immediately sensed by the awakening spirit.*

I decided to return to school and learn about moderate special needs. In graduate school, the instructor of the first course had the class fill out cards about training background and experience in special education. After reviewing my card, he asked me to teach one of the classes. I had listed my experience in teaching learning disabled, emotionally disadvantaged, and physically challenged students, and the professor asked me to present the different strategies I had used. When I finished teaching the class, everyone applauded. It was such a wonderful experience that I was motivated to reach for the highest possible goal. I aimed for straight A's, but more than that, I wanted to know the difference between an A student and myself. I began to study my own habits, my philosophies, and my abilities. I observed precisely what the A students did, how they

spoke in class, and the kinds of notes they took. Then I emulated all that they did. Although I had always been taught that we should never copy others -- that we should be ourselves -- that didn't work for me. I found some conscientious students and together, we studied, researched information, and did group projects. I made certain that I knew what the others knew and then I worked at knowing even more. I was planning for an eventual A average, but initially, I was expecting much lower. This approach helped remove the pressures associated with positive thinking and setting high goals, because the true focus is on learning strategies for the future. The nice surprise was that I never had to wait. The A's came right away. It was actually fun! I no longer wondered if I was bright. What did it matter, if I could get straight A's? There is nothing quite like the experience of earning very high grades to build self - respect.

Once a learning disabled student receives a high grade, genuinely earned, that student begins to feel that wonderful sense of control. Unfortunately, learning-disabled students are often too fearful to aim high, so they never reach their true potential without intervention.

Strategies for Empowering Students

Because of my learning experiences, I am thoroughly committed to empowering learning-disabled students in my present classes. I encourage students to aim for the highest grades possible, but not to expect them right away. I explain that there may be many low grades, even failing grades, at first, as students search for the methods that produce the most effective learning. However, the grades will eventually improve if students are truly motivated to do well. This is a critical strategy for sustaining hope and perseverance.

My second strategy is teaching students to use *graded* encyclopedias. This works best with very intelligent students who are either far below a college reading level or who have poor language skills, Educators often scoff at the use of encyclopedias, but graded encyclopedias, such as *World Book* or *Comptons* can be very valuable tools in two ways. First, they explain, simplify, and expand on the jargon present in typical textbooks. One student was baffled by Keyes' theory of economics, as it was presented in his textbook. The student became discouraged, especially when he considered that the entire textbook was difficult to read. I might have interpreted the text for him, but this does little to encourage student independence and self - esteem. It creates a dependence on the tutor that can be more harmful in the long run, for obvious reasons. Instead, I suggested that the student look up Keyes in *World Book.* When he read about Keyes' theories in the encyclopedia, he was able to return to the reading of his text with new insights and understanding.

Another use for graded encyclopedias is as a preliminary research tool. When students are assigned a paper, research or otherwise, they often lack the background to begin the work. If it is an opinion paper, their opinions show this lack of understanding; subsequently, their paper is superficial, if not incorrect. For example, students writing about whether abortion should be legal cannot begin to have a serious opinion until they can correctly understand the legal definition of abortion. Graded encyclopedias can provide this kind of information. If the assignment involves serious research, the graded encyclopedia defines the topic, explains the jargon, and then provides a history and an outline. It enables the student to progress to relevant books, periodicals and other reference materials with a clearer understanding of the overall topic.

My most important strategy, however, involves my relationship with my students. After relating my own experiences, both positive and negative, I encourage my students to feel free to do the same. This strategy is not without risks. Occasionally, a student may believe that he or she has an inferior teacher. This is particularly true of students who are denying their own learning weaknesses. Their prejudices concerning learning disabilities are often deep seated, and they are confused that their assigned teacher will not be proficient. They make the analogy of someone becoming a math teacher who has failed the required math courses.

I always counter that argument by focusing on the specific strategies I used that enabled me to rise from being a failing student in my first few months at college to one who finished a year ahead of her class. The difference between my experience and their analogy is that I do not fail at what I am trying to teach. On the contrary, my successes are more relevant than those of someone who has not had to contend with a different learning style.

I wish that I could write that these strategies always work and that they have completely erased my poor self - esteem. I wish that I could write that my learning disabilities are a thing of the past. The truth is that I still struggle daily with organizational skills, and it is always a challenge to convince people that I am more intelligent than I might seem to be.

The difference in my current attitude is that my weaknesses no longer bother me, and, at times, they are actually strengths. Because I have had these struggles, I have gained sensitivity about others, especially my students. I ache for them when they are ready to give up on themselves. I know the prejudices they face, and the numerous

failures that may await them. I am also glad that I can understand a disorganized student better than most people.

Students with low self- esteem (particularly when it is due to a hidden disability) need to understand that they are not alone. They need to know that I am not this brilliant college professor who can't possibly know their pain. Finally, they need to know that I am one of them, and I have made it.

Frankly, I would rather have my disabilities than the disabilities I see in many others, and my students need to hear this too. Because of my disabilities, I have a strong empathy for the weaknesses I see in those around me. I do not make fun of others. I do not intentionally hurt people. No matter how badly I want something, I have the ability to separate myself from it, rather than use or abuse others to achieve it. I believe that my disabilities have given me a mission in life. I want to help people find what I have found.

When I think back to graduate school, I remember the feeling of exhilaration -- the joy of being in control. If I could have one wish for my students, it would be that they can experience that same feeling.

Writing as a Therapeutic Tool

Allan G. Hunter, D.Phil., Oxford University

The author, a Professor of English at Curry College, describes his experiences in designing and teaching a course in "Therapeutic Uses of Writing." He describes the process of helping students "get to the other side of their deficits" in a college writing course and discusses the importance of dealing with the emotional blocks which impede students' learning and their ability to express their ideas. He shows the personal as well as academic benefits of involving students in writing about their own lives and feelings.

When I first came to Curry College, one marvelously eccentric colleague (who has since left) gazed at my resume and, noticing that I'd worked as a therapist, said, "You could teach this course on the Therapeutic Uses of Writing. No one's taught it for years." The dusty syllabus I was handed bore this out. I decided to try it. I had learned while working with disturbed adolescents that if one first took the time and trouble to remove the emotional blocks to learning, that subsequently the learning could proceed at lightning pace. If one didn't take the necessary time, almost no progress was likely. Starting with this premise I felt I could run an exciting and challenging class that would discuss learning styles. My interest was in teaching students about emotionally based obstacles to learning.

I knew that my students would be juniors and seniors, for the most part, and since this was to be a mainstream writing course I would have a mix of diagnosed learning disabled and non-learning disabled students. It struck me that the needs of these two groups would be very much the same, since all students have emotional issues that tend to obstruct learning. The learning disabled students might, if anything, have an advantage here since they would be more likely to have acknowledged the frustrations of their situation. This would make them more receptive to the main discussions, I reasoned. I

had a feeling that the learning disabled students might actually prove to be the most insightful members of the class.

The course I developed was relatively straightforward. It was intended to introduce students to various techniques that would allow them to start writing exploratively about themselves, techniques I then hoped they would be able to use with others. I imagined education majors would be interested, since they might learn a few tips they could use when they taught their own writing classes.

What I encountered was somewhat different.

From the first I was faced with students who wanted to use writing to explore themselves, particularly. I modified the syllabus to suit the students' needs and each time I offered the class over the next eight years I was surrounded by eager faces intent on personal exploration. I had wanted to show them a few techniques, talk about the unconscious a little, that sort of thing. They wanted to use the techniques to experience their own unconscious workings first hand. Once we allowed this to happen I found that talking about Freud, Jung, and Adler was charmingly straightforward, and that the level of understanding was impressive. By putting the syllabus content in the background and emphasizing the experience, I found that I could cover far more ground far more effectively than I had hoped.

The Nature of Teaching and the Process of Education

This in turn led me to a series of thoughts about the nature of teaching and what can happen in the process of education. While none of these thoughts are revolutionary, I do believe that they add up to a rejection of much of what is held to be traditional educational methodology.

It is necessary now for me to backtrack a little. Long ago I had discovered as a writing teacher that students wrote best about those topics that interested them most. Clearly, if I was to get good writing my task was to find out what the students knew most about, or get them excited about something so that they could write well. So I fed them

the hot topics of the time, and the results were generally good. It left me feeling, though, that I was missing something more vital, that I was stirring only part of the surface. Then it occurred to me to try and find out what it was that students were experts on. I assumed that I would get a series of answers about cars, movies, or whatever. What I discovered is that students are most highly experienced in being taught. They may not be 'experts' in the conventional sense, but they have a huge amount of experience, strong feelings, and highly developed stratagems, none of which they are normally asked to talk about. They are also highly experienced in dorm politics, roommate wrangles, and boy and girl friend problems. These are things they are rarely asked to mention, yet the history paper due two days ago on Nuclear Proliferation in the 1980s was probably delayed because of one or more of these items on the mental agenda.

It was at about this time that I began to notice that Student Life offices on campuses across New England (and probably the country) were making strenuous efforts to make the life of students smoother and thus aid retention. What struck me about this was that the valuable human lessons involved were often seen as something entirely separate from the academic agenda, and that the Student Life officers tended to target mostly first year students. My impression of most first year students was that they benefited from the help, but that many were not ready to be left to their own devices a mere two semesters later. They had been helped to cope, but probably not much more. It seemed to me and to many of my colleagues that the great unwritten and unacknowledged agenda of higher education was that students used their undergraduate days to 'mature', 'grow up', 'sow their wild oats' - before settling down as productive members of society. The problem seemed to be that society was hardly a fixed item any more, so settling back into it might be less easily accomplished than the myth implied. The growing up process had also become much more dangerous over the years. It is too important to be allowed to happen in this casual way, in my view. Whether a student was

learning disabled or not, these were important and thorny problems to tackle, and ones that anyone would need help with. This led me back to reassessing my course.

I decided I needed to redefine my own sense of what a learning disability might be. To me, a learning disability is anything that prevents a student from learning at a successful level - including the emotional confusions that make students drop out of college, or which lead them to unhappiness in peer relationships that can make college learning problematic. This is a very wide definition, and I am not proposing that any college should interfere with any student's right to have any sort of peer relationship that he or she chooses. What I'm suggesting is that all too frequently we do not give students the necessary tools to allow them to identify unhealthy situations so that they can change them or chose not to change them. They have the freedom to choose, but we have a responsibility to help them see that choices are available.

One older woman, for example, encountered strong opposition from her husband as she went through college. He was used to her being dependent, under confident, and confused. He liked her that way. When she began to develop into a more mature, self-directed learner he was terrified. He did all he could to sabotage her work. She was profoundly unhappy and eventually did drop out of college to try to save her marriage. I would say that as she overcame one learning disability, she then ran straight into something else that disabled her ability to learn.. Another woman was routinely beaten by her lover. Eventually this began to undermine her work. To ignore this emotional unhealthiness and to pretend that it will all magically work itself out seemed to me at the time to be a way of ignoring an emotionally based learning disability.

Meaningful Dialogue with Self

What does all this mean? I maintain that it is very unlikely that any person can have a meaningful dialogue with anyone else about anything much unless that person first has a meaningful dialogue with him or her self. Dialogue in the classroom, either verbal or written, became my aim, and it was then that I noticed how unsatisfactory most

classroom dialogues are. Students are frequently expected to 'sit down and shut up' - and worse still, most students tend to feel comfortable in that situation, because that's what they are used to. Students often want to speak up, but they are not always sure that they will be heard in the conventional classroom, especially if what they want to talk about is themselves.

So I designed my classes so that students could talk about themselves, but that didn't work as I expected either.

I re-thought the whole concept. What was important, I decided, in dealing with students' emotional material was not that I should understand them, nor that they should feel I could understand them. I was not there to be the therapist, although I would be dealing with material that had to do with therapy. What was important was that *they* should understand themselves, that they should begin to work at the dialogue with themselves.

I came to this understanding as a result of a long telephone call with a friend over a very poor line. I could hardly understand a word of what was being sobbed out to me at such great length. When the call ended I felt confused, because I hadn't done anything, I had made no suggestions. The next day the same friend called back to thank me for being 'so helpful'. I had been nothing of the sort, as I well knew. What I had been was a witness at an individual's developing dialogue with herself.

Inspired, I returned to the class. My approach was now slightly different. I would take my students through writing exercises and we would read or display the results, then each person could comment on what had been produced. My role was not to analyze or question too deeply. Instead, using my own exercise results as a basis I suggested possible useful avenues for students to think about in relation to their own work. I then asked them to go away and write about it. For example, I would ask them for a variety of signatures used on a regular basis - on a check, on a letter to a friend, on a job application, on a letter to a lover. I would ask them to reflect that to some extent a

signature is a self-portrait, unique, difficult to forge. When we sign ourselves differently we are showing different parts of our identities. In talking about identity, names, and self-images the discussion always turned to the name-givers, the parents. "They named me after my father, who was named after his father, who was named after his father," said one dejected-looking young man. "They really want me to be a credit to the family." The conversation unfolded a story of a man who wanted to study painting but felt forced to be an accountant, as his male ancestors had been. No one had asked him about his name before, but every day it reminded him of his dilemma which forced him to study accountancy, which he hated, and deny himself painting. I would call capitulation to such a social pressure a form of imposed learning disability.

Once students had the chance to air such concerns, they were better able, usually, to stand outside the problems and contemplate productive ways forward. Basic venting was only the first step. By encouraging the students to write down and explore what they had uncovered - or vented on paper if the classroom was still too intimidating - we had objectified the problem a little more. It could not be claimed, for instance, that everything was 'just fine' when several pages of text indicated that all was not just fine.

And this led to the next consideration. In a conventional therapeutic relationship a great deal of time can be taken up building trust. It may take years before a client can be brought to say something. Jane Adelizzi has already written sensitively about the issues of transferance and counter-transferance, and her points are well made. While such trust and confidentiality are vitally important, I would maintain that it is more important for each individual to learn to trust him or her self first. By encouraging the production of written responses to exercises, I created a situation in which students were not able to escape acknowledgement of what they had just said, or claim that the responses were not actually theirs. In conversations this can be done all too easily, and Freud has a great deal to say about such strategic 'forgetting'. "Sure, we talked about my mother," may be one

response, but to have a piece of written work in front of one that discusses the individual's mother in some detail is a reminder that cannot be removed by denial.

This reflection of self works particularly well in one exercise. I give each student a copy of Lewis Carroll's nonsense poem, "Jabberwocky". We all read it, once aloud, discuss the boy's killing of the Jabberwock, then I ask the class to draw this creature. The 'monsters' that appear each year always astonish me, and I suggest to the class that these drawings could be seen as expressions of the monsters in their own lives. One young woman, as soon as I'd suggested this, pointed to her own drawing and yelled with enthusiasm: "That's it! That's my mother!" She proceeded to explain that even the smallest details had to do with her mother, and that she hadn't known this until that moment. Her mother, she explained, made her life so stressful that she often could not do her schoolwork. A young man who had drawn an empty barren landscape confessed, shyly, that his monster was "buried, like I bury my emotions, my anger." The most defensive reaction came from a woman of 55 who, when she heard that the creature she had drawn might reflect some of her inner turmoil, immediately picked it up, hid it, and said, "Here's what I really meant to draw." She held up a picture of a smiling teddy bear. The rest of the class gently reflected her behavior back to her. She then produced her first picture of an angry monster, admitting that she felt angry at being taken for granted by her husband and children. Her devoted and self-denying care of them bit into her study time to the extent that she could not complete assignments on time. In each case I would wish to point out that we have an example of an emotional issue that impacts the ability to complete schoolwork successfully, and that arguably this amounted to a learning disability.

Addressing the Emotional Issues

These are three particularly clear examples, picked out of several hundred. When dealing with students who are diagnosed as learning disabled, we nearly always find an emotional component overlaid on the original disability. A difficult experience in school

will tend to produce a lack of self-esteem and compensatory behavior to gain acceptance, or at least recognition. I am suggesting now that a similar emotional component may well exist even in those who are not diagnosed as learning disabled.

Another slightly different example also is important here. Nick, a student of 25, was learning disabled but driven by an intense desire to succeed. His reading comprehension was slow, but he would put in the twelve hours necessary to cover an assignment that would more normally have taken four hours. He didn't flinch from the tasks. During our class work together he began to uncover some of the reasons behind this magnificent determination to succeed. It stemmed in great measure from a desire to impress his father. His father, divorced from his mother, was a high-achieving academic, very emotionally distant. Nick believed that if he excelled at schoolwork, his father would take more notice of him, so he drove himself very hard indeed. His father was not impressed. When Nick began to realize that he had worked so hard in a thankless cause, he became very angry. Exploring his anger led him to the discovery that he himself felt good about his achievements. He began to feel less dependent on his father for approval and validation, and valued himself more. Released from the need to perform for his non-attentive parent, he began to reassess what he wanted to do after graduation. The change was remarkable. He allowed himself to develop more naturally rather than forcing himself into a prearranged pattern. He became interested in the retail foods business as a result of a part-time job, and is currently rising rapidly in the management of a nationally known retail chain. More to the point, he is very happy in what he has chosen to do. I don't claim that my class is responsible. What I do claim is that he was able to use the tools my class was able to provide to create a better future than the one he had originally mapped out, and that he continues to use those tools. This time it was his choice to form his future, rather than reacting to an old psychic wound.

What does this mean? It is my opinion that college students arrive on our campuses often deeply confused about who they are, where they have been, and where

they might like to go. This is not to say that these students are any less able than any of the previous generations. They may be, or they may not be. More to the point is that until comparatively recently in history society was stable enough to give students an identity and a destiny. In many cultures they even wore uniforms so everyone knew exactly what they were. Sounds outlandish? Try Oxford University until 1970 where students were expected to wear black academic gowns to classes. The identity was reinforced by clothing and ritual as much as by residence in ancient college buildings. Today, in many colleges in the United States, it is very difficult to identify faculty and students since students can be of any age, and increasingly are. What this amounts to is that the new student has little in terms of identifiable 'identity' to cling to just at the time when he or she is likely to be away from home for the first time. Again, as an example of how quickly our society changes, the business management student who arrived on campus in 1975 wanting to graduate, get a good job with a corporation and make a lot of money was likely to be able to do that. In 1995 any student saying this would be regarded as sadly out of touch with reality. More and more often students are left to forge their own identity in circumstances that are less and less reassuring.

With so many variables, it is not surprising that some students are carrying emotional baggage that they may not even be fully aware of. The dominant culture in the United States is not so dominant or pervasive as to be able to tell us where we fit in any more. Since the task of learning involves knowing who we are so we can develop, shed our old identities and become something better, if our students have only a confused notion of who they might be the first steps are very tentative indeed. Teaching content-heavy courses in these cases is a dangerous task. It is like equipping a man with a bicycle but not giving him time to learn how to ride it. Given the time to learn, he could turn out to be a champion. Fail to do so and we have only a person whose normal walking speed has been reduced by the necessity of pushing a bicycle. Is that learning disabled or disabled by faulty learning experiences?

Here we come back to metacognition. What I have been at pains to describe here is that students everywhere need not only to think about how they think, but also to reflect on how and what they feel, since that is going to have an effect on their thinking. If the process of education is to help individuals achieve personal growth so that they can use what they know at the most effective level, we cannot ignore the fact we need to nurture the sometimes-confused students we have before us.

It is never easy to sum up a free-ranging discussion such as this, and I am well aware that there are no easy answers. My task has been to attempt to raise questions that can usefully be addressed. Signing up for my course is not the answer, certainly, and I always tell my students that if they need therapy they should not hesitate to get it. What we do is not a substitute for therapy. Naturally, not everyone needs it, either, but we all could use a little guidance now and then. What I have been trying to point out is that we might like to consider the idea of learning disabilities in a different way. First and foremost there is the diagnosable learning disability which can be described as an imperfect assimilation or processing of material, or difficulty in expressing it. Second, there is the emotional damage that can come from the consciousness of such a deficit. To these two groups I would add two more. The third group is made up of those individuals who arrive on campus damaged by social or personal mishap - the abused child, the depressed mother, for example. This can have secondary effects in self-destructive behavior such as drug or alcohol abuse. The fourth group, and the most difficult to define, is made up of those who cannot find an adequate way in which to confirm their self worth, who don't believe they have much worth saying. Both of these last two groups have disabilities that, if not dealt with, can seriously impede learning, which is why I feel it appropriate to call them disabled learners. Both of them, in addition, are made up of people who can be some of the most inventive and exciting thinkers I know of if they can get to the other side of their deficits.

I believe that it should be the task of education in the future to address all these groups of students directly, to help them to develop the necessary dialogue with themselves so that they can use what they learn and learn more effectively.

Soul Talk

Michelle A. Gabow, *M.A.*, Playwright

This "slice of PAL life" demonstrates the importance of our reflections as practioners on the underlying meanings and academic therapy which are present within our learning conversations with our students. The author illustrates how, in learning conversations, students communicate their needs to us without our request for an itemized list. She pays credence to the ability present within each student and teacher to dig yet deeper into the learning and teaching processes, finding personalized ways to communicate soulful learning.

Yesterday, I received a phone call from one of my favorite students who had recently transferred to another university. Who knows why exactly she had become so special to me? Maybe it was because she reminded me of a nineties version of myself, a nineties hippie - longhaired, nose-ringed, attracted to other cultures and differences, not quite fitting into this environment, and intensely soul searching. Randy is a bright student and very dyslexic. After spending two years at Curry and making honor role each year, Randy made a difficult decision to leave. There were long conversations regarding her dreams, her belief system, what kind of people and work she was attracted to, her difficulty here in a particular relationship, and her own distinct internal development. Making a change towards a school that was more involved in community social work and art was a hard and arduous choice. Curry had become safe; she was respected and beginning to finally appreciate herself. While applying to schools, Randy regularly changed her mind but not enough to stop or defeat her. Her fear just accompanied her on a regular basis.

Randy is presently enrolled in a progressive school of social work in New York City. At this school, she also receives mentoring but in a program geared towards working on her learning disability, trying to remediate her weaknesses rather than

concentrating on her strengths. Nevertheless, Randy is aware that her mentor is well qualified, kind and sincere. When I asked her how things were going with her mentor, she replied, "It's just not the same." She continued," She's really good. She gives me strategies, she helps with the grammar...I never saw so many red marks but..." She paused.

"But...," I continued.

"We never get underneath the work. We don't argue. We don't talk about what and why I'm writing. We don't explore the inside. I miss those conversations."

Those conversations... A flood of memories came to mind. Laughter, tears, long walks, arguments. Conversations which left me spiritually lifted. Daydreaming together. Talking about the drug addiction of her friend and lover. Examining our own racism. Feeling out our differences. Understanding community. Exploring a dream. Long discussions of her sociology class and women in prison. Her wide smile for, what she said, was no reason at all. Her performances as she read essays out loud. Staring at her photographs. Discussing one picture long past our allotted individual hour together.

The Power of Dialogue

"Conversations are the sex act of the soul." (Moore, 1994, p.124) The author reflects on this image throughout his book Soul Mates. The image revolves around reflection, embracing the dark and light of ourselves, and care of the soul. Caring of the soul, not curing, is what learning conversations are all about. "It must first of all be said that a learning conversation is not idle chatter, nor is it an exchange of prescriptions, instructions or injunctions. Instead, it is a dialogue on the process of learning" (Candy, Harri-Augstein & Thomas, 1985, p.103). This reflective process, this intense searching without a cure, is the essence and power of mentoring. Change comes from the power of examining, revealing our own images, embracing them and challenging patterns that no longer work for us. The power of dialogue allows us to both embrace our inner strength and shed a constricting skin. Too often in our teaching, in our psychology, in our politics,

we look for the cure, the easy answer - a learning strategy, Prozac, taking women off welfare. Learning differently is a powerful tool of exploration - painful, exciting, brilliant. The quality of dialogue opens the door to a student's abyss and her treasure.

In all honesty, my attraction to conversation and dialogue is not new. I have been a practicing playwright for over fifteen years. I have throughout my life been drawn to the mystery of language and the power of thoughtful conversation. My development as a writer took an interesting and odd turn in its very early stages. At first, I had particular issues I was concerned about, issues I wanted to explore. Before, I would begin a play; a play was already designed in my brain. All I had to do was follow through. I was pleasantly surprised when my endings seemed to come first. It made the whole process so much more defined. Since I always considered myself, at the very least, an intensely emotional woman, you can imagine my shock and dismay when my early plays seemed unusually flat and yes, even trite. What was I doing wrong?

Then one day, in the middle of a wonderfully sensuous bath, a street woman that I had become close to started to speak through me. After the bath, I began to talk into my tape recorder and before I knew it, other characters were dodging, darting and competing for their say. Ten in all. And so began my first alive piece of theater. Sometimes I hear voices. Sometimes I'll begin with a line I've heard on the train. Sometimes I'll open up a murder mystery to any page and stick my index finger on one line. Some plays have begun by a conversation in the street, the loss of a journal, a strange depression I couldn't kick. I rarely know what I'm going to write about now or, for that matter, what on earth will inspire me. I've had to develop something new in my writing. And that something is faith. I've had to trust the energy of my own imagination to lead me to truth in the work. I've had to trust that the writing is the work and that bringing the internal dialogue to life is the life.

And yet, I had great difficulty translating that profoundly learned knowledge to the learning process. When I began this job as a P.A.L Instructor, and although I had

many years in the public schools working with "at risk" students with various learning styles, I felt I was a novice. I wanted to know everything. After all I should know the strategies before I knew the students. And there were so many strategies to learn. I kept trying to bend and stretch myself into what I thought the program was and I wasn't. Though frustrated as times, I was working relatively well with my students. I was using some of my strengths and if there was something I couldn't answer, there was the testing (WAIS-R) to be read or a strategy to be tried. Yet, I consistently had this nagging feeling that something was missing.

This flat feeling was familiar but somehow I couldn't connect it to my writing process. During this time, I was also sharing the office with an amazing woman, who became one of my many mentors at PAL. We were beginning a process of getting to know each other, learning about each other. As the year went on, our beginning conversations got longer, deeper, more revealing, more provocative. A sensation of mirroring, intervening at different points, began to develop. We were starting to feel comfortable in out loud reflection, both self-reflection and as a partner in this conversation. A supportive friendship was being cultivated and that support was needed. Because as we began to examine ourselves, our patterns, our lives, we went through periods of depression and a kind of disintegration of old ways (constricting skins), especially in the process of looking at ourselves as teachers, therefore learners. Almost simultaneously or very soon after, we became more expressive about our dreams - artistically and as teachers. Without our even discussing it, steps were being taken towards our individual goals.

Sometimes these conversations were lots of fun and sometimes they were deeply painful. An embarrassing occurrence began to happen during the week. I almost looked forward to students cancellations. Our dialogue had become so rich, that my time with students seemed dull, lifeless in comparison. At the same time, my friendships and camaraderie with other PAL instructors was deepening and opening around the work. I

was, through them, understanding my strengths, my growth, my difficulties, my life style choices, in ways I never imagined were possible. But the culminating moment still had its heart in the dialogue with Jane, my office mate.

I had been working with a student who had transferred several times from many colleges. She was Hispanic and English was her second language. I had liked this student very much. She was very sensitive and aware. Yet, her naiveté about life and social situations always amazed me. Many times, she would come to our individual sessions in tears, a deep well seemed to implode each time she saw me. This particular session seemed no different than the others. We began with our crying session and Kleenex. Suddenly, she began to talk about her family and culture in a deeper and more profound way than I ever heard her express. Our session was already extending into my lunch period. Just as suddenly, she stopped. She pulled out her sociology textbook. Roz had great trouble understanding the main idea. She began to read. As I gobbled my lunch, I noticed Roz was busy highlighting.

She looked at me with a smile on her face and said, "Read this. Did I get the main idea?"

"Yes", I answered, not hiding my element of surprise. I don't remember the exact chapter but I do remember it was something about culture. Roz then proceeded to pack up her book. "I need to talk to my roommate now."

"Good work," I said.

"Yes," she said brightly and unapologetically for the first time. I wasn't sure what the exact connections were for her- the constant problems she was having with her roommate, her difficulty in perceiving the main idea, all the tears. But later, we did talk about trying to fit in, denial of her own culture, and how that affected her learning and friendships. Actually, that conversation took place much later.

I do remember this odd sensation of feeling really full and being entirely aware that it had little to do with my Skippy Chunky Peanut Butter sandwich. As I was drinking

down my coke to wash the thoughts and peanut butter, I heard a voice from across the room.

"Great job!"

My immediate response was of course, "I didn't' really do anything but listen and talk."

Jane laughed, "Oh, how like a woman."

Yes, how like a woman to devalue our power, our intuition and conversation. How like a woman not to trust the full sensation inside. How like a woman not to respect all our training in listening and deep conversation. And now that I begin to understand the nature of mentoring, how like a woman not to respect the feminist theory inherent and integral to our work. We've been told all the answers, all the names from attention deficit disorder to dyslexia, all the strategies, all the testing, but not the essence and breath of a real learning process, the power of dialogue as a power in itself.

The Learning Conversation

The learning conversation is "a form of dialogue about a learning experience in which the learner reflects on some event or activity in the past. Ultimately, it is intended that people will internalize such conversations so that they are able to review the learning experience systematically for themselves, but at the beginning, the learning conversation is carried out with the assistance of a teacher or tutor" (Candy, Harri-Augstein & Thomas, 1985, p.105). The authors reflect more deeply on the learning model conversation in the same chapter. They discuss three necessary ingredients to the learning curve. "First, there is the intervention point, the 'mirroring' or feedback which needs to be specific, behavioral and non-interpretative. Then the trainer has to deal with the emotional context of the learning, building up a supportive relationship which helps the learner through the period of trauma and disintegration of skills. Finally, the teacher or trainer helps the learner to articulate the new dimensions of quality"(Candy, HarriAugstein & Thomas, 1985, p.104).

Education as a Soulful Activity

Yes, but what does this all have to do with the soul. For that matter, what does education have to do with the soul? In a society where PH. D's are being fed intravenously through our veins as a survival tactic and many times what passes for education becomes "a soulless exchange of facts" (Moore, 1994, p.114), how do we keep the mystery, the magnificence of ourselves as learners alive? How do we make conversations about learning a soulful activity? Again, I don't believe I'm talking about easy answers here or even psychological insight. Because once we start looking for the answer and not respecting our own particular questions, we begin to lose soul. "Psychology prefers to analyze with the goal of increased understanding, yet understanding does little for the soul. Imagine telling stories of the dead, not for insight into ourselves, but simply to establish a deep, continuing relationship with them... The point is not to learn from our supposed failures, but to be initiated into soul through them...the soul never learns, but it does metamorphose..." (Moore, 1994, p.202).

Like in playwriting, it is the times when I feel most lost, times when I can't see the forest through the trees, that I am most involved and most inspired. Answers come but never in ways I expect them or imagine them to be. Most recently, I had my truest parallel experience to playwriting in a teacher/student conversation. Valencia, a senior at Curry and an artist. was at her wits end with Curry. She was not feeling connected to the work, was disassociating from friends and her art. As we began to talk, many memories came up. She talked about the role she played in her family, a role she couldn't release herself from. She talked about a particular relationship with a friend and her new boyfriend. She re-remembered her first testing involving her learning disability when her tester blurted out, "You're a dancer of course. That's how you learn, through your body." She complained about being disconnected from her art. Already, you are probably beginning to get the picture. We were all over the place. Occasionally, I could make a connection for her or ask her a question that could draw her underneath her words. Much

of the conversation, I could not. For quite honestly, I did not understand her connections. Mostly, what I ended up doing, was mirroring her experiences with my own as an artist. Towards the end of our learning conversation, I felt two entirely different reactions. The first was, what the hell am I doing at this job. And the second was, a gut feeling again, of complete fullness. The second was so strong, that I just threw my arms around her and hugged her.

Later that week, another student and I were talking. She proceeded to tell me about this amazing experience she had through another artist in her class. The teacher had given them an assignment which involved using form as the piece of art itself. This classmate used her body in a dance that was explosive and revealing. My student felt she took a real risk and found that to be a fulfilling and inspiring experience. The dancer was, of course, Valencia. A spark went through me as I realized that our crazy, all-over-the-place conversation was, if not the initiator, an exploration of a fire that was being smothered. She had found her own answer, her own strategy to making Curry and learning alive.

Carrying On the Conversation . . .

Although this was a particularly dramatic conversation, most aren't. In reality, they are at times grueling. Students have been well taught that after all, teachers have the answer and education comes from someplace outside themselves. Our students, in particular, rarely trust their process, because they have been shown in more ways than one, that they are learning impaired. Yet, all our students have defied the odds by entering college and have survived countless abuses of their self-esteem. Their survival techniques are strong and well developed and that is where we usually begin.

Many times, our learning conversations never take place verbally. In a summer PAL session, I had asked all my students to write a reflective paper on their learning styles. I handed out a printed sheet suggesting several past experiences, learning styles, articles, personality tests, and videos they could choose from. One student, Brad, came to

me totally overwhelmed. The more suggestions I gave him, the more overwhelmed he became. I had already discovered with Brad that his strength was in visualizing whole to part and story telling. So, the more ways I broke it down for him, the more confused he was getting. Finally, I looked at him and said three words. "Darkness to Light" He looked back at me with a brightness I had never noticed before. "Well, I could tell my story as if I was someone coming out of a very thick forest to the light. That is what it's been like here for me at Curry. " I received the best paper I had gotten that summer. He connected all the parts of himself and his learning through the image of the forest. His conversation with himself came out in images and story form, almost perfect in its first draft.

As a playwright, I, too, rarely use outlines. Something sparks an image and I have to trust that it is true. Outlines or where I'm going next unfold from the conversation, the language on paper. So too, this brand new discussion with myself. When asked to write this chapter, I hemmed and hawed. And I don't think it would have ever been written if it weren't for my respect for Jane Adelizzi and Diane Goss, as teachers, as women, as friends and now as editors. After all, I'm not an essayist, I'm a playwright. I didn't have any answers to educating nor did I have incredible strategies. I forgot about faith. The learning conversation came to me, again, through Randy at the last minute. It was an accident of fate, if one believes in accidents. By writing and not knowing where my conversation would lead me, I took a leap. Students, I thought I'd forgotten, sat in front of me with the sole purpose of edging their way back into my life and agitating my memory. I engaged in a discourse that helped me clarify my teaching. The writing was my mirror, constantly reflecting a new truth. I felt engaged, alive, scared and thoroughly amused. Through language, through listening, through a natural inclination toward feminist theory, through a lifetime of practice of in depth conversations, through teaching, through my life as a playwright, I began a kind of wild journey to the essence and life force of dialogue in education.

It is now 7:30 Monday evening as I sit in front of my Mac on top of my newly and brightly painted mustard and black desk. The whole study was a gift to myself, a crazy refuge in the city. And tonight, I gave myself another gift, and that is the gift of time for reflection in a busy, chaotic life. The soul can't survive without it; neither could I as a teacher and writer. So too with learning conversations. They take time, perseverance and trust. I complete my chapter with no new answers, no faddish or even fresh strategies, no easy prescriptions. There is no miracle drug like Prozac or Ritalin that leads us closer to our soul work, and if so I can't even imagine the side effects the drug companies will claim it doesn't have. No, instead, I am left with more questions and a rare yet familiar sense of fullness in my belly.

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Relationship Between Social Deficits and Learning Disabilities in College Students

Kathleen Cassidy Wilmot, M.S., M. Ed.

The following chapter is an overview of social deficits in the learning disabled (LD) population. The author describes students who illustrate this unique phenomenon which impacts the lives of many college students with LD. and explores ways in which the teacher/facilitator may interact and intervene in order to provide opportunities for social learning. Additionally, the author offers a description of a support group in which she facilitates the social development of students with social skill deficits and helps them to cope with the social challenges which they face in both their academic and personal lives on a daily basis.

The Importance of Addressing Social Skill Development

Working with students who have learning disabilities has always been a challenge. Understanding the whole student and determining appropriate methods to address individual needs is a crucial part of teaching. One area that often is not addressed because of institutional/programmatic constraints is helping students improve their social skills. When students reach college age they must be able to interact amongst their peers and in the "real world" in an appropriate manner. After several years of facilitating students in the attainment of academic success, I realized that students who exhibited poor social skills were not adjusting very well to college life and began questioning how well they would perform in the work force. Thus, my quest for knowledge regarding how to address their social skills needs began. What follows is knowledge I gained through review of current research and through working with students who have social skills deficits.

The ability to solve or ameliorate social problems is a crucial component in the successful development of the college student. A review of various studies indicates that many students with learning disabilities experience significant difficulties in social situations. Many students who are learning disabled do not spontaneously demonstrate appropriate social behavior in a variety of environments, especially in groups. For example, when interacting within the context of the classroom, group project and/or social event a student may exhibit embarrassing verbal responses and/or inappropriate physical behavior. A student may discuss inappropriate or irrelevant personal issues or continuously talk out of turn in a classroom. She or he may constantly interrupt a teacher to the point where it becomes annoying to the teacher and to the other members of the class. Students with social problems who are asked to work in a group may have difficulty following through with the group's expectations.

For example, four college age students were assigned to work collaboratively on a project regarding their learning preference based on Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. Sally, one of the members of the group, often exhibited inappropriate social skills. The aspect of intelligence they were expected to discuss was "bodily-kinesthetic" intelligence. The members were engaged in a discussion about how they would present their topic when Sally blurted out, "We like to touch and feel things. We could demonstrate how we like to hug and kiss our boyfriends." The other three members were appalled and mortified that she would even suggest they demonstrate this type of behavior in front of twenty classmates. She was essentially ignored for the rest of the discussion. Sally remained unaware that this would be an inappropriate demonstration.

Like many other students with social skills deficits, Sally needs consistent instruction in which specific social skills and situations can be targeted and identified collaboratively.

More and more colleges are designing special programs to assist learning disabled college students in reaching their true potential. They guide them to metacognitive awareness; an awareness of their thinking and the self-regulatory behavior that accompanies that thinking (Driscoll, M.P., 1994.). However, many of the programs offer little education or information on how students' learning disabilities may affect their interpersonal relationships, social problem-solving abilities, and their abilities to manage relationships and careers.

My colleagues and I at Curry College recognized the importance of social skills on the college level and implemented a pilot social skills group to be led by me in collaboration with Dr. Tom Byrne, the director of our counseling program. During the 1994-95 school year, instructors recommended students who they felt would benefit from a group facilitated in a didactic/psychotherapeutic format. The group addressed social problems in college students with learning disabilities, and focused on how competently they were able to judge social situations and demonstrate appropriate behavior in these situations, and on how well they observed human behavior, especially in their peers.

Relationship Between Learning Disabilities and Social Skill Development

Studies show that students who are classified as learning disabled score lower than their non-handicapped peers on a number of measures of social perception (Sabornie, E.J. & Beard, G.H., 1990). For example, students with learning disabilities may misread facial expressions and body language, and consequently respond to their peers in an inappropriate manner. They may have difficulty determining how near or how

far to position their bodies when conversing with friends. They may exhibit a deficit in attention or information processing, and may also have difficulty understanding inferences in social situations. Some studies report that learning disabled students may exhibit cognitive dysfunctional skills related to social competence (Stone, W. L. & La Greca, A.M., 1990).

Students who exhibit social skills deficits do not possess the appropriate skills required to interact effectively with other people. They often experience "a) low social status among their non-handicapped peers, b) low participation rates in school-related and out-of-school activities, c) dissatisfaction with their social lives, d) fewer friendships than their non-handicapped cohorts, and e) more loneliness and isolation in school than their non-handicapped counterparts" (Sabornie & Beard, 1990).

The Struggle for Appropriateness and Acceptance

Karl, an eighteen-year-old college freshman, was a perfect example of the social struggle which often faces students with learning disabilities. All testing indicated he had a language disability with average to above average intellectual ability and potential. When I first met him, he appeared well dressed, but upon scrutinizing his appearance, I noticed that he was somewhat disheveled. His hair was cut in a stylish manner, but it did not look neat. His navy sweater and khaki trousers were quite clean and pressed, but the collar of the shirt he had on underneath the sweater was neither under the sweater nor over the sweater.

He attended Summer PAL at Curry College, a three-week intensive program designed to prepare students with learning disabilities for their freshman year and to help them become aware of their learning styles. During this time, as

Karl's PAL instructor, I observed his difficulties in the social sphere. The coordinator of PAL and I discussed our concerns about Karl's immature social skills with his mother. We expressed our concerns, recommended he seek counseling, and suggested he commute to Curry rather than be a resident student. Karl's mother agreed to counseling, but felt confident that Karl could handle living in the residence hall and ended any thoughts of his commuting.

Several incidents occurred in which Karl exhibited inappropriate behavior. For example, he was living in a co-ed residence hall, and when he entered the bathroom to shower he did not put a towel around his waist or make any attempt to cover up. Several male residents on the floor explained the necessity to cover up but he was unable to understand why. The residence assistant and residence hall director called a meeting and explained the importance of wearing clothes in the bathroom. Many of his peers felt his behavior was inappropriate and were very worried about him. Karl was unaware of their concerns and believed they were his "best friends".

The excitement he exhibited towards meeting with a counselor was equivalent to what one might expect someone to exhibit if he found out he had just won a new car. He puzzled me. Sometimes he acted like an adult, but for the most part he acted like a little boy. He seemed to be stuck in an earlier stage of development.

As time went on, it became more obvious that because of his inappropriate behaviors and underdeveloped social skills, Karl experienced low social status among his peers, but at first he wasn't ready to deal with this openly. He would talk to me about

being part of social situations like going to the movies or to a party with his friends, but I knew that he was going by himself. I observed that he would often eat his lunch alone in the cafeteria, and in fact seemed to do most things alone. Additionally, I was concerned because he wasn't aware when someone wanted to spend time with him because she/he needed something he could provide, such as money. He saw everyone as being among his best friends, and even when people were exploiting him, he was unable to "see" what was happening.

The Impact of Social Skills Deficits

My concerns for Karl were not only related to his adjustment to college life, but also for his prospects for successful relationships in the future. Childhood social skills and peer acceptance have been related to adjustment outcomes in adulthood (Gresham, 1990; Wiener et al., 1990). Gresham's assessment of the research concluded that children's difficulties with interpersonal relationships are predictive of adult problems, such as antisocial and criminal behavior, dropping out of school, and psychopathology. The relationship among social skills, learning disabilities, and increased socioemotional dysfunction revolves around the hypothesis that individuals who have difficulty learning academic skills may have comparable difficulty learning social skills. Learning disabilities may interfere with the acquisition of social skills (Little, 1993).

Some experts believe that social skill deficits may be the most restricting component of having a learning disability (Smith, 1991). Learning disabilities stay with the individual for life and often have adverse effects on the psychological and social aspects of adult human sexuality (Smith, 1991). Adults with LD often recognize they need assistance for improving interpersonal skills and their mentors also notice this need.

My own experience in working with college age students who have learning disabilities has made me acutely aware that many of these students have social skills deficits and difficulty interacting in an appropriate manner with their peers and adults.

Supporting Students in Developing Social Skills

In my work with these students, I consider it as essential to help them to acquire social skills, as it is to assist them in developing academic skills. I utilize a variety of strategies to do this. In my work with Karl, discussion proved to be a crucial element in our learning sessions. Making Karl aware of how to interact appropriately in various social situations proved to be beneficial. Because he had above average abstract thinking ability, once problem areas were pointed out, he was better able to understand the rationale for acting in a more appropriate way. In his case, role-playing of different situations was also helpful.

As our discussions progressed and his trust in me grew, Karl became more open to dealing with his social issues, sometimes even initiating discourse on the topic. He came into my office one day and said he wanted to discuss what had been happening to him since his arrival at Curry. Some of the things he mentioned were that he knew there had been several meetings about his behavior and that he wanted everyone to know he had been trying very hard to do what was right. He explained that whenever his residence hall supervisor pointed out that he was acting inappropriately, he tried to stop. "If people would just let me know what is appropriate and inappropriate, I would do better," he said. "Please don't make me leave Curry. I love it here. I'll try to be more adult-like."

A Group Approach to Social Skills Development

Some of the issues Karl was having problems with are currently being addressed in the social skills group I facilitate with Dr. Byrne, the director of our college counseling center. In our group, members discuss various types of non-verbal behavior. This includes what image is portrayed to other people through the posture, gait, and body distancing of the group members. We also discuss the importance of facial expression, eye contact, tone of voice and vocal cues. Each nonverbal behavior discussion is followed by Dr. Byrne and I demonstrating appropriate social behavior. We then ask the group members to demonstrate each behavior.

Verbal behavior is also addressed in the weekly social skills meeting. This includes appropriate ways of listening to people, encouraging the other person to talk, asking questions, talking and maintaining conversations. The students are encouraged to practice skills during the session and to be aware of each behavior during the week.

I feel that Karl would have benefited a great deal from this type of group interaction. Unfortunately most of Karl's social skill instruction was done one-on-one. If he had had an opportunity to work in a group with peers, it would have been easier for him to gain positive feedback. The social skills group enables me to assist students in developing adequate social skills in a more natural setting.

Social Competence requires that an individual must discriminate in social situations, interpreting both verbal and nonverbal cues, determining appropriate social behaviors and skills for the situation, and applying these skills and behaviors in effective combinations, constantly adjusting as the situation unfolds and further cues are given. Karl had difficulty with his peers because he was not able to determine when and where

certain behaviors were appropriate and when they were not appropriate. Karl's not understanding the need to cover up after showering in the residence hall is an example of this. He also had difficulty reading verbal and non-verbal cues of peers and adults. For example, he thought his roommate was his best friend when the roommate was actually taking advantage of him, borrowing money and repaying him with a bad check. Structured group activities can give a student like Karl a safe environment in which to practice reading and adjusting to social cues while providing him with respectful feedback on the accuracy of his interpretations as well as on the effectiveness of his responses.

Social Isolation

Interpersonal relationships suffer as a result of inadequate social skills and competencies. Some individuals with learning disabilities report problems involving making and keeping friends, knowing what to say and how to interact appropriately with a variety of individuals, and knowing how to join a group of people in conversation by entering the discussion without interrupting the flow (Smith, 1991). A social skills group can be effective in providing a practice ground for social competence in developing relationships.

A child who has never had friends must be considered at risk for social learning (Rudel, 1998). Many learning-disabled college students have talked to me about the pain of not belonging, of not having a "best friend" or close group of companions during their elementary and high school years. Sometimes the external manifestations of neurological impairments may contribute to a child's social isolation; this isolation, in turn, excludes the child from opportunities for social learning and development, compounding the effect

of the child's neurologically based disabilities. For example, a student may have neurologically-based trouble maintaining an even walking pace with peers and his gait may appear to be somewhat awkward to the casual observer. He or she may bump into things and often look "not put together". Such "differences" may put an individual at risk for not being a preferred participant in peer interactions. In addition, because many children and adults with learning disabilities have difficulty perceiving and responding appropriately to social customs, they often experience social rejection and isolation (Smith, 1991). Social rejection can result from a failure of social learning, poor adaptation to group rules, and, possibly, poor language comprehension (Rudel, 1988).

Mary was a 21-year-old junior. She was very bright and a fairly good student, but a real procrastinator. I first met Mary three years ago when she attended Summer PAL. She was fairly attractive; however, some of the outfits she would put together were bizarre. For example, one day she came to class dressed as if she were going to attend a formal function. Another time she appeared wearing shorts and a tee shirt when it was close to 40 degrees outside. She used an exorbitant amount of hair spray and makeup. Her cheeks were often accented with bright red blush and most of the time it was not blended in very well. Her body posture was quite stiff and rigid. Her gait was awkward and she appeared to lean to the right side. She rarely had eye contact with anyone she spoke to.

Mary also had difficulty modulating her voice. Often she would speak in an inappropriately loud voice and I would have to ask her to lower it. We eventually worked out a hand signal, in which I would lower my hand. Whenever I did this, it indicated to her that she was speaking too loudly; she would then lower her voice.

Mary had a few acquaintances which were not really friendships, and for the most part was a loner. One of my goals was to get her more involved with social activities and events on campus.

Mary was a better student than Karl and her peers would seek her assistance. However, her peers would play practical jokes on her, eventually forcing her to learn to become more assertive and self-protective. Unlike Karl, her peers did not exploit her for her money, but chose instead to have her be their scapegoat and the butt of their jokes. The social rejection forced her into isolation. I did my best to get her involved in informal social situations, but she chose to engage herself only in committee work which enabled her to make a few new acquaintances

Perhaps if Mary had been a member of my current social skills group, she would have been given an opportunity to practice her concerns with posture and gait. At each session we practiced walking in a smooth motion and using good posture. In the group, she would have become more aware of her lack of eye contact and she would have learned how to modulate her voice by practicing in a group using more natural conversation. The group members tend to tell one another when they are not communicating or interacting appropriately. In the group, Mary would have role played situations she had experienced difficulty with, gaining confidence to be more assertive and becoming better able to interact more appropriately with peers.

The student with a learning disability often has difficulty following rules of social behavior. An individual who has sequencing problems may have difficulty determining what to do first, second, and third. Therefore, meeting new people becomes a major challenge (Smith, 1991). Short-term memory problems may impede an individual's ability to follow the topic of conversation, causing the person to speak about irrelevant

topics (Smith, 1991). A student with auditory dyslexia may have difficulty in following and understanding conversation, consequently causing his/her peers to be angered by responding to questions inaccurately (Neault, 1987; Smith, 1991). All of these difficulties can contribute to the person's becoming socially isolated.

In general, students with learning disabilities appear less likely to be popular than those without learning disabilities. One hypothesis which seeks to explain this phenomenon is that students with learning disabilities, and particularly children with nonverbal learning disabilities, have difficulty processing social cues. Karl and Mary both had strengths in verbal abstract reasoning and common sense reasoning which might suggest that they would understand and know what is appropriate in terms of social behavior. However, Karl had deficits in short term memory and both had deficits in visual sequencing and organizing. Their inability to sequence behavior and read nonverbal cues most definitely affected their ability to interact with their peers and form satisfactory relationships.

Research on the social perception of individuals with learning disabilities reveals that students diagnosed with learning disabilities score lower than their non-handicapped peers on a number of measures of social perception (Axelrod, 1982; Bryan, 1977; Jackson, 1987; Wiig & Harris, 1974; Reiff & Gerber, 1990). Larson and Gerber found that students with learning disabilities may also have problems discriminating the response requirements in social situations (cited in Reiff & Gerber, 1990). It is believed by some researchers (Meyers & Lytle, 1986; Shure & Spivack, 1978) that cognitive skills lie at the basis of interpersonal problem solving, understanding feelings, and forming perceptions of other people (cited in Reiff & Gerber, 1990).

Some individuals with learning disabilities have difficulty reacting appropriately to other people and interpreting others' reactions to them because of their poor social perceptual skills (Smith, 1991). Perceptual skills refer to the awareness of one's environment through sensory stimulation. Students who have faulty perception may have difficulty with social learning. Wood's (1983) human sexuality survey of youths and adults with learning disabilities showed that they often have problems interpreting gestures and facial expressions, comprehending the meaning of the tone of voice, and making and maintaining friendships (cited in Smith, 1991).

Learning disabled individuals' deficits in social perception may inhibit them from making central inferences in social settings because they are unable to attend to and interpret relevant cues (Gerber & Harris; 1990). A student's ability to interpret cues will assist him or her in determining purpose, attitudes, relationships, roles, and guide him or her in acting on the situation. Individuals need these skills for social situations as well as for many other cognitive tasks. Individuals must be able to "read expressions, find meaning through subtle cues, and be able to react to these subtleties appropriately" (Adelizzi, 1994). Because Karl and Mary had difficulty reading and interpreting verbal and nonverbal cues they often responded to peers inappropriately. Failure to understand the cues through which others communicate complex emotions compounds the student's isolation. He or she may react inappropriately to another's expression of sadness, anger, or affection because he has misread the cues. The inappropriate reaction may result in the other person becoming frustrated or withdrawing and avoiding further interaction. The learning disabled student may be at a loss as to why the relationship has deteriorated.

Many adolescents with social skills deficits "drag" all their symptoms with them to late adolescence and beyond. Students with learning disabilities may have a limited social life if they have difficulty reading social situations. Lack of friends, being used as a scapegoat, and being rejected for acting inappropriately in a classroom or social situation may cause students much emotional pain and anguish. I have found that working with students on social skills in a small group can greatly benefit the student who has deficits in this area. Although the group is not a truly natural environment, it allows the student to share with others who have similar concerns and to role-play social situations in a non-threatening manner. Recently, one member feared a meeting with an authority figure regarding her living situation. The group role-played the situation and then we evaluated it. She did a beautiful job! She maintained good eye contact, she concentrated on her body posture, and her tone of voice was appropriate. She left the session with confidence! She knew that she could handle herself in the upcoming meeting. I strongly believe that if more students participate in social skill groups of this nature, they will develop greater abilities in perceiving social situations, and will learn how to interact more appropriately in them.

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Community Service: An Opportunity for Students With Learning Disabilities to Identify Strengths and Develop Competencies

Diane Goss, Ed. D.

In this chapter, the author writes about her experience and observations as advisor to a campus-based student volunteer organization. She reveals, through specific examples, the particular benefits which students with learning disabilities derive from community service experiences: enhanced self-esteem, improved social skills, chances to develop leadership and communication abilities, and acquisition of practical coping strategies

A loud wail erupted from the kitchen of the cramped community center, but before I could turn around to see its source, it had stopped as abruptly as it had started. Looking around the door, I saw that five-year-old LaShawn was now snuggled safely in Adam's arms and contentedly licking chocolate frosting from a big wooden spoon. "You can help us get the spoon clean!" Adam was saying, as the last of LaShawn's tears crept down his pudgy cheeks leaving two long streaks against his bronze skin. At the counter, in the midst of a jumble of sticky bowls and utensils, Shawna was directing Marisa and Kisha as the ten year-olds took turns spreading a gooey mixture over fresh-baked cupcakes. Recognizing that any intervention from me was unnecessary, I continued my visit, stopping to admire the cartoons Jesse and his "gang of five" were drawing. Jesse had been able to engage the group of sometimes-difficult twelve year olds by showing them his imaginative drawings of serpents, robotic warriors, and fantastic kingdoms. For weeks now, they had been leaving the mischief that usually occupied their time on the narrow streets of the housing project, to meet him every Wednesday and create their own magical creatures. Squelching any misgivings I might have about the violent themes portrayed by action heroes like Firedor and his magic bull, I concentrated instead on Jesse’s talent in getting the kids to create such imaginative beings and made a mental

note to brainstorm with Jesse to see if he could think of a way to engage the children in creating posters or comic books in which their action heroes could send a more positive message. It would require a delicate balance and I would defer to Jesse's opinion, because after all it was he who had gotten the boys to get involved in the first place-something I probably couldn't have done!

I climbed over a pile of dominoes on the floor and headed upstairs. Kim waved me by as she checked the schedule and reached for the phone to call a replacement for a volunteer who had just called in sick. A senior and an education major, Kim was in charge of the overall administration of the after-school program, located in five small rooms of a converted apartment at the public housing development. Today she looked a little harried, and I remembered that she had a ten-page paper due the next day. It would probably be a long night, but she was here for the afternoon as she had promised to be. Upstairs, I checked into the library, an eight by ten foot cubby, not much bigger than a closet, lined with shelves containing an odd mixture of donated books and a few battered chairs. Autumn sat with one first-grader on her lap and four others sprawled at her feet, reading from a tattered copy of The *Placed You'll Go* by Dr. Seuss as the kids watched wide-eyed, occasionally interrupting with giggles. At one end of the big room next door, four kids worked on the Macintosh Classics we had gotten from the college when the computer lab was upgraded. Another volunteer, Matt, moved from one to the other giving assistance and stopping to admire the birthday card Blanca was designing on the Printshop program. In the adjoining room, Vicki conducted a movement class and the children twisted, huddled, shook their arms and legs, and spun in circles as she shouted, " Act like the wind! Now show me how rain falls. What does sunshine feel like?"

From below, Shawna yelled, "Snack time!" and the kids scrambled toward the stairs and the scent of the warm cupcakes. As I looked around the big table downstairs, I was struck by the fact that though the volunteers were male and female, of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, bringing a variety of talents, there was something they all had in

common: they were all feeling good about themselves and what they were doing that afternoon. And, one other thing: they all had learning disabilities.

When I first got the idea of starting a community service program at Curry, I thought mainly about the service our students would provide to others. I don't know why it wasn't more in the forefront of my awareness from the beginning, but the reciprocal benefits which our learning disabled students would receive from their involvement was not something I put much emphasis on initially. I knew, of course, that the volunteers would learn many important lessons and gain valuable skills. And certainly, one of my goals was to raise the consciousness of our students- to help them to become aware on a personal level of the social issues they were examining theoretically in their coursework. However, the opportunity for learning was not the main reason I started Project Share. Basically I saw it as a way to help others and so did the small group of students who were the first members. I think we all greatly underestimated the impact it would have on the volunteers themselves- an impact far greater than that enjoyed by the so-called "recipients" of our labors.

Because I am a faculty member in the Program for Advancement in Learning, our support program for students with learning disabilities, I turned first to those students although the organization would be open to all Curry College students, faculty, and staff. I mentioned the idea to each of my seven first year students, with whom I worked quite intensively, inviting them to my house for a meal and discussion of the idea. All of them responded positively. My friend and colleague, Sally Snowman, also a PAL instructor volunteered to be co-advisor to the proposed group and arrived toting her computer to take notes during our first meeting. As we sat around my dining room table that first night, I saw immediately a new energy among the group. On this night, the students were not coming to me to receive help, but to give help. We were not dealing with their latest problem or crisis, the looming research paper or the difficult roommate. Tonight, *they* had

something to give. It showed in their enthusiasm and camaraderie as well as in the spontaneity with which they expressed their ideas and suggestions.

Though few of them had had experience in community service, they were more confident in anticipation of this new arena than they were in the academic arena where they had experienced so much frustration and failure. Without articulating it, they seemed to be doing something we often struggled to have them do in our PAL sessions: identify their strengths. A young man whose family operated an international business conglomerate immediately began thinking about fund-raising to finance our venture. A popular young woman who had a wide network of friends suggested ideas for recruiting members. An artist volunteered to make posters and place them around the campus. Another student whose troubled family history had necessitated his learning to negotiate the social service system, was well acquainted with a variety of social service agencies in the area was able to contribute valuable information about possible sites at which we might volunteer our services. I noticed right away that our collaboration seemed to diminish the power differential which exists between teacher and student in the academic setting no matter how much we try to establish a sense of our being partners in learning and try to diminish the student's feelings of inadequacy. In planning our undertaking, a new venture for me as well as for them, my students were relating to me as equals, an important step in getting them to feel empowered and to take responsibility for themselves as learners, and in getting them to let go of deeply ingrained patterns of learned helplessness and dependency upon their helpers and care-givers.

In spite of our enthusiasm, it was not an easy path from initiation of the idea of creating a community service organization on campus to its fulfillment today as an active student organization which serves meals at soup kitchens, conducts clothing and toiletries drives for homeless people living in shelters, runs an after-school tutoring and recreation program in a public housing development, hosts social events for senior citizens, visits children in hospitals, and mentors urban adolescents. Our first meeting was far from an

organized, structured planning session. It was characterized by a lot of leaping from idea to idea, difficulty staying on task, struggles to communicate with each other, some "pie in the sky" suggestions, and plenty of confusion- behaviors not uncommon among students who have learning disabilities (nor among those who don't). The subsequent planning and implementation of the volunteer organization was also, as might be expected, not without pitfalls and problems either. Overwhelmingly though, the positives greatly outdistanced the negatives.

Damage to Self-Esteem

Most practitioners who have worked with students who have learning disabilities are acutely aware of the many assaults to self-esteem suffered by these students throughout their school years. Research on whether learning disabled students have more negative self-concepts and lower levels of self esteem than students without diagnosed learning disabilities has been somewhat confusing and at times contradictory with some studies finding differences between the two groups and others failing to find evidence of such effects (Rourke and Fuerst, 1991). Rourke and Fuerst attribute the discrepancies in research results to differences in definition, variations in methodology, and especially to the fact that the group of students labeled as "learning disabled" is not a homogeneous group. Like other groups of people, students with learning disabilities do not lend themselves to an oversimplified, stereotypical model which seeks to focus on their similarities and ignores their variations.

Students who have learning disabilities, like those who don't have them, have had life experiences which both contribute to and detract from the formation of a positive self image and sense of personal competence. I think, however, it is safe to say that having a learning disability is definitely a risk factor in developing low self esteem and research in the field has borne this out (Rosenthal, 1992; Ayers, Cooley and Dunn, 1990; Smith, 1986; Prout, Marcal & Marcal, 1992; Szivos, 1993).

In my own experience, the vast majority of learning disabled students with whom I have worked have, at one time or another, expressed the pain they experienced (and often still experience) whenever they confronted the realization that they were not as competent as their peers in one or more of the everyday tasks that make up the school day: reading, writing, solving arithmetic problems, expressing their ideas verbally, understanding and remembering oral instruction, organizing academic tasks, etc. Their problems often spilled over into other areas of their lives as well- family, friendships and intimate relationships, out of school activities, and work. Even if their difficulties were met with support and understanding by teachers, parents, peers, and employers, the students were painfully aware of their differences. If the effects of their learning problems were compounded by rejection of insensitive, critical, and accusatory responses from significant others around them, the negative impact was even greater. For a student with a learning disability, as for any person who has had experiences which made him or her feel less competent, less valued, less worthy of respect, less able (consider the meaning of the label they have carried through school!), opportunities for demonstrating competence, to self and to others, are an important part of feeling good about oneself.

Discovering Competence: Repairing Damage to Self-Esteem

Rudel asserts that “the most highly acclaimed remedial program will be a certain failure if the child believes that he or she cannot learn, no matter what. Thus, the clinician must ensure that the learning program includes elements that bolster the child’s self- esteem and emphasize his or her abilities while also working to remediate and/or compensate for the disability.” It's not enough to merely tell students with learning disabilities that they are worthwhile, competent, or capable- especially when they are faced every day with experiential evidence, in a domain that makes up a significant part of their life, that makes them feel that they are not. Failures often loom larger in a person's perception than successes and it's hard for learning disabled students to remember their creativity, athletic grace, artistic ability, mechanical skill, talent in problem solving and abstract reasoning,

or other personal strength when struggling with a task which seems insurmountable to them, but which most of their peers have easily mastered.

Dr. Robert Brooks (1991), a psychologist who has done extensive work in developing self-esteem in students with learning disabilities, writes about the importance of helping students to find the "islands of competence" which exist, but are too often unrecognized, in the ocean of inadequacies in which they feel they are drowning. He has found, as I have, that involving these students in community service is one of the most effective strategies we have for allowing them to learn to relate better with others, to identify their strengths, and to form positive self-identities. I've witnessed over and over, and heard my students themselves express, the powerful effects of community service opportunities on them. Here, I will recount only two stories out of the many I could share.

Mark: Breaking Out of the Shell

Mark is a tall and handsome young man whose soulful brown eyes reflect his sensitivity and vulnerability. He was fortunate to have very aware and loving parents. His mother, a college professor, and father, a therapist, gave him positive feedback and support, and tried their best to foster his growth and independence throughout his school years as he tried to overcome his deficits in perceptual organization. But even loving parents could not shield Mark from feeling the anxiety, inadequacy, and social isolation engendered, at least in part, by his learning disability. During the first few months of his freshman year, I worried about Mark a lot. I was constantly aware of the pain and tension which was evident in his rigid posture, rapid staccato speech patterns, and hesitant demeanor. While holding his own in the classroom by building on his strength in abstract reasoning, diligently putting in long hours studying in the PAL library, and scrupulously utilizing every strategy I suggested, Mark was not gaining ease and confidence in the college environment. He seemed tense, uncomfortable, unhappy. I was afraid it was too much for him and he would break. Socially, Mark wasn't establishing close relationships which could support and comfort him. He was shy and vulnerable and seemed to need to

protect himself in his interactions with others. He avoided situations like campus socials and preferred eating in his room to joining other students in the cafeteria. His perceptual difficulties made the informal, often random, somewhat disorganized college social scene difficult for him to negotiate. Though for some of my students, social interactions were a way of relieving strain, for Mark they were another source of stress- one that he avoided whenever possible. His avoidance and inability to initiate interaction resulted in his being largely ignored by his peers, a situation he later told me he had gotten used to in elementary school when he was always the last one chosen for playground games and was often forgotten when classmates sent out invitations to birthday parties.

I recognized this pattern as one I had seen before in some of my students with learning disabilities, though certainly not in all of them. I also knew that social isolation could be overcome with support, nurturance, and positive opportunities for peer interaction. Rourke and Fuerst (1991) note that while some studies (Scranton and Ryckman, 1979; Bryan, 1976; Bryan and Bryan, 1978) suggest that learning disabled students generally have lower social status than those without diagnosed learning problems, Stephens, Wiener, and Harris (1988) found that differences in social status are related to the degree of integration of the student into the regular classroom. Gains in social status result from greater integration of the student into the mainstream. Lower social status may not be a direct result of the learning disability, but may be more related to the separation from peers that often occurs as school systems attempt to meet the needs of the student for specialized services.

As Mark was a very likable person, sensitive to others and caring, I thought that he would be able to form ties with other students if only he had the opportunity to do so in a relatively non-threatening environment where he would dare to take the risk. Though I tried to encourage him, he wouldn't open up and talk freely with me about how he was really feeling. I think it was important for him to project to me the image that he was

O.K. and revealing his isolation would feel like an admission of failure to him which his fragile ego could not yet allow.

After his first semester, Mark told his parents that he didn't want to live on campus anymore and preferred to commute the sixty miles each way to and from school. While they (and I) encouraged and advised him to stay on campus, Mark was steadfast in his decision to return home and did so at the end of the first semester. None of us wanted to push him too far because we could see only too well his vulnerability and knew this was a decision he had the right to make for himself, regardless of what we might think was best for him. Although Mark had done well in his classes, I ended the semester with a sense of failure when I realized I hadn't been able to reach him on matters that were really more important than a high grade point average.

To help him get involved on campus in spite of his new status as a commuter, I suggested that he come to a Project Share meeting. I remember he was late for that first meeting because he had driven home to Rhode Island after class that afternoon and had to drive back to Curry for the evening meeting. Difficulties estimating time, rush hour traffic and anxiety at undertaking this new venture resulted in his arriving flustered and somewhat embarrassed. The other students greeted him in an accepting, if not familiar, way. Though some knew him from our group learning skills sessions or other classes, they hadn't formed a friendship with him as a few among them already had with each other. They were a welcoming group, however, and an easier group to bond with than many others he had no doubt encountered at school and elsewhere. He made a valiant effort to overcome his shyness and, as the evening went on, even made a few attempts to initiate conversation with those sitting near him. In that relatively safe environment, an informal but somewhat structured social gathering, among peers who had gone through their own struggles and tacitly accepted his, Mark began the slow journey out of his isolation.

Project Share meetings and activities during that spring semester gave Mark the chance to interact socially, be recognized, and feel accepted. Since there was a larger agenda and a shared point of reference, the social demands of being part of this group were not as threatening as the more open-ended challenge of joining a table in the cafeteria or making conversation at a student social. He was always willing to lend a hand and was soon recognized by the others as someone they could count on. His sense of responsibility contributed to his gaining a certain status in the group; committee leaders would seek him out to work on projects with them. He was being chosen!

At the beginning of his sophomore year, Mark took a big risk, and a big step forward in believing in himself, and volunteered to be coordinator of the committee which served meals at a local shelter for homeless men and women. It was a challenge for him, but one which by that time he was willing to undertake. Mark was responsible for recruiting a group of eight or nine student volunteers each month to serve a meal at the Long Island Shelter in Boston Harbor, arranging transportation, and being sure that we had donations of four hundred desserts for the shelter guests. The task sometimes demanded organization, assertiveness and communication skills which Mark was still in the process of developing. There was the occasion when seven volunteers had to squeeze into Mark's old Camaro, balancing brownies and pudding on every available surface, because he hadn't asked another student to help with the driving. And there was the time when he showed up late at the shelter, distraught, and without the four hundred ice cream cups the Hood factory had promised to donate because he had underestimated the time it would take him to get to the other side of Boston to pick up the ice cream, had got caught in traffic on the Tobin Bridge, and had gotten to the factory after it had closed. Although painful at the time, each of these occasions eventually became a learning opportunity for Mark.

Mark persisted in spite of his frustrations (and mine!) and the demands his role as coordinator placed on him. In the two years in which he was in charge of that committee,

he became more assertive, more organized, and more able to delegate responsibility, more able to take the risk of asking his peers for help and demanding that they fulfill their end of the bargain. Sometimes I had to make him role play the phone calls he needed to make and actually place the receiver in his hand to get him to go ahead. On my part, it took a mixture of firmness and understanding. I'm sure sometimes he felt caught "between a rock and a hard place" as he had to either take on the difficult task of making calls recruiting volunteers and soliciting donations or face my disapproval when the tasks weren't completed. We had many long dialogues when things didn't go well about the reasons why. The tasks for which Mark was responsible gave us a concrete experience on which we could reflect metacognitively. Mark's natural reticence and tendency to avoid uncomfortable discussions couldn't hide the obvious when only two volunteers showed up to serve four hundred hungry shelter guests! The tasks also gave Mark specific behavioral objectives which were much more measurable than generalized goals like trying to "become more assertive" or "improve communication skills." They gave me the chance to ask Mark specific questions about the concrete situation, to encourage him to reflect on what had occurred, and to draw from him conclusions and insights which could be transferred to new situations.

As time went on, Mark became more sure of himself and proud of what he had accomplished. His latent sense of humor became more evident and he became able to tease his peers as well as to laugh at himself. The Long Island Shelter volunteer group had become a community- going out for Chinese food or pizza after events or during planning meetings, giving him friends and supporters with whom he felt comfortable. A tentative romance flourished for a time between him and one of the other members. At the beginning of his senior year, Mark was elected president of Project Share, something I certainly wouldn't have predicted when looking at the scared freshman he had been three years before. Again, he surprised me when he greatly surpassed my expectations as he stood before the first general meeting of the group which by then numbered fifty or

sixty members, his voice strong, his eye contact direct, and his manner confident. Today, after completing his master's degree, Mark works as a recreation therapist in a large rehabilitation center. His own struggles to meet and overcome challenges have prepared him for this work and help him to do it kindly, as well as effectively.

Corie: Coming Into Her Own

Corie was another Project Share member whose involvement in community service had a tremendous impact on her growth and development as well as on her future career. Corie was bright, capable, and exceptionally motivated; she was also severely dyslexic, frequently frustrated, and angry. Her elementary and high school years were marked by struggle. She repeated two grades in elementary school, spent most of her high school years shuttling between the mainstream classroom where she expended most of her energy trying to hide her deficiencies in reading and writing from both her teachers and her peers, her resource room where she labored for long hours over workbooks and handouts trying to acquire skills that didn't seem to transfer into her classroom work, and the private tutors her parents had hired to help her in the subjects in which she was currently having the most difficulty. She was advised not to go to college by well-meaning but mistaken teachers and guidance counselors, ignored their advice, and arrived at the PAL program suitably armored and ready for more battles. Even her parents didn't have much hope that she would succeed.

Corie knew it would be difficult, but was not going to give up without having tried. Although she had experienced much classroom failure and although most of those around her underestimated her abilities, she was quite resilient and remained fiercely determined to push herself as far as she could go. Ironically, more than anything else, in spite of all the painful hours she had spent there, Corie wanted to be a classroom teacher. She told me later that she had known this from the first time she set foot in a classroom and, though she had not dared to breathe a word of this hope through the many years of frustration and failure, she had never given it up.

During her first semester, Corie enrolled in a freshman seminar class designed to assist students in mastering the academic, social, and emotional tasks necessary for successful adjustment to college. One of the assignments required the students to work together in small groups to select, plan, and implement a community service project. Since I happened to be teaching the course that semester, I had the chance to observe and get to know Corie although I was not her mentor in the LD support program. I noticed that Corie, while relatively quiet during whole class discussions, and sometimes even sullenly hostile, was much more comfortable and talkative in her small group. Her common sense, tenacity, and excellent problem solving skills were obvious as she made suggestions for a sock drive for shelter residents and helped her group to figure out and assign the various tasks which needed to be done. As the semester went on, and other groups were floundering in implementing their projects, Corie's group flourished. Posters were displayed everywhere on campus, faculty and staff were sent letters requesting donations, local businesses were approached and gave surplus merchandise. Throughout the process, Corie was the one who held her group together, made sure assigned tasks were completed, and was largely responsible for the successful culmination of the project, a pizza and wrapping party in which eight hundred pairs of new, warm socks were packaged in bright holiday paper. Corie, normally rather self-contained, was dashing around the room in a flurry of ribbons, distributing tape and scissors, serving pizza, laughing and radiant with success.

Of course, I asked her if she would join Project Share, and after her positive experience in the Freshman Seminar she responded enthusiastically. Over the next few years, Corie got involved in almost every Project Share committee. She worked with senior citizens, homeless adults, and urban children. It was Corie who had started the after school program at the housing project, working with the residents to plan and implement the programs, spending countless hours at the center, and supervising the other volunteers. Her competence often astounded me as she skillfully managed

demanding tasks, executing them with the same efficiency and skill with which she had attacked that first sock drive in Freshman Seminar. As with Mark, I watched her confidence and self-esteem grow and wondered if she were as aware of it as I was.

Sometimes the road was bumpy and her new self-confidence was threatened. On one occasion, two of the volunteers got into an argument which escalated into a loud shouting match. Corie sternly demanded that they take their problem outside the building because she was justifiably worried about the children observing the unsettling interaction. Outside, the two young men became even louder, causing residents of the development to open windows and yell at them. Frustrated and overwhelmed, Corie over-reacted, closing down the center for the rest of the day, sending the children and other volunteers home, ordering the two offenders into her car, and heading back to campus. When one, in anger and frustration, tried to jump out of the car at a red light, it was the last straw for Corie. She burst into tears and arrived in my office a few minutes later, feeling like giving up on the whole enterprise, convinced she didn't have the skills to handle the responsibilities. Reminding her that she was shouldering a tremendous responsibility in her role and assuring her that all of us come up against those situations where, in spite of our training and expertise, we don't know the best course of action to take, I gradually calmed her. Telling her about the frequent tears I shed during my first year teaching also helped. Bit by bit her confidence was restored as I reminded her of the countless accomplishments she had had in her various Project Share undertakings. One failure wasn't very significant in the light of that. Before she left, she had spontaneously generated several alternative actions she might have taken in the situation and had called each of the two young men, setting up time to talk with them the next day.

Just after graduation, I went out to lunch with Corie to talk about what the community service experience had meant to her. Again, I realized that I had underestimated its powerful impact. Corie said that first of all, community service had been a great way for her to meet people. During elementary and high school, she had had

to spend so much of her time studying and working with tutors outside of class, she hadn't been able to socialize much with her peers. She had also suffered from the stigma so often attached to the children who had to leave the class to go to the resource room for special services and hadn't felt accepted by her classmates. She described her situation simply, but powerfully, "I was used to not interacting and didn't really know how to go about it when I got to college." Her experience is consistent with the finding of Hoyle and Serafica (1988) that students with learning disabilities spend less time interacting with classmates and are less involved in extracurricular activities. Even more eloquently, Corie stated, "I was used to being the lowest person on the totem pole. When I started volunteering, instead of me needing help from others, there were people who needed me. Everyone liked me. Other volunteers turned to me for advice; I guess they thought I knew what I was doing. There was something I could do well. I was needed and it felt great."

Corie went on to describe how important it was to her to have the positive regard of others. "Once I got involved in Project Share, I got comfortable and started getting involved in a lot of other things too- like being an orientation assistant and getting into student government. People knew me. When you do well in one area, people see that you're different. The professors sought me out. Even the president of the college would come up to me around campus or in the cafeteria and tell me what a great job I was doing in Project Share. The way people treated me was totally different. People treated me better. They knew me by name!" As with Mark, the achievement of a higher social status as a result of community service activities played an important role in Corie's feeling good about herself and her college experience.

Corie described her surprise at having emerged as a leader in college. When I asked her why she hadn't exhibited her leadership qualities before college, she hesitated for only a second before replying, "I think it's because no-one ever gave me the chance before. It was always, 'Oh, Corie has all these problems, what can we do for her.' They didn't think about what I could do, only about what I couldn't do. And I thought that way

too. The first time I went down to the after-school program at the housing project, I was afraid to help kids with their homework. I was afraid they'd ask me to spell a word I didn't know. So I brought my Spelling Ace and showed them how I use it to find the correct spelling of words I don't know. After that, it was easy. And when I started doing my teaching practicum, I felt a lot more confident in the classroom because I knew I could handle it the same way. I just never had the chance before to discover all the things I could do. Everyone, including me, was always concentrating on my weaknesses."

Tapping the Benefits of the Community Service Experience

As Corie talked, and as I reflected on the many students with learning disabilities whom I had observed both in the academic setting and outside it in volunteer activities, I was aware that I too sometimes get caught in that trap of over-emphasizing students' needs. I am a worrier and a nurturer. I always want to "take care of my students." Corie reminded me that this emphasis can be harmful to the very students I want to help. It doesn't do any good for me to tell them that they are capable, bright, talented people and then treat them in the majority of my interactions with them as if they are incapable and needy. Of course, I don't do this overtly, but if students spend much of their time with me "getting help" with writing papers, organizing time and materials, or working on other tasks in which they do not feel competent, it's important for me to balance this out and find ways to let them also demonstrate to me their strengths and talents.

Sally Smith, an acknowledged expert in providing support for individuals with learning disabilities, describes the importance of helping these individuals to identify and develop areas of competence. "Adults tell us that a talent or overriding interest does not completely compensate for feelings of failure in academic areas, but it does provide much needed enjoyment and a solid sense of achievement. It can also grow into a career that sidesteps the obstacles presented by the learning disabilities. Parents and teachers, as well as the learning disabled themselves, must actively seek out areas of talent and special

interests. The nurturing of talents and the remediation of learning disabilities must go hand in hand (Smith, 1991, p.56-7).

In recent years, I became aware that I was missing many opportunities for promoting student growth because I wasn't tapping fully into the potential power of the community service experience in my students' lives. As teachers, we often bemoan our students' inability to transfer skills from one academic area to another and, in this case, I see myself also making this mistake. Using metacognitive conversations in their tutoring sessions, I constantly draw out of my students their latent understanding of their strengths as well as their needs, but for a long time I didn't utilize these same kinds of metacognitive strategies in helping them to process their community service experiences. I speak often about the need to attend to a variety of learning styles, recognizing that many of my language-learning disabled students are excellent experiential learners, yet I hadn't recognized fully the value of the experiential learning they had in community service.

During their first semester at PAL, I usually ask my students to take the Kolb (1985) Learning Style Inventory as part of their exploration of themselves as learners. This inventory helps students to identify their preferences for the various steps in the experiential learning cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). We utilize the information gleaned from the inventory at various times during the semester as we engage in metacognitive conversations about the demands of their coursework and the approaches to learning which work well for them. It has only been during the last few years that I've made a more concentrated effort to integrate into these discussions the learning my students are engaged in through their community service experiences. This approach has contributed to their development and competence as learners by giving them insights into the ways in which their learning styles influence their performance outside the classroom as well as by providing them with opportunities to enhance underdeveloped areas and

take a more integrative approach to learning. Guiding students through the various phases of the learning cycle as it applies to their community service activities is also an effective way to engage students in critical reflection and to help them to make progress in this important developmental task of the college years.

Essential Elements

If community service experiences are to be helpful to students with learning differences, certain elements need to be woven into those experiences.

Reflection

One of the most important things I've learned in my dual role as a PAL instructor and as advisor to Project Share is that for maximum impact it's essential to integrate a reflective component as an ongoing element of the service activities, not just as part of a one-shot orientation/training program or culminating activity. It's important to go beyond the nitty gritty discussions of schedules, transportation, and activity planning and get students to talk about what the community service experience means to them and what they are learning about themselves as well as about others.

Reflection can be facilitated through informal group or one-to-one discussions (some of our most important conversations have been held in the car as we've returned home from a visit to Long Island shelter, Dorchester Youth Alternative School, or the pediatric department at Boston City Hospital). It can also be done in a more formal and more intensive way through a course such as the Fundamentals of Mentoring course I'm currently teaching with my colleague, Roberta Kosberg. In this course, we match the college students with urban middle and high school students as mentors, assign guided journals for reflection, require readings on adolescent development, communication skills, and social issues, and hold weekly class discussions in which students can explore their experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

Explicit reflection on the relationship between the students' learning profiles and their community service experiences can be encouraged by skillful questioning and is

beneficial for students who don't have learning disabilities as well as for those who do since all people have patterns of strengths and weaknesses which they need to understand.

Support

Adequate preparation and ongoing support of the volunteers is essential for success in community service endeavors just as it is for classroom learning. Students with learning disabilities who are taking their first tentative steps into a new role may be particularly vulnerable to the discouragements and disillusionments many volunteers experience. Robert Coles (1993) in his wonderful book, *The Call of Service*, describes feelings of despair, helplessness, and self-condemnation as being among the hazards of service. When these feelings occur, students need nurturing and support from an advisor who can help them put their experience and reactions into perspective. Without this support, a community service initiative may be perceived by the student as one more failure which damages his or her already fragile self-esteem.

Peer support also plays an important role here. Students are reassured when they learn that other volunteers are experiencing similar reactions, doubts, and difficulties. Marcy, one of the students in our mentoring class, hesitantly confessed that she felt jealous as she watched other students who seemed to have close, positive relationships with their mentees. Her own mentee had put up many defenses and Marcy was blaming herself for her failure to reach this outwardly hostile teenager. Other members of the class, inspired by her honesty, opened up and shared their own frustrations with the slow and difficult task of relationship building. I could see the relief wash over Marcy's face as her peers confirmed that her mentee was especially challenging (they had had many opportunities to observe her during group activities) and that they too were having difficulties in their mentoring relationships. Several told her that they had admired the way she had conducted herself and actually saw her as a model of the behaviors they

wanted to acquire as mentors. Though her task didn't become easier, she became more confident in her ability to handle it.

Readiness

As in classroom teaching, it's important to be sure the students are ready for the tasks they will undertake as volunteers. Stewart (1990) notes that given different learning style preferences, aspects of community service that are very challenging for one student may be lacking in challenge for another. This means offering a wide range of service options and helping students to assess their abilities and find matches with volunteer opportunities in which they can succeed and contribute.

In general, short-term, group service activities like conducting a clothing drive, taking part in a walkathon, or serving a meal at a shelter are less demanding than intensive, personal, long-range commitments like one-to-one tutoring or working with critically ill children over an extended period. Personality characteristics and background must also be considered. A student with learning disabilities who has underdeveloped social skills and who had a difficult time with peers in high school may find mentoring an at-risk adolescent disastrous, but may bloom as a friendly visitor to an elderly person who reminds him or her of a nurturing grandparent.

Collaboration

It's important for students and faculty to be collaborators in community service activities. Those of us teachers who are used to being "in control" must learn to relinquish control and share the power with our students. Sometimes this gets a little messy and it definitely takes more time, but the rewards are worth it. Community service is an arena where we can stand *beside* our students and communicate to them the important message that we have trust in their abilities.

After many, many clothing and soap drives for the shelter, I have to consciously restrain myself from *telling* a new crop of students what to do. It takes patience for me to let them come to decisions about how to advertise the drive, collect the clothing, and

deliver the donations. I have to remind myself of the *learning* half of service learning. At other times, my taking a back seat comes more naturally, as students' talents and abilities are obvious and my own deficits come into play. Being "athletically challenged," I am well aware that I am not the best person to get a game of volleyball going with our teenage mentees, but two of my P.A. L. students, Jayson and Mike, easily handle it. And having a strong preference for linear-sequential tasks, I often gladly stepped back and let Kim and Shawna, my wonderfully organized students who can do five things at once, sort out the chaos of hot dogs, balloons, water fights, face painting, and "duck, duck, goose" at our annual picnic for the kids in our after-school program.

Deferring to our students in these ways, asking for their suggestions and advice, being a member of *their* teams and letting them instruct us communicates important messages of respect for them and faith in their abilities.

With proper preparation, processing, and support, service can provide students with learning disabilities the chance to discover a sphere in which others see them and they can see themselves as competent, valued, contributing human beings. Like Corie, who now teaches autistic pre-scholars, and Mark, working with physically and mentally challenged residents at the rehabilitation center, students can discover strengths and talents which have a direct impact on their lives and on the lives of those they will touch in the future.

Engaging learning disabled students in community service work is certainly not a cure-all for the deeply entrenched and complicated problems many of them must face in trying to build a positive sense of self and establish satisfying relationships with others. Tom Byrne, the Director of Counseling Services at Curry who works with many of our learning disabled students writes with Alice Crawford, "The insults which initially produced the pain will continue to occur, at least to some extent, in the present and in the future as one is not cured of a learning disability" (Byrne & Crawford, 1990). Although it cannot provide protection against future insult, having experienced success and a sense of

belonging through involvement in community service can help learning-disabled students become stronger and more resilient, better able to weather the challenges they will face, more aware of the strengths which provide a counterpoint to their limitations. Involving students in community service can be a valuable part of a comprehensive, holistic approach to helping students with learning disabilities reach their potential.

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Sensitivity in Teaching Basic Language Skills to College Students with Learning Disabilities

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In this chapter, the author illustrates through a case study and a careful recording of teacher-student interaction, how important the issues of student sensitivity are to the learning of necessary basic skills. For many students, as a result of their learning disability, the acquisition of basic skills has been a struggle. Their "gaps" in skills require remediation prior to, and during, the writing process. They occur within a variety of contexts in tutorial sessions and are dealt with through flexible and sensitive methodologies

The college students with whom I have been privileged to work are intellectually able, although learning disabled (L.D.) individuals. They have problems in the organization and communication of their ideas, occasionally in their oral language and more frequently in their written language. Their language usage and organization is generally inadequate and their grammar and spelling errors are symptomatic of their language-based learning disabilities as well. Reading scores are usually depressed, while their abilities in comprehension are usually high.

Additionally, there is often difficulty in spatial-relation tasks. Many are frustrated by problem solving which requires the organization of time and space. These students are challenged by the learning process that requires an awareness of spatial coordinates, movement and organization within space, and particularly by those tasks which require visual sequencing. Disparity between intellectual ability and language performance creates tremendous academic and social obstacles and personal frustration for many of these students.

The Challenge of Teaching Basic Skills to College-Age Students

My goal as an instructor/facilitator in PAL is to establish a relationship with the student which enables both the student and teacher to work together in order to move the student into a position of control over his/her learning, ultimately achieving independent learning. From my past experiences, it has been obvious that college age students who are approached with remedial tasks which may be on an elementary school level, are offended and further "turned off" by learning. My task as a teacher is to adapt their basic skill training needs into a model acceptable to them and compatible with their emotional needs. It is necessary to engage older students in elementary level tasks, while at the same time not making them feel "stupid" or like little children. An example of this would be the teaching of the fine motor/visual spatial task of writing "b-d-p-q".

Approaches to Basic Skill Instruction

There are two ways in which adapting a task of this nature might be approached:

1. Keeping the object of the task in mind, the teacher might give the student a simple task which offers a high level of interest, preferably one with which the student is personally connected such as sports, scuba diving, etc. An example of this approach would be in written expression. Because of familiarity with the content, the student would not have to be concerned with the information he or she is putting on paper, but could focus on the goal of the task. The student is comfortable relaying his or her knowledge to the teacher as the teacher simultaneously helps the student with the area of need, whether it be in writing, reading, oral expression, or other language skill. This makes a student feel like he or she is imparting knowledge to the reader - which he or she no doubt is.

2. A teacher might give the student an elementary level task providing that the teacher has explained to the student his/her individual style of learning, emphasizing his/her cognitive strengths, and explaining why the areas of difficulty are impeding learning. This requires that the teacher be extremely observant as to <u>how</u> information is

received and expressed. During the explanation, the teacher includes a rationale for the goals to be accomplished as a result of the task. An example of this would be the teaching of prepositions. The teacher needs to explain the reason why prepositions are important not only in written language and math but also in spatial awareness. Since many learning disabled students have difficulty with prepositions, teaching prepositions by using pictures or by involving them in concrete demonstrations of “over, into, under,” etc. while explaining the relationship to the process of learning and individual learning style, is necessary.

The Awareness of Emotional Issues in Basic Skills Instruction

It is extremely important that the teacher be aware of a student's self image, while respecting his or her strengths as they relate to the ego. I have found that most students will engage in "elementary tasks" if a rationale is provided for them. Students *are* interested in learning and once trust is established will accept these tasks as long as they understand their relevancy, and where the task is ultimately leading them. Success in this area occurs when the student is able to eventually "take control" of his or her learning. This is evidenced by a student demonstrating understanding of how he or she learns, and independently using appropriate strategies which enable him or her to successfully comprehend and communicate information. A student can be empowered through this self awareness, become able to self-advocate, and become comfortable discussing personal strengths and needs as the student becomes more familiar with his or her own capabilities.

I had been experiencing difficulty in working with some learning disabled students who sincerely wanted to learn and at the same time did not respond to strategies which I provided. This led me to look further into the area of emotional overlay in relation to individual learning disabilities. I began to see that a teacher is unable to effectively teach a student who is having emotional problems resulting from frustration with learning and/or a sense of self worth. I was then presented with the subjective choice

of which to address first, or how to address both issues simultaneously. I knew that I may put aside working with the student's learning style and develop a counseling relationship, or that I might work with an individual's learning style, hoping that the emotional overlay would improve with academic success. However, this all depends on how each student is functioning. One reality is that a college student has to pass required course work. This means accepting the responsibility of completing the requirements. If the work is not being successfully completed in spite of the strategies provided, a counseling relationship may be beneficial in order to discover what is "going on."

I had observed that when students begin to be comfortable with their expressive language they can "name" their experiences, possibly needing to discuss them. For a student who will not admit there is an emotional issue, it is necessary to work on a "sense of self" using academic concerns as the basis of discussion. One suggestion is to ask the student to write on a subject/concept which will eventually reveal feelings or to verbalize feelings and thoughts through role playing. For other students there have been academic tasks which have brought about success and therefore a feeling of self worth. When I started teaching I had no idea the depth and breadth of the relationship between emotions and learning.

Scott: A Success Story

Scot was accepted to Curry as a special student. He was a student with a severe language based learning disability and had developed little reading or writing ability. Because Scot was unable to sequence information visually and auditorally, he could not be evaluated appropriately through a Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS). He interviewed by showing photographs of the seven developmental stages of life and by verbalizing his understanding of development, explaining each picture and what it depicted. His persistence and many letters of recommendation by concerned professionals, convinced Curry College and PAL to give him the opportunity to prove that he could succeed. Later, once Scot could sequence information enough so that he

could give a response, he was administered the WAIS-R which demonstrated that Scot was a very bright young man.

In our PAL sessions, after explaining to Scot the learning situation and how we arrive at our goals, we discussed what was necessary to attack first, and why. I started Scot in the *Peabody Rebus* first grade book. I used the Peabody because it addressed memory, association and visual symbol relationships. Scot would write (print) one or two sentences for me each day. Later, he would read back what he thought he had written down. At first, I could make no sense of his written work. Concerns such as spelling, sentence structure, punctuation, etc. were not issues to be dealt with at this time. Scot was to write just to get used to putting words on paper. I then asked him, after some time, to point to his words and read them. Through this process, he discovered that he had left words out or added unnecessary words. He would also perseverate on a letter - including the letter in every word. Some weeks it would be an “L” and others maybe the “S”. I made it a point to never criticize anything he wrote. We worked only on process and progress. He continuously listened to tapes and followed along with his finger in the book. The goal of the task was to connect the sound of the word to the written word. Usually, he was able to follow the lines and pick up a few words to find his place, although on some days he was not able to complete this task.

In trying to teach Scot to separate a word (recognize syllables), I typed articles printing all consonants in black and a single vowel and vowel combinations in red. This did not include the final silent e vowel - only vowels which indicated syllables. If there were three sets of red then there would be three syllables. For example (with the underlined meaning red): At noontime yesterday we went sailing in my boat.

The first breakthrough in his learning was his acquiring the ability to put on paper one written word, for one word. I had been observing that Scot would go into a "time out period" just before a "breakthrough". Then he would go into a "time out period" following his breakthrough. It was almost as if he was gathering energy to accomplish a

major task and then he needed to rest afterwards. According to Piaget, Scot was assimilating and accommodating information. The "time out period" gave him time to internalize what he had done. It reminds me of a little baby beginning to make sounds. The baby gears up to make a sound by being quiet. He then moves his arms and legs, and after making the sound appears to need to rest before gearing up to make the next sound.

In reading, Scot would look at a word and read it from the middle, from the ending syllable, and from the beginning, reversing the order of the syllables. Using a kinesthetic method of teaching and learning, I started moving my finger from left to right across his back timing my movement to the word while he said a word with more than one syllable. Feeling my finger on his back, he was able to follow visually-spatially from left to right the word which he was trying to pronounce. Because of his inability to learn sound symbol relationships he still had some difficulty with the word but he was able to get the left-right progression. An example of this would be the word "academic". He might pronounce it as “a-dee-mice”, mispronouncing or omitting some of the syllables, but at least he would be sequencing them properly. When accompanied by audiotapes in his reading, he began to point to one word, matching it with the sound of the word.

At the end of the second semester, Scot was able to complete a valid WAIS-R test which demonstrated his superior thinking ability, indicating his college potential. The test also demonstrated that Scot was reversing symbols both visually and auditorally, exactly as we had determined during our sessions. There had to be much flexibility in lesson planning with Scot as each step was dependent upon his success with the previous task.

The next "breakthrough" was Scot's ability to read elementary-level books without audiotapes. He would read into a tape recorder and then listen to himself, visually following what he had read. This enabled him to hear and see his own mistakes. He was still performing only one task at a time, although he was integrating the methods with which he had already experienced success. We continued to work kinesthetically on the rhythm of language and the sequencing of syllables. The next step in the learning process

was to be able to write the words, separating the syllables. Once more we were addressing sequencing. I noticed that Scot was progressing in this area, but that again, the progress was not consistent.

Scot went into another "time out period." During these "time out periods" I would not see Scot for awhile. This time, I was not sure whether it meant another breakthrough or that he had reached a plateau in his learning.

When Scot did see me, for the first time after a rest period, I shifted to a strong counseling approach in our relationship. The lessons, although important and necessary, needed to take second place. Scot's emotional needs became the priority. He told me that he was noticing he was now able to read outside of our comfortable learning environment. He noticed signs and read what he could from the newspapers and other material. Finally, he was able to verbalize the anxiety of being responsible if he learned to read and write. We talked about being accountable and the responsibility of being able to read. We talked about self-image and seeing yourself as a capable learner.

Eventually we returned to the academic work combining academics and counseling. We started reading again, but this time I informed him when he stumbled over words. I decided to do this so that Scot could gain some understanding and confidence in reading, eliminating some of his frustration. He started writing letters to friends and began to recognize some of his own written errors. Although Scot was required to read accompanied by audiotapes for his coursework, in order to lessen stress, our reading in PAL concentrated on material which captured his interest.

Scot and I worked together until he graduated from Curry College in 1978. We constantly shifted back and forth from the teaching to the counseling relationship, sometimes doing both simultaneously. In this stage of our relationship we could discuss where we were and ask for what was needed. Because of the extent of his disability, he will always require some support such as audio taped textbooks.

Scot graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Sociology and Psychology. He continued his education at Salem State College, achieving a Masters in Education in Community and School Counseling. He is a certified Guidance Counselor, Marriage and Family Therapist, and Mental Health Counselor. Scot is presently employed as a counselor and teacher at a school specializing in the education of students with dyslexia.

What is important is that Scot became a confident, independent and empowered learner. In a letter to me as his PAL instructor, Scot spoke about the "personal level" of teaching that we had experienced and that he considered me not only a teacher but a friend. I consider Scot my friend and I will forever be thankful for what he taught me.

Learning Disabilities in Speakers of English as a Second Language

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An interdisciplinary domain which receives inadequate attention for college students with learning disabilities is that of LD/ESL. The frustrating experiences of students with learning disabilities learning in a second language have only begun to be recognized. The individual who arrives at a college with a hidden disability feels doubly at risk when he/she is performing a juggling act with English as a second language. The emotional, cultural and academic issues are compounded for this student as the complexity of social and remedial tasks increases. This chapter takes "A Closer Look" at the issues involved in providing support to college students with learning disabilities who are non-native English speakers.

Despite the dramatic increase in the range of services designed to meet the needs of college students with learning disabilities (LD), one area of service that has received relatively little attention is that of working with LD students who are non-native speakers of English. However, these students are joining our learning communities in increasing numbers and challenging us to understand their needs and reexamine our teaching practices. During the following discussion of our current thoughts on ways to look at the complex profiles of these students, we will share many of the important insights that they have given us. We will focus particularly on one of our students, Thanasis, who has generously allowed us to tell his story.

Some ESL-LD students come to Curry, or similar institutions, from great distances because there are no colleges at home where students with learning disabilities are recognized and supported. Many other ESL-LD students are currently struggling in a college environment with little understanding of their LD, experiencing great frustration

in their academic programs. For some, the diagnosis of a "learning disability" may be relatively recent, and may involve coming to terms with a construct that does not even exist in a student's native culture. Others remain undiagnosed, relying on tremendous investments of time and talent necessary simply to remain afloat in their continually overwhelming environments. Still others find themselves denied the opportunity to pursue study in the United States because of difficulty demonstrating English language competence on the standardized Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) examination. For the student in each of these situations, Curry College's Program for Advancement of Learning (PAL) continues the tradition explored in other chapters in this book of taking a comprehensive approach to developing student's academic skill and language ability and recognizing the impact of cultural and linguistic variation on the learning process.

Over the years, Curry, like other institutions, has served ESL-LD students, but with services based loosely on the principle that what works for most students with learning disabilities should work for those who are non-native speakers of English as well. It has only been recently that we have taken a more focused look at the issues involved in second language acquisition and attempted to evaluate the assessment and teaching implications systematically. In sharing our reflections, we highlight the experiences of Thanasis, a twenty-two year old student from Greece enrolled in PAL/ESL a section of PAL devoted to supporting ESL-LD students at the college level. Thanasis' profile is typical in many ways of most PAL students, and his personal story of growth helps us to reflect on the connections between having a learning disability and learning in a second language.

Characteristics of ESL-LD College Students

As expected, the profiles of ESL college students with LD vary considerably from student to student; however, there are some common characteristics of these students that may help to identify useful teaching approaches. First, like Thanasis, many of our ESL-LD college students have had little formal support in elementary and secondary school. They are likely to have been diagnosed later in their lives and to carry with them the self-doubt and uncertainty created by years of failure and frustration. When we first met Thanasis, he told us of his long history of school difficulties and failures, of having spent three years in kindergarten and receiving daily tutoring from grade three to twelve. Throughout these years, Thanasis faced significant difficulties with concentration, organization and reading; however, despite his persistent efforts and what he later discovered were superior skills in reasoning, teachers typically attributed his difficulty to either laziness or lack of ability.

In this regard, PAL/ESL students like Thanasis often share common experiences with native English speaking PAL students; for many, their teachers' lack of understanding about, or acceptance of, learning disabilities has contributed to learned helplessness, a diminished sense of self-worth, and acceptance of entirely inaccurate labels like "slow" or "lazy." One student from Japan shared these thoughts, "I was not having high grades and everyone said it was because I was not trying hard enough. In Japan if you are trying hard you will make a good student. But I tried hard and I was not a good student." Attributions like this are particularly common among students from

cultures where difficulty in school is viewed primarily as being due to lack of effort, and where the concept of "learning disabilities" is only beginning to be discussed.

With the introduction of Public Law (PL)94-142 in 1975, the United States took a leadership role internationally in identifying and serving students with learning disabilities. Since then, other countries have begun to recognize the need for additional study in the research and academic communities (organizations such as the International Association for Research in Learning Disabilities have assisted in this process), but, for the most part, such interest has not yet led to the development of wide-spread programming changes in school systems. In our experience with parents, reports of the frustration and lack of support experienced in advocating for their children in Greece, Jordan, Thailand, and other countries virtually mirror the experiences of parents in the United States in the early 1970's, when learning disabilities were first becoming recognized. And indeed, even in the United States, a need exists for support in developing comprehensive programming and implementing regular classroom modifications that are sensitive to the needs of non-native speakers of English with learning disabilities.

Thus, when talking with students about their school experiences, it is of vital importance to take into account the educational environment of that student's culture's view of learning and learning disabilities. Within this larger framework, we found students' difficulties to be exacerbated when they came from cultures where classroom instruction provided little accommodation for variation in learning styles and little recognition of alternative learning strengths.

Thanasis, for example, was very successful in many non-school-related activities; he had excellent mechanical repair and assembly skills, and reported learning English on his own, mainly through watching television and films. Yet he told us with frustration that none of his teachers had ever recognized or validated these abilities. He was able to demonstrate his strengths during the semester he studied English at Curry in a special program which prepared students for entrance into college. His natural "ear" for language was quickly recognized and appreciated by his fellow students many of whom had superior reading and writing skills. Through class discussions he revealed his ability to grasp the central concepts and synthesize them into language which was accessible to his classmates. He generously fixed, TV's, radios, and cars for his group. At the end of this semester he wrote this eloquent message. "You are the first teacher that in your class I was a good student. Thank you for your help and for making me believe in myself."

Another common characteristic of some ESL-LD college students prior to their receiving specific assistance is a failure to make consistent progress in a regular college classroom setting. Some students remain in university systems having failed ESL classes and having been unable to make adequate progress despite repeated attempts at a course. Faced with the lack of progress in an unfamiliar cultural setting, ESL-LD college students are confronted with the familiarity of the experience of failing in school despite tremendous investments of time and energy. Not surprisingly, we have seen that this dramatically impacts students' self-esteem and sense of self-worth. As a result, more and more ESL-LD students are looking to the PAL program to provide them the support that was missing in their previous unsuccessful college experiences. These students bring with them a significant amount of anxiety that needs to addressed quickly. Looking at past and

present learning from a metacognitive, reflective point of view can bring the fear of failure out into the open. Once this happens some of the negative energy will start to diminish.

For many students, recognition of the problem is a beginning step that is often the most difficult. Particularly for students from cultures where learning disabilities are not yet recognized, the recognition of the need for some kind of evaluation may not emerge without the prompting of the regular classroom instructor or academic advisor. As such, outreach efforts to regular ESL instructors; international student advisors and/or tutors must focus on helping these "front-line" professionals recognize the characteristics that may indicate a learning disability.

Assessment

Given the lack of standardized measures in many students' native languages and the potential impact of cultural bias in English language tests, assessment of ESL-LD students can be a complicated and difficult task. The educational evaluator faces the difficult task of determining what tests can fairly assess underlying processing issues if administered in English. The interview or case history remains one of the most useful tools in the assessment of the ESL-LD college student. (See Lingenfelter, 1993 for a step-by-step recommended process). In reviewing the student's educational history in their native language, the case history can provide valuable information about how a student has performed in relation to his/her cultural and linguistic peers. Even in cultures where learning disabilities are not recognized, a detailed case history can provide information about whether difficulties with academic study are limited to the college experience or are reflective of a student's long history of difficulty in education. Statements about

difficulty with vocabulary in the native language, problems preparing for examinations, persistent difficulties with attention and impassivity, difficulty learning to read, slow rate of reading, poor spelling and penmanship, are all highly suggestive of a learning disability. At the same time, the case history can also be used to try to identify possible explanations other than a learning disability that might explain a student's performance; for example, information suggesting post-traumatic stress syndrome or psychological trauma may prove valuable in developing a comprehensive support model for a student who has recently arrived from a war-torn militarized homeland. Finally, in obtaining the case history, interviews with siblings and/or parents can be very useful in developing the most detailed and accurate picture of a student's difficulties learning in his/her native language.

We are experimenting with this approach to assessing students whose English is limited. During a recent evaluation of a young man from Hong Kong, we developed a team approach. First we interviewed the student along with his father and sister; both of whom were fluent English speakers. His educational history revealed learning problems in his native language and a history of school difficulties. Then our psychologist administered the non-verbal sections of the WAIS-R with the student’s sister acting as an interpreter. We used an informal TOEFL test and a writing sample as diagnostic tools to look at this student’s ability to function in English. We met together to discuss our findings and our observations of his test-taking style as well as his educational history. Although we still felt frustrated by the missing language and culture pieces, we were able to develop recommendations that we could share with the student and his family.

As in any assessment process, some measure of the students' overall cognitive ability should be obtained; however, in so doing, the examiner must be cautious about the interpretation of the results, taking into account a range of factors particular to assessing non-native English speakers in addition to considering the familiar factors of motivation and fatigue. At a minimum, careful use of cognitive assessments can be useful in obtaining an estimate of overall reasoning ability that can help rule out limited intellectual functioning as an explanation for school difficulty.

If the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale - Revised (WAIS-R) is available in the student's native language, this can certainly be a valuable tool. The ability to reference a student's performance on the subtests to that of age-matched peers of the same native language provides critical information about the extent of the student's difficulty as compared with other speakers of that student's language. Chapman (1980) argues that even if normative information from peers in the student's culture is not available, it is absolutely essential that the assessment itself be conducted in the student's native language. In so doing, the translator becomes a critical component of the evaluation; siblings and parents can be utilized if absolutely necessary.

If cognitive assessments are not available in the student's native language, several "nonverbal" measures of reasoning ability can be considered. For example, performance subtests of the WAIS-R such as Block Design or other measures of abstract visual reasoning such as the Raven's Progressive Matrices or the Test of Nonverbal Intelligence (TONI) can be expected to provide reasonably valid measures of thinking ability. However, even such seemingly "culture-free" tests should be evaluated with caution. For example, at first glance, the Coding subtest of the WAIS-R may be thought to be a

relatively “culture-free” measure of automaticity in visual-motor integration in which students are asked to quickly copy a code of symbols. However, because the test is timed and requires examinees to work from left to right, students who have developed literacy in right-to-left orthographies may find their performance compromised, although unrelated to any actual visual-motor difficulties.

We believe that the issue of performing a task within an allotted period of time is also a problem if a student chooses not to ask for clarification of directions, but instead uses a trial and error method or simply guesses. This was part of Thanasis’ strategy even though he had a friend present to interpret for him. Imagine the added anxiety when a student cannot understand the directions clearly, but is embarrassed to reveal this.

In the achievement areas, standardized measures of listening, speaking, reading and writing may be useful in identifying a learning disability, particularly if a dramatically uneven pattern of performance emerges. As with assessment of all adults with learning disabilities, task analysis comparing the demands of individual subtests can provide valuable information about the nature of the student’s processing of information (Johnson & Blalock, 1987). The critical question in evaluating performance on these tests is to determine whether diminished performance is due to lack of language or to weakness of processing ability in a particular kind of task. To begin to determine this, one can compare scores on tests with slightly different task demands and supplement such information with details from the student’s own case histories. The student who reports repeated failures in learning new vocabulary in his native language may demonstrate a pattern of difficulty in memory tasks that would help to explain his difficulties.

We know from our experience that accurate assessment is a very difficult task. Often it is hard to recognize a student as the same person described in a testing report; so many variables impact on performance. With students whose first language is not English or students from a different cultural background, it is even more important to look beyond one kind of measure or one set of numbers. We need to recognize the importance of anecdotal information from the student, the family, and the teachers.

Sources of Difficulty

Research in the area of second language acquisition provides some valuable insight into the factors that can contribute to the difficulty experienced by ESL-LD college students. For example, John Schumann (1986), in discussing a model of acculturation, identifies a taxonomy of factors (including social, affective, cognitive, instructional and personal) which can either facilitate or hinder language acquisition. Within the social domain he argues that attitudes between the two language or culture groups will affect the amount of contact between members of the cultures. Specifically, Schumann (1986) argues that greater congruence or similarity between the cultures is thought to increase the amount of contact. Since social interaction is vital to language acquisition, the extent to which groups view each other as being similar or dissimilar, (and hence, view each other positively or negatively), is thought to affect significantly the student's opportunities to develop language facility. As such, it is important to facilitate greater understanding and opportunities for communication among different culture groups and to highlight similarities including the cultures' educational views of learning disabilities.

The uncertainty and disorientation encountered upon entering a new culture referred to as "culture shock" plays an important role in the development of language skill for many second language learners (Schumann, 1986). This well-known phenomenon must be fully explained to all second language learners, but especially to ESL students with learning disabilities so that they may understand that their feelings and anxieties are predictable, normal, and transient. We have seen that, particularly for ESL-LD students, the ability to attribute some of the difficulty of the new learning environment to the common experience of culture shock provides a much-needed label for a source of difficulty that is external to themselves. In individual and group sessions, PAL/ESL students regularly reflect on how culture shock is affecting the learning process. In one PAL/ESL group this year, a student reported, “I would like to take my teachers and classmates home and show them who I really am.” This kind of reflection and discussion allows students to more fully understand the impact of the learning and social environment on their personal and academic growth.

Although some aspect of culture shock gradually disappear, some remain or resurface in times of stress. Thanasis and many other international students find that the discomfort caused by unfamiliar social cues still bothers them at times. They will tell us about the overwhelming desire to be “home” that strikes unexpectedly.

Schumann (1986) also considers the second language learner's reaction to teaching methods and argues that students unfamiliar with a certain style of teaching may unconsciously reject the new model or may not know how to respond appropriately. For example, many college instructors use class participation as an important component of the grading system. This may pose a problem for ESL-LD students for several reasons.

On the one hand, difficulty expressing ideas clearly and completely and/or interpreting non-verbal conversation cues (which may vary significantly from culture to culture) may leave an ESL-LD student unable to take part in a fast-moving class discussion. We have observed many ESL students choose not to volunteer in class discussion because of a lack of self-confidence in their language ability. At the same time, ESL-LD students may be accustomed to a classroom style where student participation is not encouraged. Group discussions where students challenge the professor may be diametrically opposed to the traditional format of classroom interaction in the student's culture, creating a difficult affective barrier to overcome.

Stephen Krashen (1982) argues that such an "affective filter" plays a critical role in language development which is acquired through the learner taking in interesting and relevant comprehensible input. According to his theory each learner 's affective filter allows this input to enter in greater or lesser amounts. A student with a high affective filter, due perhaps to heightened anxiety, will experience a reduction in the amount of input received. Many students with learning disabilities often demonstrate high affective filters rooted in past difficult learning experiences. Beyond this, students with learning disabilities from different cultural backgrounds bring with them still more additional powerful affective filters. The combination of negative learning experiences and cultural differences and taboos which are often subconscious and not apparent to the students can be powerful barriers to new learning and to comfort in new social relationships.

Since culture is so closely connected to our self-identity, the process of assimilating and integrating another “blueprint for personal and social existence” (Brown, 1987) is very complicated. The impact of this acculturation process will add stress to the

student's vulnerable learning system. Earlier problems which may have already been compensated for in the student's native language may surface and add to the student's discomfort and bewilderment (Sparks and Ganschow, 1991). Thus, for ESL-LD students, the need to develop and nurture self-esteem while lowering anxiety becomes all the more important for providing a positive learning experience. In our own experiences, we have found that many students have difficulty dealing with the social pressures of living in a college environment, Thanasis and other students from different cultures tell us that meeting people and making friends can pose a problem. At times the desire to go back to a familiar and comfortable environment is very powerful. Thanasis recalls that his first year was extremely challenging for him in this regard; while slowly, slowly learning about his own learning style, he worked to overcome the negative feelings that returned from time to time to make him discouraged and depressed. In many of our students, this loneliness and longing for family, language and culture were critical stressful components that needed to be addressed on a regular basis.

Implications for Teaching

In developing a structured approach to serving ESL-LD students, the guiding philosophic principles of the Program for Advancement of Learning -- strength-based, metacognitive, proactive instruction that promotes an understanding of self-- continue to serve as the basis for intervention. In adopting this approach, emphasis is placed on helping a student identify and understand his/her entire profile of learning. This includes discussing with the student the impact of factors such as acculturation and cultural variation both on a day-to-day and abstract level. Developing advocacy skills in students includes eliciting reflection about the teacher/student relationship, as it exists in the

students' native cultures. By engaging students in discussion and reflection about the teaching styles of native culture and host culture instructors, students' metacognitive understanding of their own learning process and style is encouraged. Collaborative learning plays a critical role in this process by allowing students to identify those aspects of learning that are unique to them, and contrasting this with characteristics that are common to all students with learning disabilities. For ESL-LD students, group discussion about learning process issues with other non-native English speaking peers provides students with the opportunity to examine the impact of cultural and linguistic variation on the learning process in general and on their own learning in particular. The informal atmosphere also allows students to support each other through sharing experiences and to develop a sense of self-empowerment through helping one another. By encouraging students to share experiences and knowledge about their cultures, we found that a learning community emerged that centered on a theme of respect for differences.

Thanasis' Story

We are very grateful to Thanasis for sharing his story with us. His life is unique to him, of course, but in many ways it speaks to the experience of many students. Thanasis and his parents investigated Curry because of its strong reputation for providing support to college students with learning disabilities. As part of the application process, he obtained a neuropsychological evaluation at a Massachusetts clinic, and his experiences at the clinic illustrate some of the difficulty of obtaining a valid assessment when testing ESL students. The examiner first administered the English version of the verbal subtests of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS-R). Once the limit was reached on each subtest, the examiner continued testing in Greek. The testing revealed a sixteen-point

difference between Thanasis's Verbal IQ score when the test was administered in English and the score obtained when the testing was continued in Greek. Other formal language tests were administered in English and Greek with a close friend interpreting for the examiner. The examiner compared performances in the two languages in an attempt to determine strengths and to identify weaknesses that were based on cognitive processing rather than on a lack of English knowledge. Results of the testing were regarded cautiously. In addition to the cultural bias of the test itself, there was concern that directions on the verbal and performance sections of the WAIS-R may not have been clearly understood. This lack of clear understanding may have interfered with performance especially in timed tasks. Thanasis later told us that he did not understand some of the directions or sentences given by the examiner, yet he chose to guess rather than ask for clarification.

Despite possible difficulties with test administration and interpretation, the background information obtained during the interview with Thanasis and his parents, and the hypotheses provided in the psychological report provided a profile which looked familiar. Auditory language, social perception and reasoning were strong. Concentration, reading and written language skills needed improvement. We recommended that, although Thanasis had fairly good listening and speaking skills in English, he needed to spend a semester studying English to improve his vocabulary and his reading and writing skills. Since his self-confidence as a learner was extremely low, it was vital that Thanasis experience school success as soon as possible.

Thanasis's oral communication skills quickly helped him become one of the leaders in his English class. The communicative classroom style provided him with a

learning environment where he began to thrive. Buoyed by this success, he worked diligently and successfully to improve his reading and writing skills. Part of his work was to practice taking the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). He learned how to work in a timed test situation and to use his naturally acquired language skills to help him overcome his test anxiety, but this was a challenging process. We could see the frustration surface when the class pace became too fast for him or he sat too long taking a practice test. Privately we discussed how the old feelings were going to resurface at times. He learned to recognize the trouble spots and tell us how to help him get by them.

At the end of the semester, he earned a score that when combined with his writing samples and his classroom performance qualified him for regular acceptance to Curry. Mixed with happiness at his success was concern about how he would manage when he was faced with the demands of a college schedule. Would he be able to lower his "affective filters" and tolerate frustration which would bring back years of depressing school experiences.

Thanasis began his college career by participating in Summer PAL, a three week intensive experience designed to be the first step towards success in college. The goal is for students to deepen their understanding of how they learn and how they can monitor their own learning. Participants earn three academic credits towards graduation. For Thanasis these three weeks were very difficult. He felt that having to work in his second language put him at a disadvantage because he had to work more slowly than many other students. "The first two weeks were like hell," he explained. The third was easier. With the support of his PAL instructors he persevered and successfully completed his program.

Throughout the Fall semester, Thanasis worked closely with his PAL instructor to overcome the negative feelings that returned from time to time to make him discouraged and depressed. He took his tests untimed in the PAL library. He taped his classes and used the tapes faithfully to review and rethink the course information. At first, Thanasis didn't think that books on tape would be helpful to him, but he has since found them invaluable. His persistence in using the tapes and organizational strategies for writing was rewarded with a 2.88 average at the end of the semester, and he recalls with pride the sense of success and respect he felt for himself when his grades arrived in Greece.

Thanasis began the second semester with greater confidence and with a set of strategies that he had developed with the help of his PAL instructor and also from his own experience. During the semester he took more control of his learning and experimented successfully with taking some tests in the classroom rather than at PAL. These excerpts from his journal illustrate both his growing confidence and the challenge academic life presents to students with learning difficulties.

2/9/95

Today I had to do one of the things I hate most in school. [Taking] a test makes me feel bad. I think that I am not going to do well because of all those years of experience in high school. But today it was different. I went at 8:30 A.M. in PAL library and I said [to myself] write anything you can remember and I remembered many things.

3/10/95

The first half of this semester is finished and I look back in the beginning when I was worried about achieving my goals. Well, most of my goals are accomplished. I started to understand my learning style. I discovered some strategies for success in my class work, and some of these things helped me with my exams. I am not enjoying my classes because classes are classes and I always hated them and I always will. I think I am doing a good job this semester, but that doesn't mean I like it.

5/9/95

At the beginning of the semester you helped me set some goals. Some of the goals were to understand my learning style, develop successful strategies for academic success, develop exam taking strategies and successfully complete this semester. All these goals led to problems, but all the problems have solutions and if you find the solutions there is success.

That's how I started working. At the beginning I was afraid of reading, completing assignments and taking exams. The solutions were there I just had to think about them. About reading I used tapes because I knew that my listening was one of my strengths. In completing assignments I tried to organize my time and for the exams I used the one and only strategy, which is "I don't care". Using these solutions and strategies made my semester a real success."

When Thanasis tells himself, "I don't care." he is talking himself through his test anxiety by telling himself to calm down. He knows that he cares too much. Thanasis summed up the difference between his learning experience in Greece and at Curry in one word: "understanding".

Thanasis has taught us well about how our students feel. His testimony supports our theories about what we can do in collaboration with our students to help them succeed and believe in themselves. His insight has truly informed our teaching.

We are learning that students entering the PAL/ESL program bring with them experiences similar in many ways to that of other PAL students. Their school histories are characterized by learning difficulties which often have not been understood or accepted. However, students from different language and cultural backgrounds carry added strength and added vulnerability which need to be considered in developing a program to support them as they make the transition to being successful, independent learners in English. As teachers and administrators we must be sensitive to the cultural as well as educational dimensions of our students' lives. Their knowledge and experience of another culture and language give PAL/ESL students a unique perspective which, when

recognized and welcomed by teachers and classmates, can deepen their educational experience and that of their instructors and peers.

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Learning to Adapt: Models for Inclusion

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The content of this chapter includes profiles and personalized accounts of three students and their teacher- all of whom adapted one or more special needs for eventual success in the school environment. The subjects have personal experience with issues related to learning needs and/or physical challenges. The author identifies insights and strategies for classroom inclusion models based on these personalized accounts.

Introduction

This chapter integrates the profile analysis of three (3) students and their teacher (the author). Special challenges and adaptation to the school environment will be examined through this reflective study of factors affecting learning transition. All of the subjects have faced special needs in the transition through school and college years. These profiles represent a composite of numerous student-teacher interactions including: classroom activities, individual conferences, group sessions, tutoring, advisement, and evaluations. These reflective profiles are not detailed biographies; rather, I provide them as concise summaries in a non-technical format to assist in the demonstration of human factors influencing inclusive learning.

It is through these analyses that insights and model elements can be identified for inclusion in the classroom. Inclusion should actively involve facilitating the access to successful learning for all students, particularly those with special needs. A student centered approach focuses on a partnership between teacher and student involving creative problem solving and decision making. It is important for professionals to recognize individuals who have dealt with disabilities as primary sources for insights into inclusion issues. It is evident that keys to adaptive learning are embodied within individuals who have personally experienced challenges and coped through innovative strategies and problem solving. The profiled subjects have experienced learning and/or

physical disabilities. These reflective experiences also have implications for personal and school situations such as those related to language transition, cultural diversity, medical factors, literacy, and other classroom inclusion issues.

Current research on adaptive learning and inclusion models (Gerber, Ginsberg, & Reiff, 1992) emphasizes the relationship of learning profiles and reflective analysis as key elements in successful transition. Adaptive learners utilize analysis in decision making and identifying strategic resources. Existing research and practices support self-advocacy and networking as significant to inclusive learning improvement for all students, including those with special needs (Brinkerhoff, Shaw & McGuire, 1992). Social issues and school adjustment are also recognized as factors influencing integration and effective communication among students. Mentoring and collaboration are included as successful practices utilized by the disabled to help themselves and others (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). The individuals profiled in this chapter provide testimony to the significance of these elements for achieving successful inclusion among all students including those with special challenges.

I have worked extensively with students at the elementary, secondary, and college levels. I am also physically challenged due to the effects of childhood polio. As a teacher, consultant, and administrator I have experienced an interesting dynamic among individuals who have faced special challenges in school and life experiences. This interactive dimension has heightened my awareness of shared needs that affect teaching and learning. Reflection has helped me to understand my own needs and those of my students. It is also apparent that many students identify with my struggles to overcome obstacles in the school environment. This awareness and initial connection by students interweaves with my professional competencies to provide a base for mentoring and exploring successful transitions to inclusive learning.

The framework of this reflective study consists of the following components which are explored in each of the four profiles presented: *a) Background and special*

challenges; b) School environment/social issues; c) Analysis of strengths and needs, and d) Adaptive learning strategies.

Following the four (4) profiles, I have summarized *keys to transition* as delineated from the case studies and related literature. Also included is an outline for *inclusive model elements* drawn from studies and recognized practices. These inclusion elements are provided for facilitating adaptive learning and collaboration in the classroom curriculum (Stainback & Stainback, 1992).

Profile #1: John (teacher & author)

Background and Special Challenges

At age five (5) I became a survivor of Poliomyelitis. I was totally paralyzed, but eventually regained mobility through rehabilitation and orthopedic support. I contracted polio just prior to entering kindergarten. Although I am not learning disabled, my school experience and learning access were directly impacted by my physical disability.

These special challenges, plus the missing of school time due to follow-up surgery, directly affected continuity, progress, and inclusion. Through a process similar to that of the students to be profiled, I was able to adapt limitations with strengths and find eventual success in school and social integration.

My experiences, although not identical to those of learning disabled students, are quite similar in the struggle to overcome obstacles for learning opportunities and full inclusion.

School Environment/Social Issues

I attended kindergarten/first grade in a hospital. This part-time education in between intense physical therapy created a gap in my educational sequence that lasted into my early college years. My elementary grades were at a public, then parochial school. I was the only student in my school with a physical disability. Although the core curriculum was well established, there were few, if any, support services available.

The school environment was difficult for a student with special challenges. My classmates treated me as different and sometimes with exclusion. Junior high school was particularly troublesome due to major leg surgery occurring just before the start of seventh grade. Again, I fell behind in my course work and my performance suffered. These negative experiences created a cycle of interrupted learning progress, due to external difficulties beyond my direct control. Toward the end of junior high school, I began to realize that I would need to establish my own support networks and formulate strategic goals for adaptive learning and successful inclusion.

I transferred to a public high school and my adaptive transition to learning access and social integration became evident. My strengths in social studies, communication, and writing skills were recognized by certain teachers and encouraged. I was able to establish friendships with a wide range of fellow students and particular teachers. My high school experience was conducive to self-advocacy. This school environment was more open to differences among students. The curriculum was less structured, but did emphasize critical thinking. Networking with students and more sensitive teachers was important in my gradual climb towards improved academic performance and social integration. Although I still faced some physical difficulties including surgery prior to my junior year, I maintained productive connections in the school environment.

I was able to sustain steady academic success within the first year of college. From this point on through graduate school and advanced degrees, I was able to demonstrate consistent academic excellence with focused determination, goal setting, and strategic planning. As a professional educator, I've come to realize that my delayed, but eventual success in school has been an integral factor in my relationship with a range of students, including those with special needs. My own adaptive experiences have influenced my professional abilities in relating to learners who are in transition and/or have special challenges in the school environment.

Analysis of Strengths and Needs

During my school experiences, I was able to identify and demonstrate strengths that included analytical thinking and problem solving. From this analysis, clearer goals and personal expectations emerged. I developed skills in tapping resources for personalized learning and the expansion of knowledge. Reading, writing, and communication skills were maximized as keys to improved learning opportunities. I was able to help others in need through reflection and creative solutions.

The areas of identified needs involved recognizing that access to learning opportunities is partially a personal responsibility to be combined with advocacy and suitable expectations. I also needed to balance intense independent drive with pacing, collaboration, and reasonable accommodations. I eventually realized that obstacles to learning success and insensitivity to inclusion are not personal limitations, but shared social issues to be overcome.

Adaptive Learning Strategies

Among the techniques that I utilized to improve the transition to learning access and social integration were the expansion of options and tactics for improving performance (e.g. study skills, advanced organizers, speed reading, creative writing). I was able to establish informal support networks with fellow students. This interaction directly helped me and provided the opportunity to experience the satisfaction of assisting others with their needs. For example, a classmate who was experiencing temporary personal problems was helped through our discussions on adjustment and coping with adversity.

My transition to learning independence was enhanced through self-analysis and reflective thinking about my strengths and ways of coping with limitations. Through this process I was able to acknowledge my physical disability and how it impacted school and personal life. This was important in helping me to determine priorities and strategic

resources. Networking with others to help solve problems through practical solutions also assisted me in recognizing priorities for learning access and school success.

Learning to adapt involved personal reflection and social interaction with a wide range of peers possessing various abilities, talents, and needs. This analysis and outreach helped me to identify specific goals, skills, and resources required to reach objectives for full learning opportunity and inclusion.

The students profiled in the next section are part of my professional experiences; they have also been impacted by special challenges that were adapted for inclusive learning. I am able to share with you their adaptive learning profiles and strategies for inclusion from this unique perspective. Their personal experiences may be different, but many of the strategies are similar to my own adaptive inclusion.

Profile #2: Kenneth (Student)

Background and Special Challenges

Kenneth experienced a difficult birth resulting in defects to his ear lobes and channels. His hearing ability was affected to a mild degree, but was considered correctable through plastic surgery and hearing aids. Kenneth's pre-school years were without major incident except for the stress and discomfort of ear surgery. Kenneth demonstrated learning differences in his early elementary years with attention deficits, organization and expressive communication difficulties. Poor self-esteem was directly associated with Kenneth’s perceptions and social interaction with his peers. Throughout childhood, adolescence, and as a young adult, Kenneth continued to deal with learning difficulties, attention, and adjustment problems. These difficulties continued even after his physical deficits were modified through surgery and hearing appliances.

Kenneth's frustration and distractibility would fluctuate in times of stress. These periods of increased anxiety and presentation of learning difficulties were most apparent at transitional points in his school experience. Kenneth's eventual adaptation to successful

learning and inclusion was based on personal reflection with analysis of his strengths and resource needs.

School Environment/Social Issues

For Kenneth, the early years of public school (K-4) and the initial years of high school and college were the more problematic. However, these were strategic points in directly coping with disabilities and learning to adapt for positive change. In his early grades (K-4) Kenneth received support services including speech and language therapy, specialized LD tutoring, and resource room assistance on a regular basis. Counseling was available, when needed, in high school and college. Teacher-student interaction was often inconsistent in the classroom and sometimes in the resource setting. This appeared due to communication miscues by Kenneth and the inability of some teachers to formulate workable options for the demonstration of learning.

Socially, Kenneth was at times rejected or shunned by his peers. This exclusion was partially due to physical and learning differences, but also because of his counterproductive anger and inappropriate responses to peer teasing and rejection. When shunned, Kenneth would react with verbally aggressive behavior or he would move inward, which limited his social interaction even further. This in turn established a negative cycle that affected his academic and emotional growth.

Kenneth's performance in school was inconsistent depending on his self-image and level of distraction. It also depended on the learning situation. In subjects where teachers allowed alternatives and the opportunity to express ideas in various forms, Kenneth did well. In other classes where there was little cooperative learning and increased demand on individual performance with few options, Kenneth did not perform well.

Analysis of Strengths and Needs

Over the school years Kenneth demonstrated strengths in several areas. Beginning in the elementary grades, he clearly showed critical thinking and problem-solving skills

with keen insights and sensitivity to people's reaction to him. Kenneth was also able to work with me in advancing his reading rate and comprehension to optimal levels. He possessed excellent fine motor skills and the ability to work productively on independent tasks and projects. Kenneth's key positive attribute was his caring and outreach to others in time of need with empathic listening and reassurance.

There were also areas of needs that Kenneth was able to recognize more fully in his middle school years. One need he recognized was to decrease distractions and focus more on classroom activities. Kenneth learned through consultation with me as his teacher that he required organizational and time management systems for course content. Kenneth's self-esteem and personal goals were, at times, too dependent on external reactions rather than internal confidence. He also recognized the need to build social awareness and communication skills for more productive interaction with peers, teachers, and parents.

This analysis of strengths and specific needs blended with Kenneth's background and challenges to produce a profile of possible options and strategies in adaptive learning decisions.

Adaptive Learning Strategies

At transitional points in Kenneth’s school experiences, factors were assessed and strategies suggested improving learning opportunities and social integration. The first adaptive experience occurred in grade three when I worked with Kenneth to assist him with learning activities and to help him seek necessary classroom modifications for improved learning access. In middle school, Kenneth began to acknowledge his physical difficulties as temporary and his learning/attention deficits as long-term, but adaptable through techniques, approaches and strategic resources. These alternatives and adaptations were usually initiated by his specialist during Kenneth's elementary school experiences. Strategies were suggested and applied through school contact situations. To assist in focusing attention and organization, strategies included time management charts,

reading tactics, progress journals, untimed tests, essay mapping, and note-taking formats. This dependency on external advocacy was initially productive but did not provide for Kenneth's sustained needs for independent learning and self-reliance.

In high school and particularly college, metacognitive (learning analysis) strategies were integrated with personal advising. Kenneth was then able to formulate creative solutions through self-assessment and strategic planning for improved learning access and social interaction.

Kenneth's transition from directed support activities to self-analysis and independent learning was gradual, but deliberate. In his early years of high school, Kenneth became aware of his short-term and long-range goals. At this time, Kenneth considered his continuing reliance on directed learning support and peer acceptance for self-esteem as a potential hindrance to successful independent learning.

In consultation with his learning advisor, Kenneth mapped out a plan of action to foster effective learning and social integration. He reached out to younger students in need and assisted them as a tutor. This was particularly helpful to Kenneth when he was at low points of acceptance and recognition by peers. He also developed personalized learning strategies for priority areas, piloted them, and discussed refinements with his advisor. These cooperative projects produced time lines, course charts, and self-assessment inventories that were useful to Kenneth and other students with similar needs. Kenneth's anger towards insensitive peers decreased and real friendships grew out of his providing assistance with fellow students.

An example of improved communication and self-advocacy was evident with a college professor. This professor unknowingly turned away from students when making key points in the classroom. This was particularly difficult for Kenneth with his hearing impairment. Kenneth calmly explained the situation to the professor and suggested modifications that were helpful to all students in the classroom.

Profile #3: Alexis (Student)

Background and Special Challenges

Alexis's early years were without major incident. Her pre-school years appeared to be developmentally normal. Alexis spoke and walked at an early age with evidence of very good motor coordination. By the time Alexis entered school, challenges surfaced in understanding numerical concepts, memorization, and abstract reasoning. These challenges continued through her school years and were most evident in math and science applications.

School Environment/Social Issues

Beginning in elementary school and continuing through most of her academic years, Alexis's ability to communicate with peers and teachers was considered a significant strength. She also exhibited talents in writing and athletics, however development of self-confidence was impeded by her difficulties in general memorization and test anxiety in math and science.

Alexis received support from learning specialists, private tutoring, and resource room services in public school during her elementary and middle grade years. She then attended a private high school where few special services were available. This private school environment required a transition in her personal adaptive learning and mentoring relationships.

Socially, Alexis expanded her communication skills in school and athletic activities to establish support networks. She was able to relate well with others and to talk freely about her concerns. Alexis was in turn able to help others in need.

Analysis of Strengths and Needs

During her school experiences Alexis was able to demonstrate several areas of strength. She was a highly motivated student with excellent communication and social networking skills. Alexis was also a talented athlete with group leadership abilities. Her

fine writing skills demonstrated clear insights and descriptive details. Alexis remained persistent in the pursuit of her goals despite setbacks.

Alexis was able to recognize her needs in consultation with teachers and advisors. She sought options for coping with short-term memory difficulties. Math and science content required alternative modes and support resources. Alexis also recognized the need to explore options in learning with her fellow students and teachers.

Adaptive Learning Strategies

Alexis learned to adapt her strengths and cope with her specific challenges. In cooperation with her learning advisor, strategies were formulated to address needs in testing and memorization. In middle school, untimed tests were initiated. Computer applications were employed for creating study guides and visual charts to improve memory tasks. Computer software and videos were also utilized to assist Alexis in math and science.

In high school a situation occurred that changed Alexis's perspective on her learning difficulties. A classroom teacher would not allow her to take untimed tests or utilize any alternative assessment modes. The teacher viewed this request as unfair to other students. Despite numerous attempts to explain her learning problems, Alexis became very frustrated and disappointed by this lack of flexibility. Following this incident, Alexis began to slip in her classroom performance. Some of her friends and teachers noticed this decline. A close friend, whom Alexis had helped with a personal problem, encouraged her to talk with a teacher who was also an academic advisor. Alexis gathered the courage to meet with this teacher and explain her situation. The advisor was sensitive to her plight and agreed to intercede, but only after Alexis had devised a reasonable plan for testing options. This mentoring relationship blended with self-advocacy to provide long-term solutions for addressing needs.

In college, her math and science problems became major factors conflicting with graduation requirements. In partnership with me as her learning advisor, classroom

professors, and peers; various resource services were tapped to meet this crisis. These support resources included tutoring, group study sessions, learning analysis, and reflective thinking that helped to separate past issues from directly interfering with current learning opportunities.

Through this combination of confidence building, resource support, and problem solving techniques, Alexis was able to overcome, for the first time, her math and science difficulties. This was a particularly satisfying experience for me as a professional-- to be able to coordinate with Alexis, the resource support and strategic planning for attainment of her graduation goals.

Profile #4: George (Student)

Background and Special Challenges

George's early childhood development appeared to be slightly delayed. He did not walk or speak as early as expected. His vocabulary was slow and did not expand at a rapid rate. However, George was intuitive and a very astute observer of the activities around him. It was evident by the early grades that George had significant reading, writing, and communication difficulties and he was eventually diagnosed as dyslexic.

George is a Latino student with a rich cultural background, who speaks English as a second language. Although not a direct hindrance, the language transition did interact with his dyslexia to manifest in a complex set of challenges. His academic performance, social integration, and personal fulfillment were affected by these challenges. George did learn to adapt through self-analysis, resource support, and alternative learning modes.

School Environment/Social Issues

George attended public schools through elementary, middle, and high school years. He received specialized tutoring and resource room support for most of his school experience. During George's school years he appeared frustrated in trying to keep up with other students in his class work. Teachers and his fellow students did not fully understand his perceptual difficulties and the reasonable options that were needed.

Socially, George is a warm and likable person. However, he had to select his friends carefully, because some of his peers were inappropriate in their behavior towards him (e.g. teasing, taunts, and over focusing on differences). Fellow students, and even teachers, sometimes referred to him as "slow"; "very different", or worse. This lack of acceptance led to immature social behavior and very limited networking with his peers. In high school, he found success in a vocational based program that integrated apprenticeship. This "hands-on" approach utilizing demonstrated skills was a very effective mode in which George was able to acquire mechanical skills. These successes helped to improve his self-esteem and general academic performance.

George enrolled in a two-year community college with a reduced course load in the first year. He was determined to get an associate's degree and manage an automotive repair business. It was at this point in time that George became better able to evaluate options, identify resource support, and to adapt his behaviors for productive learning and social awareness. This was accomplished through self-analysis in cooperation with his learning advisor, teachers, and trusted friends.

Analysis of Strengths and Needs

As part of his learning profile, George showed strengths in key areas. He demonstrated consistent motivation to learn and succeed. George was able to learn best by observing and modeling the skills and performance necessary to complete tasks. He worked cooperatively with others to achieve mutual goals and overcome difficulties.

Specific areas of need were also recognized. Improved expressive language and communication strategies were essential to help him cope with difficulties in learning and limited social contact. George also needed to practice positive interactive behaviors and to avoid conflicts.

Adaptive Learning Strategies

George utilized adaptive learning strategies to help compensate for his specific challenges due to dyslexia. Among the strategies and resources he employed were books-

on-tape; untimed tests; multi-sensory input; mapping out essays and charting out his schedule on assignments and priorities. These strategies were supported by individualized and small group instruction along with computer applications.

Effective transition to independent learning was realized through self-analysis and strategic planning, as well as modeling successful behaviors in skill performance. This was particularly productive in college when his challenges became more acute. In consultation with me as his advisor, George developed detailed plans of action. He worked cooperatively with his peers and joined study groups. A significant area of transitional progress was his willingness to negotiate with teachers on alternative testing and learning modalities. George became an avid self-advocate and when this was not completely successful he would discuss such issues with fellow students and advisors. This helped him to create a unified view on which priorities and options would be best to pursue.

George used his positive apprentice experience in vocational activities to communicate with teachers the need for demonstration in the modeling of concepts, skills and expectations. He was also able to teach other students the observational and mapping skills he learned through these modes. George was particularly helpful to me and our learning center personnel in assisting culturally diverse learners through language transition and social awareness. Collaboration with students and teachers on adaptive techniques was vital to George's successful learning skills and inclusion.

Synthesis

Keys to Transition and Models for Inclusion

Based on my reflections, observations, and research as a practitioner, the following transition factors and characteristics are highlighted as keys to successful adaptation, as demonstrated in the composite profiles. The profiled subjects analyzed strengths and limitations to affect change with practical solutions for successful transition. The profiled individuals are persistent despite adversity in setting goals and

tapping the necessary resources. They take direct personal control and primary responsibility for improved learning. Social outreach and networking are established to foster support, collaboration, and mentoring partnerships. In our work together, acknowledgment of their own disabilities is important in recognizing these differences as potential contributors to successful adaptation, rather than only as limitations. Creative solutions are accomplished through reflective thinking, analysis, and problem solving techniques.

Inclusive model elements emerge from this reflective study of successful practices to form a framework for further consideration and expansion. The identified elements are proposed as inclusive learning goals for integrated classroom curriculum. The model elements are outlined as follows

Reflection and analysis*:* utilize for all students and teachers to foster awareness of learning strengths, differences, and practical strategies for coping with difficulties. This examination of options is important to productive change and successful transition. Self-reflection and analysis should be an integral part of the learning experience in the classroom.

Adaptive learning/transition: identify skills, strategies, and resources to integrate and adapt for improved learning by all students in the classroom. Guide, mentor, and support the transition to more inclusive learning. As demonstrated by the profiled subjects, much can be learned from individuals who have successfully coped with special challenges.

Social awareness and collaboration: nurturing social networks is beneficial among students. Helping each other to reach goals is an interdependent process that boosts social awareness and self-esteem. Collaboration among a wide range of students creates opportunities for learning access in the school community. It is also vital to establish partnerships among teachers to promote student learning innovation and inclusive environments.

Self-Assessment with Creative Solutions: as evident in the selected profiles, self-assessment is an integral element of inclusive learning. The piloting and refining of options, strategies, and partnerships are essential to successful transition. Creating practical solutions based on cooperation and feedback is a productive means for inclusion. Facilitating and monitoring access to successful learning opportunities for all students includes self-analysis, reflection, and shared decision-making.

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