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Association of Ontario

The right to learn, the power to achieve

communiqué

THE PUBLICATION OF THE LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

SPRING 2017

Fidget Toys Aren't Just For Fidgeting Anymore



Understanding and
Supporting Social
Competence
in Kids with LD

Social Purpose Enterprises Propel the Message Home

LD@home Website Launched • ADHD Fog • Disclosure in the Workplace • More!

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Editor's Notebook

The Age-Irrelevant Society?



It's interesting to see how irrelevant age is starting to become. As boomers get older and society changes, people are starting to chart out new pathways for themselves. Not content to rest on their laurels, people are starting to branch out, take risks, and try on new skins for the old ceremony, as Leonard Cohen might have said.

It's not too late to try that return to school to complete that degree. It's not too late to reinvent yourself. It's not too late to tap into that passion that's been bubbling beneath the surface. A friend dear to me only discovered the alternative therapy reiki in his 60s and eventually turned that into a vehicle for helping others. After 40 years of wedded bliss and four children, a man in his late 60s woke up one day to realize his true sexuality. He spent the last 20 years of his life gleefully discovering an entirely new side of life he'd never experienced before.

The same applies to people with LD/ADHD. We all age and for many of us, the best years are just beginning!


Graham Lewis was well into his 40s when he conceived the idea of creating a concept for young offenders that eventually morphed into the social enterprise Klink coffee. There was a time when I

put social purpose enterprises into the same category as sheltered workshops. Back then I clearly didn't understand the difference and thought that the skills-building components associated with each were largely a waste of time. Boy, was I ever wrong. It wasn't until being inspired by the award-winning Red Propeller group that I decided to revisit the concept of social enterprises. It was at this point that I discovered the fact that social enterprises actually dated back a century and grew out of churches in the form of thrift stores. It was at this point when I learned about their close association with co-ops and the rich impact those institutions had on contributing to the Canadian economy. And I continue to be inspired by groups like Red Propeller which has identified a niche for itself and contributes to the social fabric with both its environmental sensitivity and its commitment to hiring people with barriers.

Speaking of hiring people, I'd like to welcome another late-bloomer, **Joanna Samuels** to the fold. Her article on Disclosure in the Workplace puts a fresh spin on a familiar topic but a necessary one. Joanna's enthusiasm and passion as a job developer for job seekers with disabilities and college instructor is legendary. It's a pleasure to have her

join us. The same applies to noted actor/playwright Rachael Lea Rickards, herself diagnosed later in life with ADHD. Perhaps best known for her role in the ridiculously successful *Da Kink in My Hair* a decade ago, Rickards has taken her career in entirely new directions as a playwright, social media personality and community leader. If you have a chance, be sure to check out the online gabfest *Real Talk with Rachael Lea* or the manly view platform, *Inside His Head*, both of which invert traditional conversation on its pointy little head. She's the subject of our In Person column this issue. Finally, contributor **Zoë Kessler** turned her later-life ADHD diagnosis into a tiny cottage industry, becoming a passionate spokesperson about women with the condition.

All these people and more await in our latest issue. So grab a cup of something good, sit down and join a determined group of inspirational folk who just don't quit, no matter what age they are.


Please remember that if someone with this condition ever summons the courage to try and talk to you. And remember that while the person is emptying their soul to you, that real active listening is an act of caring. 

This Issue We Were...

Aaron Bailey is currently an educational assistant in northern Yukon and a motivational speaker who shares his experiences and insights as a person living with LD/ADHD. **Jon Barry** is a Toronto writer. • **Owen Sound's Zoë Kessler** is an award-winning journalist, and speaker. She's also the author of a memoir, *ADHD According to Zoë - The Real Deal on relationships, Finding Your Focus & Finding*

Your Keys (New Harbinger Publications, 2013). She's currently the editor of *The Warton Echo* (www.wartonecho.com). • **Dr. Marjory Phillips** is the Director of the Integra Program at the Child Development Institute, the only accredited children's mental health agency in Canada to specialize in providing mental health services to children, youth and families with Learning Disabilities • **Toronto's**

Joanna Samuels is a job developer with Reena, part-time college instructor and author of the forthcoming book, *Letters to the Job Coach: Practical, No-Nonsense Advice From a Survivor of the Frontlines*.

• **Taru Virkamaki** is a writer, non-profit professional and job coach living in Toronto. 

Next Issue You Could...

Message FROM THE CEO

By Lawrence Barns, President and CEO



Can Kids With LDs Dream?

As I meet people from across the province, the first reaction to hearing their child has a Learning Disability (LD) is horror at the future implications. This isn't necessary. Now is the perfect time to face this challenge and still be successful. Let's be clear: while we may call these learning challenges a "disability," there's both positive and negative aspects to the label.

A student may fail and end up on the wrong side of the statistics without the proper supports. Students with LDs drop out more than other students (38% of high school drop outs in Ontario), and that often leads to unemployment (62% are unemployed a year after school) and in the worst case, incarceration. Nearly 40% in youth detention suffer from an LD. You may be thinking all this paints a rather gloomy picture

But this is only part of the picture, today more and more students with LDs are living their dreams, going to postsecondary education and forging careers. So how does a parent ensure they get the right resources to their kids and stop them from failing at school and fulfill their potential? What can be done to help them navigate towards their dream along with their LD?

There are a few keys you should be aware of.

Parental Support - In the field we talk about advocacy and that's exactly what a student will need from parents until they

find their own voice. Today, using an iPad or Chromebook in class may overcome a lot of the issues a student may face. If you think about it, doesn't your phone check your spelling? Maybe your car reads text messages to you while you're driving. Think about how powerful that modern technology is to a student who struggles to read or write. Schools however often need a parent to keep them on their toes. Teachers have varying degrees of acceptance about tech in the classroom. Some still think it's unfair to other students. But is wearing glasses unfair if you have poor vision?

Build Resilience - There will be struggles: LD will present some challenges for a child. It may mean longer hours on homework; it may mean extra tuition outside of class. It will almost certainly mean some setbacks along the journey. Teaching a child to carry on and rise to the challenges instead of being defeated by them is a key indicator of future success.


You're Not Alone - As a parent of two boys with LDs, I felt isolated when they were first diagnosed. I didn't know where to turn and while the Internet is a great source of information it can lead to finding conflicting advice. LDAO and its chapters are a great place to start. We've served Ontario for 53 years now and have a wealth of experience. Also seek the input of Special Education Resource Teachers (serts) within your child's school. They will have a lot of insight into what services

can be offered and tips on your home environment for learning.

Trial-and-Error should be expected - Every LD is different, and you cannot find a one size-fits-all solution, nor should you expect one. Try different approaches to issues until you find one that works. Some students will hate apps and prefer using highlighter and good old paper files to achieve the same task. It doesn't matter how; it matters that we find what works. So take the next point to heart!

Be Kind to Yourself and Your Child - As a parent my biggest regret was pushing through on homework tasks when I had a boy who was clearly distressed and tired. I felt he had to finish the task that was due tomorrow. Later I learned to tell teachers he could manage around 45 minutes of homework efficiently and not to send more. Once I realized his LD meant his concentration and output were different to his peers, I should have been kinder to both him and myself. Stress in a household does no one any good at all.

Lastly, remember the term "disability" means schools, universities and employers have duties to support that are legally enforceable if required and are protected under the Human Rights Code. As a last resort that protection and duty may be what makes the difference.

Now go help your kids dream! 

The ADHD Files

ADHD Fog: A Confession

By Zoë Kessler, BA, B.Ed.

“Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. My last confession was...”

I'm not Catholic, but that whole confession thing speaks to me right now. Let's try it like this:

Forgive me, Dear Readers, for I have neglected my column. My last article was a long time ago and these are my issues:

- I've been binge-watching *Coronation Street* and reading novels until the wee hours of the morning
- I've caved to my Facebook addiction until I was so sick of cats knocking stuff off shelves I wanted to kill somebody
- I've stopped meditating, playing bass, and doing yoga
- I haven't followed through on a zillion ideas and have forgotten what most of them were
- I completely forgot my mission-critical goals and projects
- I've become depressed and despondent

I am truly sorry I lost myself in a black hole. I have no idea where I've been.

There is no priest to forgive me. No ADHD coach to absolve me of my descent into ADHD hell. I had to rescue myself. And here's what I discovered:

- I didn't meditate, do yoga, or practice bass because I had no privacy
- Without daily privacy I'm an irritable, nervous, crazy person who sits in her room eating chips and watching British soaps
- I need to fill my emotional and spiritual well on a regular basis or I'll fall into an empty well

- Being unproductive, for me, is depressing, disorienting, and self-esteem crushing

When I finally realized that I hadn't been doing the things I needed to do to manage my ADHD and mood, I made changes. My boarder (who was home 24/7) moved out and I regained my privacy.



This helped.

But the truth is, my entire last year is mostly a blur partly because I went off my ADHD medication a while back. But then I was shocked when I realized I'd been off my medication for over a year. Hadn't it been only a few months?

A trip to my family doctor and the decision was made.

In Spring, I went back on my medication. Instantly, it felt like a fog had lifted.

When I told my friend with ADHD that I'd felt like I'd spent the past year in a fog, he said, "That sounds awful."

I don't see it that way. Losing the first 47 years, now *that* was awful. But so much has changed for the positive.

Off meds, I discovered that I'd learned a lot since my late-in-life diagnosis at 47. I was no longer as verbally impulsive; my friendships and part-time work remained stable. But moving my main life and work goals forward had been a Sisyphean task.

Still, even three weeks back on my meds, I'm dragging my butt. I've started to become more productive again, but I'm still exhausted. Today I learned the possible reason: a wonky thyroid. Perhaps it's not just the ADHD that's been holding me back over the past year.

Imagine that.

Beyond Social Skills:



Understanding and Supporting Social Competence in Children with Learning Disabilities

By Dr. Marjory Phillips

WHAT IS SOCIAL COMPETENCE?

Social competence requires more than just social skills; it is a complex and interconnected set of skills that enables us to navigate social interactions and initiate and maintain relationships with others (Stichter et al, 2012).

Social competence reflects three areas of functioning, including:

- 1. Cognitive:** understanding social rules, being able to understand another's perspective, and taking in, remembering and expressing ideas to others
- 2. Emotional:** being able to manage emotions, matching 'energy' or level of emotion to the social situation
- 3. Behavioral:** using social skills effectively and age-appropriately, such as taking turns, making eye contact, sustaining a conversation, negotiating conflict

WHY DO WE NEED SOCIAL COMPETENCE?

Why is it important to develop good social competence? Social competence is a protective factor in good mental health (Alduncin et al, 2014). It helps us to develop strong social supports and to work effectively with others. More and more, we live in a complex and connected world, and the ways in which we connect are increasingly fast paced and fragmented. The challenges of social media, living away from extended relatives and familiar communities, having to form new social supports, and having to work with groups of people, all add to the need for high levels of

social competence. We know that individuals who struggle with social competence are more likely to experience difficulties in forming lasting and supportive relationships, or may have poorer outcomes in mental health & wellbeing as adults. Individuals with better social competence achieve better career success (Amdurer et al, 2014).

LEARNING DISABILITIES AND SOCIAL COMPETENCE

75% of children with learning disabilities (LD) struggle with social competence (Kavale & Forness, 1996; Milligan et al, 2015). Thinking about the impact of LDs, this makes sense. For example, individuals whose LDs reflect language processing difficulties might have trouble interpreting sarcasm. "Reading" body language is harder if one has difficulties making sense of what you see (visual-perceptual processing). Difficulties with memory, attention or processing speed can make it harder to track a group conversation or to participate in a social group. Lastly, difficulties with executive functioning, such as controlling impulses or being flexible and shifting ideas, can also impede social relationships.

What might this look like? Each child's social competence abilities may differ. Some children may interrupt others, monologue (not allowing others to talk), or may be too silly. Others may have trouble letting go of an idea, can't compromise, or may be seen as too bossy. Some children have trouble taking social risks and initiating conversation, and may prefer to stay on the edge of social interactions.



WHAT IS THE IMPACT FOR CHILDREN WITH LDS?

Children with LDs often develop social competence at a slower rate than their peers, and the problem compounds over time. It can be harder to make or keep friends, and these children may not have the same opportunities at an early age to learn how to negotiate having a fight with a best friend or figuring out how to apologize for a social misstep. By adolescence, navigating social relationships are even more complex. Children and youth with LDs are at greater risk for bullying and peer victimization (Mishna, 2003), social rejection (Bryan, Burstein and Ergul, 2004), and loneliness (Valas, 1999). They may stop trying to engage with others and may avoid social situations or may focus on computer games as a way to interact. This can lead to a 'vicious cycle' in which these children miss out on opportunities to learn and develop more effective social



competence, thus further isolating them and having an adverse impact on self-esteem (Sideris, 2007).

WHAT CAN HELP?

We know that children with LDs need more time, more direct teaching, and supported opportunities to practice social competence skills in a safe environment. Ross Greene writes that 'kids do well if they can' and we need to understand the lagging social competence skills that might be getting in the way of effective interpersonal relationships. The first step is to figure out what might be underlying the child's particular social struggles. Is it a problem in self-regulation? Is it an information processing problem? Is it anxiety and a reluctance to initiate a social conversation? Or a combination of all of these factors?

Some simple strategies to consider:

1. Narrating: Some children do not know how to interpret a social situation or may not know what to do or say. Tactfully pulling the child aside to interpret the situation and coach the child in the moment can be helpful. For example, 'Susan was being sarcastic when she said she loves doing homework for four hours.'

2. Conversation skills: Directly teach the child how to share information in a conversation and practice following up a statement with a related question. E.g. 'I played Minecraft last night. Do you know that game?'

3. Conflict resolution: Help the child to become aware when they may have hurt someone's feelings or made a social 'misstep' by explaining the situation and the observed behavior (e.g., when you took over the game and changed the rules, that was frustrating for Johnny, who made a mad face and then didn't want to play anymore). Teach the child how to 'repair' by apologizing, and practice the skills.

For more information about social competence for children and youth with learning disabilities, please contact Dr. Marjory Phillips at the Integra Program, Child Development Institute (mphilips@childdevelop.ca) 

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A TOOL NOT A TOY

**Fidget toys
are not just an anchor
– for some,
they can be a life saver**

I do it in school, in meetings, in conversations, at conferences, during presentations, and I even do it in bed... I fidget all the time!

By Aaron Bailey

I fidget all the time! When it comes to having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) combination type: inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity - fidgeting is an essential strategy for me to succeed in this world. However, this strategy has not always been viewed as a positive way to release my energy and help me learn. Parents, teachers, and friends throughout my life have asked me to stop fidgeting, have taken away my fidget toys (or whatever I'm fidgeting with for that matter), and have punished me for fidgeting. I have experienced this personally, and I have also seen it firsthand with parents, teachers and day care providers. People are continually asking kids to stop fidgeting and "listen". Little did we know that these kids are listening when they fidget.

Researchers at the University of California (UC) Davis MIND Institute found that physical activity with people with ADHD correlates to better cognitive abilities. Their study revealed "participants who moved more intensely exhibited substantially

better cognitive performance". I've had the privilege of working with a teacher at a rural school in northern Yukon, who not only lets, but encourages her students to fidget. Students use Thera bands underneath their desks for their "busy feet"; they grab stuffed toys from the "stuffy box" for certain parts of the class; and they even have weights at the back of the class for "body breaks" whenever needed. The teacher provides enough fidgets in her classroom to make me giddy! What stands out to me is that she reminds her students to use them as a "tool not a toy", ultimately helping them to engage in their learning and empowering them to know that if they need to fidget when they learn, that is perfectly fine.

Julie Schweitzer, professor of psychiatry and director of the UC Davis ADHD Program states that teachers and parents should not ask kids to "sit still" and should not be asking them to stop fidgeting. "Let them move while they are doing their work or other challenging cognitive tasks. It may be that the hyperactivity we see



Figure 1



Figure 2

in ADHD may actually be beneficial at times. Perhaps the movement increases their arousal level, which leads to better attention.”

Dr. Robert Silvestri, lead researcher at the Northern Assessment and Resource Centre (NOARC) confirms this research and explains the neurology of ADHD by explaining the connections in the brain. He explains that the limbic centre sends messages to the frontal lobe such as fight or flight, when to eat, when to breath, and the regulation of emotions. This is described as the “executive part of the brain”. Dr. Silvestri explains the frontal lobe as the CEO of a business, essentially making the ultimate decisions: “yes, I want to do that” or “no, I don’t want to do that”. However, the executive functioning in the brain of someone with ADHD is underactive and messages are not being transferred appropriately. As Dr. Silvestri states, the frontal lobe is “not picking up those messages appropriately and they talk to each other via a chemical called dopamine.” When students with ADHD are sitting in class and listening, our limbic centre is telling us that we need to get up and move. Our frontal lobe is supposed to “inhibit” that thought and say: “nope, we are sitting still and listening”. Due to the deficient dopamine levels in our brains, that connection isn’t being made. For example, students with hyperactive ADHD will fidget, squirm, or even get out of their chair. Students with inattentive ADHD may start day dreaming, or stare off into space. Brain scans on students with ADHD have found that when students begin to fidget, day dream, or disrupt other students, they receive more dopamine, which actually helps their brains function better. Therefore when students fidget, they are searching for that dopamine connection through their environment.

When students begin to fidget it is because they are trying to self-regulate so that they are able to stay in class and focus. Self regulation is described as “the ability to monitor and control our own behavior, emotions, or thoughts, altering them in accordance with the demands of the situation” (J.L Cook & Greg Cook 2014). As a person with ADHD, I can attest that that is exactly what I do. I bring my bag of fidget toys with me wherever I go because I know that I will not be able to sit still for 5-10 minutes. Inevitably when that time comes, I am ready with an arsenal of fidget toys that help me self-regulate and concentrate on the task at hand (figure 1).

Now keep in mind that this is coming from a 26-year-old man. Imagine how difficult it is for younger students to not get distracted by their fidgets or distract others with their fidgets. That is why I love the quote “tool not a toy”. If we, as educators, parents, social workers, or anyone working with people with ADHD, can remember ourselves that fidgeting is a useful tool, and remind students how to appropriately use their fidgets, then it can be a game changer.

It seems like this information is starting to spread as more and more companies are designing fidget toys (or should I say fidget tools), for “the fidgeter in your family”. One exciting tool that is coming out is called the “fidget cube”, a small cube with different fidget tools designed on each side (Figure 2), which I will clearly be ordering!

Not only are companies designing tools specifically for people who fidget, but organizations are starting to speak up about how some students learn in different ways. At one of my speaking engagements, I was asked to pose the following question to the students: “What does it look like when you are engaged in your learning?” Personally, this question is simple to answer. Fidgeting is exactly what it looks like when I am fully engaged in my learning and my education. As fidgeters, we need to be comfortable with the fact that we have to move when we are learning and we need to be comfortable telling others.

Some people may find it difficult to understand the necessity of fidgeting, whether they find it annoying or think that we aren’t listening. We need to be mindful that when students fidget, they are self-regulating and searching for that extra dopamine boost so that they can appropriately function in class. Remind your students how to appropriately fidget and come up with a plan together so that both of you are on the same page.

Nothing highlights this better than a quote from my wife. We are getting for a date and I hear her giggle to herself in the other room and she says to me: “You know you’re married to someone with ADHD when you have 3 fidget toys in your purse!” 🌀

Red is the New Black

By Carter Hammett



Despite its humble thrift store origins a century ago, social purpose enterprises have been gaining ground in recent years as a viable form of both employment and skills training. Now, a Toronto-based recycling operation is taking things in a different direction with a new twist on an old model.

When Graham Lewis stepped up to accept the award for Business Achievement Employer of the Year, from the Job Opportunity Information Network back in December 2016, it came as something of a surprise.

In business less than a year, Red Propeller has been making a name for itself in a number of ways. As an innovative recycler of materials others have yet to consider; as Canada's only dedicated VHS tape recycler, and as an employer committed to hiring people with barriers, including learning disabilities (LDs) and ADHD.

"We're able to take a slower road to profit and we do that with a social mission we stand by," says Lewis.

This is good news for people with learning disabilities (LDs) and ADHD, since Red Propeller is an employer that places emphasis on working with the person's strengths and possibilities, rather than their limitations.

I've always said that job seekers with LDs go from the crisis of having no job to the crisis of *having* a job. What this means is that, although they may present well to employers, keeping the job

becomes a different matter. As an invisible disability which the employee might not even be aware of, issues like inconsistent work performance, time management and learned helplessness may play a role. Furthermore, classic LD issues like executive functioning may present problems with self-regulation; auditory memory may be a concern when receiving tasks or remembering names. Issues like this, combined with the impulsivity and/or inattentiveness of ADHD can make maintaining a job extremely difficult, especially if the person hasn't been assessed or has chosen not to disclose their disability.

"We do that with a social mission we feel has been lost in society through automation, and that's human equity," says Lewis. "Human equity is the ability to see the good in someone irrespective of the barrier they possess or are perceived to have."

"It doesn't matter if the person has a learning disability or an ABI or seizures...they possess lots of other qualities."

Although the company has for-profit goals, Red Propeller is probably best described as a social purpose enterprise (SPE) or social entrepreneurship. For the uninitiated, the Toronto Enterprise



Graham Lewis
Red Propeller

Fund describes SPEs as “a business operated by a charity or non-profit organization that sells goods and/or services in the market place for the dual purpose of generating income and achieving a social, cultural and/or environmental mission.”

Indeed, the concept of social enterprise has existed in various forms and concepts for decades. Thrift stores operated by various charities across the world have been a key source of revenue generation for over a century. Hostels are another example of this. A different spin on the concept evolved during the 1980s when alternative businesses began to dot the horizon as a means of teaching consumer-survivors, homeless people and street youth, employability skills. While the number of SPEs is unknown, a conservative estimate would be about 25,000 and these employ thousands of people across the country.

The concept has proven beneficial to people with LD/ADHD on a global scale. And with crowdfunding, Kickstarter campaigns and the evolution of the shared economy (Uber, Airbnb among others) social entrepreneurship appears to be a concept whose time has finally arrived. When you think about the disproportionate number of entrepreneurs with LD/ADHD—Virgin’s Richard Branson and Apple’s Steve Jobs among them—it makes perfect sense to apply the model: the idea only becomes more fortified.

In London, UK, the social enterprise Goma Collective, which exists to foster creative business ideas, partnered with local caterer and rapper Loyle Carner and created a cooking school specifically for youth with ADHD with positive results. Meanwhile over in Spain, the Barcelona-based social enterprise Change Dyslexia gathers researchers globally to improve opportunities for people with LD. One of their most notable projects is a “dyslexia detector” designed to combat school dropout. Another effort is a gaming app called Piruletras that helps children with reading and writing.

Closer to home, Red Propeller is giving people with barriers experience in a full warehouse setting. The concept began with the idea of recycling old VHS tapes and Project Get Reel was born. The supply of tapes, which are contained in a shell of polypropylene, is not exhaustive so Lewis and partners started sniffing out other recycling opportunities, eventually settling on baby car seats as the recycling item of choice.

“We realized that car seats are also made of polypropylene so we decided to take these apart and find a use for the parts that we couldn’t recycle,” he says.

The shell is granulated and can be recycled into products including chopping blocks, ping pong paddles and even furniture. The concept appears to have taken off with Red Propeller operating a recycling program that’s approved by the Ministry of the Environment.

Lewis prefers to refer to Red Propeller as a social franchise model rather than a social enterprise. That’s because the concept’s being spun off into a non-profit organization with the launch of Green Propeller.

“We’ve created Green Propeller and removed ourselves from the equation. The Learning Enrichment Foundation (LEF), which houses Red Propeller, has over 300 members who learned of the NGO plan at LEF’s most recent AGM.

“All we’ve done is license Green Propeller,” says Lewis. “Our board of directors is no relation to Red Propeller.”

The idea is born from good stock, since Lewis is perhaps best-known as the founder of Klink Coffee, which has proven to be a successful social enterprise for people working their way through the Canadian justice system.

And with plans to expand first provincially in the next year, nationally within the next three years, the propellers show no signs of slowing down.

“We work with all people that others overlook. Employers are missing out on some of the most grounded individuals who give you so much. From my perspective we’re a for-profit employer,” says Lewis. “The business principles we’ve developed will stand on their own.” 🌀



LD and LDAO News

LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP BREAKFAST: LDAO'S Flagship Event Turns 10

It's hard to believe that LDAO's annual Learning and Leadership Awareness Breakfast reached its decade milestone on March 8.

A crowded room of celebrants at the Fairmont Royal York hotel burst into a well-deserved round of applause at the news just before keynote speaker Dr. Kenny Handelman was introduced.

Handelman, a well-known psychiatrist, author and ADHD expert spoke about the complex relationship between LDs and Mental Health.

Opening his speech with a familiar but grim PowerPoint slide that stated "Whether I Try or Don't, I Fail," Handelman went on to say that kids go on a downward spiral because of repeated failures as well as the inability of the school system to detect LDs early enough. "The school system is essentially like a factory developed for 90% of learners. If you are in that 90% you come out happy," he said. If not, you may find yourself on that downward spiral.

Using a Bio-Psycho-Social approach that's more holistic and responsive to the child's needs Handelman said the biggest




challenge that kids with LDs and Mental Health issues face is stigma." Can we help build an upward momentum?" he asked.

"We want to help give kids to build their own momentum."

"Imagine if you had asthma and people just said, 'breathe harder.'

Fortunately, some of these issues can be addressed through multi-pronged approach that includes early identification, psychoeducation (including life skills) family supports and school resources.

Attendees were treated to a mouthwatering breakfast and interacted with roving volunteers who received bids towards an incredible range of prizes that included everything from superior bottles of wine to a roundtrip for two to any Westjet location.

LDAO would like to thank its many event sponsors, including Scotiabank, C.J. Graphics, Ernst and Young LLP, Heathbridge Capital Management, Cogeco, Fiera Capital Corporation and the Jackman Foundation among a host of others for once again making this a successful event. 

LD@home: New Website With Free Resources

In February, LDAO launched a new website, LD@Home. Jam-packed with resources for parents, students and families dealing with LDs.


Whether it is the inspiring podcast with LDSO board member Jay Mandarino or a Video on initial diagnosis with an LD, or a success story of a student who has overcome the odds, this easily accessible platform houses them all.

With support for the first phase generously provided by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the project's vision is to offer education and resources to assist people on their LD journey while providing a safe space to connect with a constellation of people across the province. Phase One will focus on supporting the earlier

developmental stages of the LD journey through elementary school for both parents and youth.

The service will follow the model already available to support educators at www.LDatSchool.ca. The use of online delivery will mean no one in Ontario will be geographically isolated from tools to help increase their success in living with a learning disability.

The Ontario Trillium Foundation's Seed grants program has been designed to enable non-profit organizations across the province to take a new idea and pilot it within their organization or community. For more information, visit www.otf.ca

Although the web site is still in its "beginning stages", it is already growing by leaps and bounds. Make sure you drop by regularly! 




THANK YOU KAREN QUINN: 38 Years of Service Lead to Well-Earned Retirement

It is with mixed emotions that we say goodbye to the longest serving member of the LDAO staff team, Karen Quinn, our Director of Operations. Karen has been part of LDAO for nearly 38 years and has served in a number of capacities during her long and distinguished tenure. As 2016 drew to a close, Karen decided it was the right time to move on to a new phase of her life, take some vacation she hadn't used and start a fresh year with a clean slate.

LDAO is grateful for Karen's many years of dedicated service, and all of the staff, board,

chapter staff and members who dealt with Karen will, I am sure, join us in wishing her a long and exciting retirement. Despite a number of huge challenges to the association across the years, Karen always made sure that LDAO moved through them and grew from them. She will be missed by a great many people. We also acknowledge the great support over the years of Karen's husband Bob, particularly his support of the LDAO Corporate Breakfasts.


Thank you Karen and very best wishes for the future from everyone you supported at LDAO and beyond! 

HELPING MORE CHILDREN AND YOUTH ACCESS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES: Province Expanding Services to Better Reach Rural, Remote and Underserved Communities

Ontario is helping children and youth in communities across the province connect to local mental health services more easily by expanding online, smartphone and video resources that can provide immediate, specialized support when and where it is needed.

The province is supporting Kids Help Phone's Resources Around Me online tool, which helps children and youth access mental health programs and services in their communities through the app on a smartphone, computer or mobile device. The tool instantly connects young people across Ontario to information on mental health services close to home.

Ontario has also enhanced its Tele-Mental Health service, which provides children and youth, especially those living in rural and remote communities, with better access to specialized mental health consultations through videoconferencing. These supports will increase the program's treatment capacity to up to 4,000 consultations per year.

Helping more young people access mental health services and supports is part of our plan to help all children and youth in Ontario thrive and reach their full potential. 


Public Policy Roundup



GOVERNMENT OF CANADA ACCESSIBILITY CONSULTATION

Government of Canada is developing new accessibility legislation to promote equality of opportunity and increase the inclusion and participation of Canadians who have disabilities or functional limitations. A consultation process this winter, with in-person group sessions and an online survey, addressed the following issues:

- feedback on the overall goal and approach;
- whom it should cover;
- what accessibility issues and barriers it should address;
- how it could be monitored and enforced;
- when or how often it should be reviewed;
- how and when to report to Canadians on its implementation; and
- how to raise accessibility awareness more generally and support organizations in improving accessibility.


LDAO submitted a response to the survey questions, which you can read on our website at www.ldao.ca/ldao-services/public-policy-advocacy/responses-and-letters/ 

GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO COMMITS TO DEVELOP AN EDUCATION ACCESSIBILITY STANDARD

David Lepofsky of the AODA Alliance has been advocating for the development of an education accessibility standard for several years. On November 21, 2016,


the AODA Alliance released a Discussion Paper on what an education standard should include (www.aodaalliance.org/strong-effective-aoda/11212016.asp) and on December 5, 2016 it publicly released an open letter from twenty-two disability organizations to Premier Wynne, calling for the enactment of an Education Accessibility Standard.

On December 5, 2016, on the floor of the Legislature, Premier Kathleen Wynne responded to an opposition member's question by stating, "We recognize that there's more to be done, and there will be an education standard developed."

LDAO is watching for first steps in the process, such as the creation of an Education Standards Development Committee. 


AODA REVIEW OF INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS STANDARD

The Information & Communications Standard, Part 2 of ONTARIO REGULATION 191/11, Integrated Accessibility Standards, is in the process of being reviewed under provisions of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, which require review of the standards after 5 years.

Diane Wagner represented LDAO on the original Information and Communications Standards Development Committee from 2007 to 2011, and has been asked to sit on a new Information and Communications Standards Development Committee, beginning with an orientation session on March 29, 2017. There will be a public consultation in six months. 

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION CONSULTATION ON STUDENT WELL-BEING

As part of its Well-Being Strategy for Education, the Ministry of Education has been holding consultations on student well-being. In the fall/winter of 2016-17, they consulted with community and education partners, including school boards, students and parents, to better understand what student well-being looks like, what is needed to support it, and how to measure progress.

The consultation period closed on March 19, 2017, and the ministry will now analyze the feedback received and determine the next steps for supporting student well-being. You can read LDAO's response to the consultation questions on our website at www.ldao.ca/ldao-services/public-policy-advocacy/responses-and-letters/ 

Ask the Expert

Employment Issues

Disclosing your Disability in the Job Interview

By Joanna Samuels



Dear Joanna,

I'm a person living with mental health issues and dyslexia. It's created a few gaps in my resume and work history. I'm eager to return to the working world in my field of marketing and communications.

Should I disclose my disability to an employer in my application and job interview and how should I do this?

Signed: Difficulty in Disclosure

Dear Disclosure,

One of the most challenging aspects of living with an invisible disability is deciding when, or if, you should disclose, your disability to a stranger during a job interview. There are pros and cons to this. Employment counsellors suggest the following:

1) THE RISKS OF DISCLOSING

Analyzing the risk factors from the employer's perspective is critical. If you disclose, you take a chance that you may not be hired; that you may be labelled and face discrimination. Unless your disability could put you or someone else at risk on the job, it's a matter of personal choice whether you tell an employer about it. If safety is an issue, you'll need to disclose your disability at an appropriate time. Think about these questions:

- If you do decide to disclose, will this information help or hurt your chances of getting or keeping the job?
- How will the interviewer react?
- If the disability's under control, is there a reason to disclose?

- Do your coping strategies allow you to meet the job requirements?
- If you know you can't perform some of the duties of the job description because of your disability, would disclosure and requesting accommodations help you get the job?

2) BENEFITS OF DISCLOSING

If a company is federally regulated (like the banks, telecom and transportation), they will have employment equity requirements. These firms are interested in diversity and actively hire candidates with disabilities. Therefore, it might be a good opportunity to disclose that you have a disability (to remove any possible preconceived bias, don't mention the nature of the disability) in an application, cover letter and/or the interview. Sometimes employers value your openness and how you manage your disability.

3) LOOK FOR EMPLOYERS WHO FOCUS ON YOUR ABILITIES AND POTENTIAL

Make sure your skills and experience are a good match for the role and that the work meets your needs. For example, if you like to work from home sometimes, apply to companies and organizations that offer this possibility. Figure out what you need to succeed at a job.

4) YOU CAN ALWAYS DISCLOSE LATER

In an interview, if you don't disclose your disability, the employer won't know that

you need accommodations. Once the job is offered, you can discuss accommodations with the employer; make sure you are clear and reasonable about the accommodations that you require to be the best employee possible.

5) DISCLOSE DURING THE JOB INTERVIEW

Be concise and prepared to explain the gaps in your resume whether or not you decide to disclose. For example, you can say something like: "for the last three years, I've been dealing with a medical issue, but it's under control now and I'm ready to work." Legally, the interviewer can only ask questions about your disability that relate directly to the requirements of the job (such as how much weight you can lift, or whether you can stand on your feet all day). However, according to Canadian and Ontario employment law, it is illegal to ask candidates about their disabilities. There is more in-depth information on this issue at www.ohrc.on.ca.

At the end of the day, disclosure is a very personal issue. Generally, it's recommended that you disclose only after you've secured the job. That way, you can't be fired for having a disability. Not only that, but you'll have time to be able to prove yourself on the job, build alliances and learn which parts of the job are challenging for you. When these come up, research accommodations that might enable you to be more productive. Consider swapping parts of the job you find difficult with someone else. Or using adaptive technology for reading and writing. There's dozens of accommodations out there and many are low cost. Once you have a disclosure plan in place you'll feel much more comfortable

Elsewhere

News and views collected from around the world



UNITED STATES



People with Dyslexia Show a Difference in Sensory Processing

Neuroscientists at MIT and Boston University have discovered that a basic mechanism underlying sensory perception is deficient in individuals with dyslexia, according to study published December 21 in *Neuron*. The brain typically adapts rapidly to sensory input, such as the sound of a person's voice or images of faces and objects, as a way to make processing more efficient. But for individuals with dyslexia, the researchers found that adaptation was on average about half that of those without the disorder.

The difference may explain some of the challenges people with dyslexia experience, such as discerning speech in a noisy environment and learning to read. "Adaptation is something the brain does to help make hard tasks easier," says first author Tyler Perrachione, assistant professor of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences at Boston University, who completed this research as a graduate student and post-doctoral fellow at MIT. "Dyslexics are not getting this advantage."

Perrachione, who has a background in linguistics, wanted to investigate the theory

that reading difficulties in dyslexia come from difficulties in associating sounds with written words. Working in the lab of lead investigator John Gabrieli, professor of Brain and Cognitive Science at MIT, he decided to investigate early, fundamental processes in the brain that could make this association difficult. "Part of the mystery of dyslexia is that the brain doesn't have an area that evolved for reading," says Gabrieli.

They zoomed in on the process of rapid neural adaptation. The researchers used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to examine the brains of adults with and without dyslexia as they listened to voices. In some cases, the same voice spoke a series of words; in others, different voices spoke each word.


Brains typically adapt to a single, consistent voice within a second or two, but they don't adapt to many different voices. As brains adapt, the fMRI measures of brain activity in relevant brain areas drop.

Individuals without dyslexia adapted to a consistent voice and not to multiple voices. But for dyslexics, brain activity remained

high in both cases, suggesting that they did not adapt as much. Dyslexics with better reading skills showed greater adaptation levels. "Brains typically tune in and figure out what is consistent about a voice," says Perrachione. "We saw much less adaptation in those with dyslexia group compared to typical readers."

Perrachione and Gabrieli decided to look at adaption to visual stimuli, too. They recruited another group of individuals with and without dyslexia and examined adaptation to images of written words, faces, and objects, either in a series of different images or repeated images. Again they saw much less adaptation in participants with dyslexia.

The reduced adaptation was observed in the regions of the brain responsible for processing the stimuli in question. "This suggests that adaptation deficits in dyslexia are general, across the whole brain," says Perrachione.

Retrieved March 2017,
[www.sciencedaily.com/
releases/2016/12/161221125517.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/12/161221125517.htm) 



What is it Really Like to Have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder?

The Institute of Mental Health has brought together researchers, clinicians and people with lived experience of ADHD to help promote better understanding of the condition at its annual engagement conference.

Dyslexia affects an estimated 8.5 million school children and one in six Americans in some form. The House passed the *READ Act* last October with unanimous support and earlier this month approved a Senate amendment, sending the bill to the president's desk for his signature.

At the event on Friday February 3, CANDAL, the Institute's Centre for ADHD and Neurodevelopmental Disorders Across the Lifespan, showcased an 'in my shoes experience' developed by Shire and

supported by CANDAL members Professor David Daley and Blandine French.

Professor David Daley, who has been leading the research, said: "Promoting public understanding about neurodevelopmental disorders is one CANDAL's key aims. 'In my shoes' is a live action virtual reality experience that allows individuals to enter the world of three different people with ADHD and experience how it feels to have that condition."

This innovative experience helps people fully understand what it is like to have ADHD so that they can see the individual behind the disorder.

It aims to:

- Highlight the reality of living with ADHD

- Challenge perceptions about ADHD
- Showcase everyday patient experiences
- Build empathy for individuals living with ADHD

The Institute of Mental Health, partnership between the University of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust.

Further information is available on the Institute of Mental Health website at www.institutemh.org.uk

Retrieved March 7/17:
<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/news/pressreleases/2017/february/what-is-it-really-like-to-have-attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd.aspx>



Low Birth Weight Babies At Higher Risk For Mental Health Problems Later In Life

Babies born with extremely low birth weight are not only at risk for physical problems but are also more likely to experience mental health problems later in life, according to an analysis of research conducted over nearly 30 years.

"Our findings provide evidence that individuals born at extremely low birth weight are at higher overall risk for psychological difficulties than their normal birth weight peers. These difficulties most frequently involve attention, anxiety-related and social problems," said lead author Karen Mathewson, PhD, McMaster University. The study appears in the journal *Psychological Bulletin*, which is published by the American Psychological Association.

Preterm births have increased dramatically over the last two decades and now make

up about 8 percent of infants born in the United States and Canada. Because of improvements in recent decades in neonatal intensive care, babies who are born at extremely low birth weight (less than 1,000 grams or just over 2 pounds) have a greater chance of surviving than ever before.

Mathewson and her colleagues conducted meta-analyses using 41 studies that followed 2,712 individuals who were extremely low birth weight babies and 11,127 who were normal birth weight babies. The studies took place over a 26-year period (1990-2016) in 12 different countries, including the United States and Canada.

Extremely low birth weight babies were found to be at increased risk for particular mental health problems, beginning in

childhood and extending at least into their 30s. As children, they were significantly more likely to have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in almost every study included in the review. Adolescents were also at greater risk for ADHD and social problems. Adults born with extremely low birth weight reported significantly higher levels of anxiety, depression and shyness, as well as significantly lower levels of social functioning.

These risks did not seem to vary according to where or when extremely low birth weight survivors were born, or whether they had significant neurosensory impairments, such as cerebral palsy or blindness. All of the studies were from developed countries from North America, Europe or Australia.

Retrieved, March 30 2016

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LDAO depends on the generosity of individuals, corporations, foundations and special event functions to support the work of the organization. We wish to thank everyone for their support, whether it is through our online presence on CanadaHelps, United Way and Corporate Employee Donations programs or general corporate and foundation donations. To those corporations, foundations and individuals who supported our March 2017 Corporate and Leadership Breakfast, a huge thank you for opening your hearts and wallets to make this event the most successful ever in its tenth year. And as always, the Corporate Breakfast Volunteer Committee and the Scotiabank volunteers did a superb job in presenting a great event.

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In Person

RACHAEL-LEA RICKARDS

By Jon Barry



“If You Love What You Do, You Just Stay Motivated”

Rachael-Lea Rickards is an actress, writer and theatre performer who was one of the creative forces behind Global TV's *Da Kink in My Hair*. She is also the director of community engagement at Epilepsy Toronto, runs RLR Events, and hosts the live talk show *Inside His Head*. While Rachael somehow manages to juggle all of these competing obligations, she is fairly blunt on how ADHD has been an empowering factor towards her busy schedule. “ADHD can impact my life in both a positive and sometimes negative way. Positive? I can think on a dime, I come up with great ideas and find quick solutions to questions. Once I'm focused, I zone in until things get done. Other times... there are just too many dimes floating around, so I don't focus on just one.”

We sat down to discuss how her professional life and creative process have both been helped and hindered throughout her life

by ADHD. We dive into what tricks she uses to stay motivated and focused with such a heavy plate and how the reception of learning disabilities differs in the corporate and artistic environment.


Rickards believes her creativity is informed by her disability, rather than hindered by it: “ADHD allows me to come up with creative storytelling. I can build characters quickly and write quickly as well. Some of the work I have written, is usually under tight deadlines, due to procrastination and distractions. Somehow, it all works out.” But she is also open about how ADHD can get in the way of the creative process. “At other times... I get up and walk away from my computer...because there's birds outside chirping!”

Being aware and on top of her attention issues is a crucial aspect for Rachael-Lea's creative process. The thought of sitting down for extended periods of time solely dedicated to writing can be daunting for her: “...Even though I love writing, I have to commit to short spurts, and then take a breather... because there are birds outside.”

She builds structured time into her writing sessions to make the task more manageable: “I think the key thing is to be aware when it's time to tap out and do something else. It makes no sense trying to focus, when you really need a breather. I give myself a certain amount of time to write. I'll set the clock for say, 15 minutes. Often times, I write way past that set time, but mentally, it gives me the security to know, that I have time to stop and shift to something else.”

While building structure into her writing session has allowed Rachael-Lea to work around her attention disorder, she believes that her ability to juggle so many different projects and delegate tasks is a result of her ADHD: “I think the beauty of having ADHD, is the ability to balance different balls in the air. In fact, I thrive better with a full plate.”

She believes that knowing your strengths and when to hand off a project to others is crucial to functioning in the creative process with ADHD: “I've also realized that delegating tasks that I'm not good at, is far more productive. I'm a creator, and though I've learned many other skills, I'll pass things off to my team, who can do a much better job at certain things than I can. Math is my enemy, so that's definitely passed off, and my grammar... well, thank God for editors.”

In the end, for Rachael-Lea's, passion is the best motivator to manage her disability and put the positive aspects of ADHD to work during her creative process: “I love what I do. Writing and performing is in my blood. Fast-paced environments keep me buzzing. If you love what you do, you just stay motivated. My two cents” 



Shelf Life

Books to enlighten and inspire and help you learn a little bit more about and embrace your LD/ADHD!



New Book Links Poverty and Literacy in Kids With Reading Difficulties

SPELLBOUND

By Robbins Burling
Published by Equinox Publishing Ltd.

The study of linguistics is an acquired taste. Or so I thought until I was drawn into Burling’s account of his personal struggle with spelling that he became aware of at the tender age of seven. But his knowledge is very much in hindsight.

Although he wasn’t entirely sure what the problem was in second grade, he simply realized that it was difficult for him to remember the right letters or the right order to put them in when he was writing. He recalls the admonitions from his well-meaning teachers, “If you would only try harder, you could spell as well as....” Or, “If you don’t know how to spell it, look it up in the dictionary.” However, as Burling rightly points out, that only works

if you know what words you don’t know how to spell! Poor spelling has dogged Burling his whole life, but he didn’t let that interfere with what became his life’s work: the study and teaching of linguistics (language, its structure and meaning) and anthropology. His struggle became a fascination with understanding the evolution of language as it intersects with culture.

In this book, Burling makes a plausible, though at times technical (and he gives readers fair warning) argument for reforming the English language to enable people, like him, to vastly improve their spelling. But that would be too narrow an interpretation. His loftier vision is that modern-day reform would vastly improve literacy rates in the English-speaking world. As such, he is not just examining the unpredictability of spelling; he is also relating that to the difficulty children have in learning to read English. His underlying premise is that poverty and illiteracy are inextricably linked. Burling cites the early reading abilities of children in

Continued on next page. ➤

countries such as Finland and Italy where the languages are more highly structured. The argument is that if a child understands the sound systems of a language and the relationships between words, they can spell words correctly.

On this point, I can speak personally. Although I was born in Canada, my first language is Finnish. I learned to speak, read and write as befits a 4-year old before entering kindergarten at 5. Only then did I begin to learn English. Reflecting on that process, it seemed effortless.

Engaging and amusing quotes from esteemed authors and historical luminaries introduce each chapter and remind us that the challenge of spelling correctly has a long and worthy history.

In the first half of the book, Burling shares various personal experiences grappling with the irregularities of the English

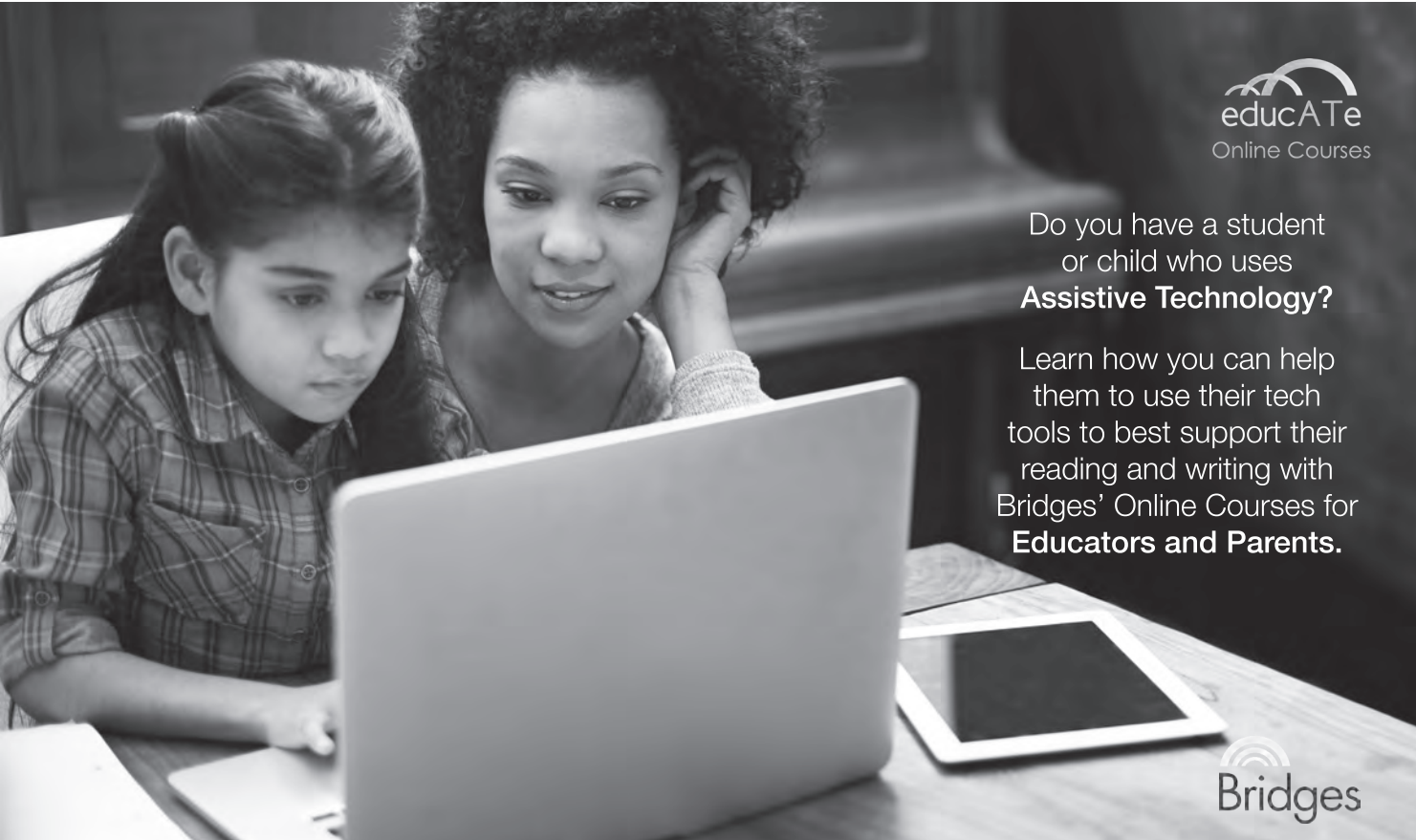
language followed by the attempts at reform throughout history. Learning how it became so muddled is an interesting exploration of borrowing and blending of words from early Greek and Latin through to the more recent Romance languages of France, Italy and Spanish, and German.


The most disheartening chapter is the discussion of the high illiteracy rates of Americans--one scholar estimates that one-third of adults are illiterate, or functionally illiterate. Often they are in poor immigrant and black communities. It's difficult to overlook the association of literacy with education and class. With parents unable to help support their children in learning reading and writing skills, families fall into a downward spiral. If the English language were easier to learn for all children, they would be better prepared for 21st century living and opportunities.

Attempts at reforming languages--not just English--have a history of their own with no lack of creativity and approaches and differing levels of success. It seems that only one--the writing system of Hangûl in Korea--which is lauded as the closest to the spoken language, is a success. And it only took 5 centuries for it to be fully accepted!

Burling does not propose to design his own spelling system. Rather he intends to examine the key elements of an improved spelling system. That is the focus of Part II. It is the most challenging section, but he gives fair warning that it is necessarily very technical. I would simply add that it is not for the faint hearted. In the final analysis, it seems almost impossible that a reform of the English language could ever be successful. But readers will appreciate his passion for mounting his side of the argument.


-Taru Virkamaki



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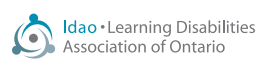
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