

Additional Qualifications Guidelines Feedback

The attached Ontario College of Teachers guideline, **Special Education-Learning Disability**, leading to an Additional Qualification has been developed to ensure that guidelines meet the needs of instructors and candidates. In some cases, practical or hands-on sections have been added to support theoretical considerations.

To aid the College in this process, a feedback form has been included. We appreciate your input:

1. What is your overall reaction to this guideline regarding relevance, appropriate content, references to required Ministry and other components?

Comments:

LDAO is very pleased to see that the College of Teachers is developing an AQ Course specifically on learning disabilities (LDs). You will note that we use the plural. Although the official special education identification is **Learning Disability**, the term **learning disabilities** better reflects the diversity of needs of these learners. Also, it is best to avoid using the term **learning disabled**, but rather refer to a learner **with** learning disabilities.

In 2001 LDAO, through the Ministry of Education funded Promoting Early Intervention Project, released an updated, research-based definition of learning disabilities. Although the Ministry has not changed their categories and definitions, many if not most of the school boards use the LDAO definition, so AQ students need to be aware of it.

The language used in the Ministry definition is out of date, so the reference to (eg. perceptual handicap; a brain injury; minimal brain dysfunction; dyslexia; developmental aphasia.) should be omitted in the following statement:

- having awareness of policy and/or legislation relevant to Special Education-Learning Disability ...

Instead it would make sense to reference the IPRC process and Regulation 181/98

Similarly, the following statement is misleading:

- understanding the range of conditions described as Learning Disability e.g., ADHD, Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Epilepsy, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Acquired Brain Injury, Hydrocephalus, Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida , ADHD, etc.

Dyslexia and dysgraphia are types of learning disabilities, but there is no consensus yet in the professional community on whether ADHD is a learning disability or a coexisting condition that frequently co-occurs with learning disabilities. It definitely should be referenced in some way, however.

Epilepsy, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Acquired Brain Injury, Hydrocephalus, Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida and also *Tourette Syndrome* and *Developmental Coordination Disorder* should be listed as conditions where learners **may have** learning disabilities. However, the conditions themselves are **not** learning disabilities.

- understanding that Learning Disability contains a range of student abilities as well as common needs: in social skills; in verbal and non-verbal communication; *and in restricted and repetitive interests or behaviours.*

'Restricted and repetitive interests or behaviours' is typical of individuals with ASDs such as Asperger Syndrome, not of learners with LDs, so this statement should be removed.

- understanding the that Learning Disability may contain a range of student behaviours such as outbursts, attention ,impulsive acts, aggression, motor *difficulties, clumsiness, self-control, anxiety, depression*

It should be explained that behaviours such as these may be found in **some** learners with learning disabilities, and may be a result of frustration.

Clumsiness and *motor difficulties* are not behaviours, and might be better listed with the needs in the next bullet:

- understanding the specific needs of learners with Learning Disability (e.g. memory, attention, processing in language, speed, perceptual-motor, phonological and psychological)

A list of the psychological processes from the LDAO definition would be good here.

2. Comment on how effective this guideline will be for the purpose of supporting and deepening teacher knowledge in the area of Learning Disability.

Comments:

Teacher knowledge in the area of Learning Disability needs to be based on current information, as outlined in the comments in the previous section.

Teachers need to have an understanding of the role of psychological assessment in programming for learners with LDs. This should include an understanding of the difference between identification and diagnosis.

Teachers should understand how the psychological assessment report can be used to design an individual program for a learner, based on their profile of strengths and needs, and how recommendations can be used in developing the IEP.

The Promising Practices Guide being developed through the OPA Student Assessment Project should help with making psychological assessment reports accessible and useful for teachers.

It is vital that teachers understand the difference between **accommodation** and **modification**. Most learners with LDs will need minimum modification of their curriculum outcomes, if they have appropriate accommodations.

Teachers will need to have a good knowledge of the range of assistive technologies that are available for learners with LDs, and an understanding of how to make use of technology to accommodate learner needs.

Transition planning is an important part of program planning and of IEP preparation. It should include planning for transition to postsecondary studies.

Awareness of the range of placements and programs should include a reference to the Provincial Demonstration Schools.

Information about Assessment and Evaluation needs to include discussion of the use of appropriate accommodations, including assistive technology.

Under Shared Support for Learners, parent associations that support families, e.g. the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, should be mentioned.

3. Do you think this guideline will provide appropriate foundation for teacher education in this subject? Please explain your response.

Comments

Teachers of learners with LDs need to be up to date on the latest research on evidence-based practice.

First of all, they should have access to the instructional strategies available through the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat.

They also need to have an understanding of approaches that have been demonstrated through research to be effective for learners who have different profiles of LDs. The Provincial Demonstration Schools can be a good resource.

It is important that the teachers learn how to develop and implement IEPs that are individualized to meet the needs of learners with LDs.

3. Please identify other components that should be included in the guidelines. Please specify, explaining your response.

Comments:

As outlined in more detail in previous sections:

- LDAO definition of learning disabilities
- Role of psychological assessments in programming
- Understanding accommodation vs. modification
- Use of assistive technology
- Transition planning for postsecondary

Under Additional Resources:

- Guidelines on Accessible Education, Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2004
- Shared Solutions: A Guide to Preventing and Resolving Conflicts Regarding Programs and Services for Students with Special Education Needs, EDU, 2007

Websites:

- Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, www.ldao.ca
- LD Online: www.ldonline.org/indepth
- International Dyslexia Association Ontario Branch: www.idaontario.com/

4. Do you have other comments or recommendations?

Comments:

There is a lot of good information in the guideline. The material could use some reorganization within the various headings, as well as updating of information about LDs and the additional items outlined and explained above. If all this is done you should have a very good AQ. Please feel free to contact LDAO with questions or comments.

