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Naomi Peters

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Effect of Participation in a Self-Understanding Curriculum on the Academic Self-
Concept of Children with Learning Disabilities

Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the School Psychology Program

College of Liberal Arts
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

By

Naomi Peters

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Master of Science

Rochester, New York 5/14/99

Approved: ___
Jennifer Lukomski, Ph.D.

Virginia Costenbader, Ph.D.

Dean: _____________________________
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Abstract
This study examined the effect of participation in a self-understanding program on the academic self-concept of students with learning disabilities in a rural, upstate New York, school district. Sixteen students between the ages of 8 to 11 were randomly assigned to one of four groups. In order to control for history and maturation, a Solomon Four-Group Design was used. Results of the 2X2 ANOVA indicate that participation in the six-week self-understanding group did not significantly increase the participants' academic self-concept scores. Results of the one way ANOVA indicate that the difference between the change in score from pretest to posttest between the treatment group and control group was significantly greater for the treatment group, suggesting that when not controlling for testing, the students in the pre/post test treatment group made significant gains on their academic self-concept score. The results of the present study should be treated with caution because the small sample size was small. Therefore, future research should be conducted to further investigate the existence of a relationship between participation in a self-understanding group and ones' academic self-concept.
Children with learning disabilities (LD) are often cognizant of their academic difficulties (Kronick, 1977; Fox & Malian, 1983; Levine, Clarke & Ferb, 1981); however, the topic of learning disabilities is rarely discussed with them (McMurchie, 1994; Sachs, Iliff, & Donnelly, 1987; Yuan, 1994). Consequently, many children with learning disabilities are not aware of, or, do not understand the implications of their disability (Buchanan & Wolf, 1986; McMurchie, 1994; Sachs et. al., 1987). This lack of knowledge and self-understanding of their academic difficulties contributes to negative attitudes about themselves, the learning process, and school (Kronick, 1977; Buchanan & Wolf, 1986; Rosenthal, 1973). These negative thoughts and feelings that children with learning disabilities have about their learning differences can impact school learning as well as persist into adulthood, suggesting that educators need to take into account emotional factors when designing interventions for children with learning disabilities (Bloom, 1976; Black, 1974; Buchanan & Wolf, 1986; Dinkmeyer, 1970; Gerber & Reiff, 1991; Hoffmann et al., 1987).

Theorists have suggested a relationship between understanding one’s learning disability (LD) and self-concept (McMurchie, 1994; McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 1985; Rosenthal, 1973; Serafica & Harway, 1979). Students with LD who have never been educated about their disability often try to make sense of their difficulties and or attempt to understand why they have learning difficulties. Often the students with learning disabilities think that they are “dumb” or “strange”, which are negative self-attributions (McMurchie, Personal Communication, 8/19/1988). McMurchie also indicated that upon gaining an understanding of their learning disabilities, students indicate a sense of “relief” that they are not “dumb” or “strange.”
They are better able to see their strengths and weaknesses, which leads to a more positive self-concept (McMurchie, Personal Communication, 8/19/1998).

Programs designed to sensitively educate children with learning disabilities about the nature of their learning difficulties, their strengths and weaknesses, and appropriate learning strategies, promote better adjustment for the students by teaching self-understanding and basic self-advocacy skills (Bryan & Pearl, 1979; Hoffmann et al., 1997; McMurchie, 1994; Tomlan, 1985; Yuan, 1994). In turn, this increased understanding may serve to enhance the academic self-concept in children with learning disabilities (Hoffmann et. al., 1987; McWhirter et. al., 1985; Serafica & Harway, 1979; Tomlan, 1985).

Learning Disabilities and Self-Concept

In the literature, there are many different terms used for self-concept (i.e. self-identity, self-image, self-ideal, self-esteem and self-perception) (Furnham, 1983). The definition of self-esteem suggests that it is a specific type of self-concept. For example, global self-concept is thought to include evaluations and thoughts of oneself (Wylie, 1994), while self-esteem is considered a part of one's self-concept and made up of only judgements of oneself (Wylie, 1974, 1994). In the literature, however, the term's self-concept and self-esteem are often used interchangeably. For purposes of this paper, no distinctions will be made between self-concept and self-esteem. Self-concept is the term that will be used to include self-esteem.

Researchers in the self-concept area have mostly concentrated on the global nature of self-concept and have had difficulty uncovering consistent relationships between self-concept and other variables. For example, the research findings of the
between the global self-concept of students with learning disabilities and those students who are not classified with learning disabilities are variable. One reason for this inconsistency is that self-concept measures are often psychometrically deficient due to their lack of standardization and validation (Chapman & Boersma, 1979). It is also considered that global self-concept measures may be investigating too many facets of personality to discern meaningful relationships (Wylie, 1974). Despite the difficulties associated with quantifying these constructs, there is a general understanding that individuals with learning disabilities have lower self-concepts (Serafica & Harway, 1979).

Self-concept is an important construct to consider when trying to understand the reactions to success and failure of students with academic difficulties (Bryan & Pearl, 1979; Butkowsky & Willows, 1980; Nunn & Parish, 1992). For example, Butkowsky and Willows (1980) found that students with reading difficulties, compared to good and average readers, displayed many characteristics suggestive of low self-concept including lower estimates of success, less persistence, attribution of failure to lack of ability, attribution of success to external factors, and greater decrease in expectancy for success following failure.

Children with special needs are highly vulnerable to developing negative self-concepts (Bloom, 1976; Black, 1974; Bryan & Pearl, 1979; Chapman & Boersma, 1979; Fox & Malian, 1983; Heyman, 1990; McWhirter et. al., 1985). Studies indicate that children with learning disabilities have self-concepts that are more negative when compared with children without learning disabilities (Bryan & Pearl, 1979). For example, Larsen, Parker and Jorjorian (1973) found that learning disabled students compared to
children without LD had significantly greater differences in their ideas of their "real self" and "ideal self", which is suggestive of a low self-concept. Similarly, Rosenthal (1973) found that learning disabled students, in comparison with non-learning disabled students, had lower self-concepts. In addition, Black (1974) investigated the self-concept of learning disabled and non learning disabled students experiencing academic failure and found that learning disabled students had significantly lower self-concepts regardless of actual ability. The results suggest that students with learning disabilities, regardless of school difficulties or ability, are more at risk for having lower positive perceptions of themselves (Black, 1974). Various research studies have also found that children with learning difficulties in specific subjects areas tend to generalize to an overall negative self-concept (Butkowksy & Willow, 1981; Winne et al., 1982).

**Academic Self-Concept**

Self-concept is often conceptualized as a global construct composed of a number of facets (e.g., academic, physical and social)(Marx & Winne, 1978). Research studies that have examined the ability of global and specific self-concept measures to differentiate between children with and without learning disabilities have found variable results. For example, Marx and Winne (1978) attempted to investigate the discriminate validity of three self report measures of self-concept (i.e. Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, Sears Self-Concept Inventory, and The Gordon How I see Myself Scale) and found no evidence that the subscales were measuring different components of self-concept.

In contrast, Winne et al. (1982) found that the academic subscales of two self-concept significantly differentiated between students with learning disabilities, students
without learning disabilities, and students who are gifted, with students with learning
disabilities having lower academic self-concepts than both of the other groups regardless
of actual ability or achievement. Similarly, Ayres, Cooley & Dunn (1990) found
consistent findings that only the subscale relating to school performance of a global self-concept measure (i.e. Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale) differentiated between
learning disabled and non-learning disabled students. Vaughn, Elbaum and Shay-Schumm (1996) also found that the global self-concept did not significantly differentiate
between students with and without learning disabilities. However, the children with
learning disabilities had significantly lower academic self-concept scores (Vaughn et. al.,
1996). In contrast, Rogers and Saklofske (1985) used measures of global and academic
self-concept to assess the affective characteristics of learning disabled and non learning
disabled and found that learning disabled students had significantly lower scores on both
of the measures suggesting that learning disabled students have both lower general and
academic perceptions of themselves (Rogers & Saklofske, 1985).

These variable results may be due to both psychometric inadequacies as well as
the fact that the measures may be trying to measure too many personality facets and are
therefore unable to differentiate significant relationships (Chapman & Boersma, 1979). Although researchers have not been able to empirically separate between the facets of self-concept, there is increasing agreement that students’ perceptions of their academic
ability is an important area to study in the adjustment of children with learning
disabilities (Ayres et al., 1990; Bryan & Pearl, 1979; Boersma & Chapman, 1981;
Boersma & Chapman, 1992; Butkowsky & Willows, 1980; Chapman & Boersma, 1979;
Maladaptive affective variables such as a negative academic self-concept are considered to inhibit students' motivation to learn and succeed in the classroom (Ayres et al., 1990).

Chapman and Boersma (1979) assert that in order to understand children's perception of their academic ability, one should specifically study children's thoughts and feelings in relation to their education. They found when using a specific measure of academic self-concept to compare individuals with and without learning disabilities, that the students with learning disabilities not only obtained lower academic self-concept scores but had lower perceptions of their reading ability (Chapman & Boersma, 1979). Although these results are understandable considering that the majority of the participants had a particular difficulty in reading, it is important to consider that this negative perception generalized to other school related areas assessed by the measure including arithmetic, general ability, and school satisfaction (Chapman & Boersma, 1979).

Similarly, Boersma and Chapman (1981) found that children with learning disabilities, compared with students without learning disabilities, had lower academic self-concepts that were well established by the third grade and remained stable through the sixth grade. Furthermore, Chapman (1988) in a two year study of academic self-concept found that the students with learning disabilities, when compared with students without learning disabilities, had lower self perceptions of academic ability, displayed signs of learned helplessness, and had lower academic achievement exceptions that were constant and stable through to the second year of the study. The negative academic perceptions of children with learning disabilities appear to be established early and remain stable (Chapman, 1988) indicating the importance of the learning experiences in the elementary school years in the development of a child's self-concept and academic
perceptions (Roffman, Herzog & Wershba-Gershon, 1994)

**Interventions**

Heyman (1990) suggested that interventions designed to facilitate a specific understanding of what a learning disability is might foster a positive academic self-concept among children with learning disabilities. For example, Heyman (1990) found significant relationships between academic self-concept, self-esteem and an acceptance of learning difficulties (i.e. recognition of the existence of a learning disability plays a subordinate role it one’s overall self-perceptions). Heyman (1990) also suggested one can foster a positive self-concept among children with learning disabilities through providing knowledge that one’s learning disability is specific to certain learning areas and that one is able to improve upon his or her weaknesses. The results support professional opinions that, in order for interventions to be effective and psychological growth to occur, children with learning disabilities need to gain a thorough definition and understanding of their learning difficulties (Cohen, 1985; Kronick, 1977).

Authors emphasize the importance of paying attention to both affective and cognitive variables in interventions with children with learning disabilities (Ayres et al, 1990; Black, 1974; Boersma & Chapman, 1981; Larsen et al, 1973; Rogers & Saklofske, 1985; Serafica & Harway, 1979; Tomlan, 1985) However, the research on the effect of interventions on self-concept is minimal (Serafica & Harway, 1979). This may be due to measurement difficulties as well as the inability to implement long term interventions (Serafica & Harway, 1979). However, it is hypothesized that there are advantages of developing interventions to explain learning difficulties to individuals with learning disabilities (Adelman & Feshbach, 1975). Theorists have suggested a connection between
informing a child with a learning disability about his or her disability as a viable component to a remedial program to increase self-concept (Kronick, 1977; Serafica & Harway, 1979; Yuan, 1994; Rosenthal, 1973). For example, McWhirter et al. (1985) suggested the following important strategies to use to help increase the self-concept of children with learning disabilities: informing the child about his or her learning disability, teaching the child how to identify his or her own strengths, use I-messages and use self-reinforcing terms.

Through an awareness of learning differences and similarities children can become more accepting of themselves and aware how they learn (Cohen, 1985, Kronick, 1977; McMurchie, 1994; Tomlan, 1985). For example, Rosenthal (1973) investigated the effect of information on self-concept on two groups of children with dyslexia and asthma compared to typical children. One group of children with dyslexia was taught about their learning difficulties. However, the second group of children with dyslexia received no information. The two groups of children with dyslexia both scored lower than asthmatics and normals on a test of self-concept. However, the uninformed group performed significantly lower than the informed group. It is important to note that no information was provided on the method of sub-grouping or the original differences between the two groups before the program, nor did the researchers use pretest and posttests to assess the participants’ knowledge about learning disabilities (Rosenthal, 1973).

Authors have noted there is a need for individuals with learning disabilities to be educated about their learning disabilities (e.g., Fox and Malian, 1983; McMurchie, 1994; Tomlan, 1983. For example, Hoffmann et al. (1997) conducted a survey that assessed the needs of adults with learning disabilities and found that 62% indicated a need to further
understand the nature of their learning difficulties.

Various curricula and seminars have been developed in order to educate children about their learning disabilities. A major goal of these programs is to foster the development of positive self-concepts (Cummings & Fisher, 1991; Dinkmeyer, 1970; Fisher & Cummings, 1990; Fox & Malian, 1983; McMurchie, 1994; Phillips, 1990; Sachs et al., 1991; Yuan, 1994). This may also serve as a foundation to promote self-advocacy skills (Cummings & Fisher, 1991; Dinkmeyer, 1970; Fisher & Cummings, 1990; Fox & Malian, 1983; McMurchie, 1994; Phillips, 1990; Sachs et al., 1991; Yuan, 1994). Information on learning disabilities and coping strategies serve as tools to help students with disabilities handle various situations and interactions with other individuals in a school environment (Bryan & Pearl, 1979; Cummings & Fisher, 1991; Dinkmeyer, 1970; Fisher & Cummings, 1990; Fox & Malian, 1983; Hoffmann et al., 1997; McMurchie, 1994; Roffman et al., 1994; Sachs et al., 1991).

Self-Concept and Self-Understanding

While authors and researchers have suggested a relationship between understanding one’s learning disability and an increased positive self-concept (McMurchie, 1994; McWhirter et al., 1985; Rosenthal, 1973; Serafica & Harway, 1973; Yuan, 1994), the relationship between one’s academic self-concept and understanding one’s learning disability has not yet been studied. For example, McWhirter et al. (1985) hypothesize that by teaching a child about his or her learning disabilities his or her positive self-concept will increase. More specifically, it appears understandable to hypothesis that children’s academic self-concept may positively increase when they are taught about their learning disability. This study will investigate whether children with
disabilities who participate in a self-understanding group experience a positive increase in their academic self-concept when compared to those children who do not participate.
Effect of Participation

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were 16 students (11 males and 5 females) who were categorized as learning disabled by state and federal standards. There were four students in each group. The students' ages ranged from 8 to 11. Table 1 shows the number of students, at each age, and which group (1, 2, 3, or 4). Participants were all Caucasian and attended a rural elementary or middle school in upstate New York. All subjects attended regular education classes and received extra support. There were 6 students that received small group instruction outside their regular education classroom in one or two academic areas and 7 students who received support from the resource room. All of the 16 students spent at least part of their school day in a regular education classroom. The participants received special education services ranging from 6 months to 5 years.

Procedure

Prior to starting this study, permission was received from the Institution Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research at Rochester Institute of Technology and the two principals at the schools were the groups were to be held. Parental permission forms (Appendix A) were then sent to eligible student's parents or guardians which briefly explained the purpose of the study, the requirements, the possible risks and expected benefits that their child would experience through participation in the group. Parents were given five to seven days to respond, and if the permission form had not been returned within this time period, a second letter was mailed. The parents were given an additional five days to respond before they were reminded, by phone, to return
### Table 1

Number of Students at Each Age by Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1 (group-pretest/posttest)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 (no group-pretest/posttest)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 (group-posttest)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4 (no group-posttest)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the permission form if they consented to have their child participate in the group. Out of the 35 permission forms sent home 20 (57%) were returned granting consent to have their child participate in the group.

Sixteen of the 20 students were randomly selected and assigned to one of the four groups using a table of random digits (as cited in Jaccard & Becker, 1990). This study used a Solomon Four–Group Design, as endorsed by Campbell and Stanley (1966) in order to increase the generalizability of the results by controlling for the effects of maturation and history in each of the groups. Group 1 was administered both the pre and post-test Perception of Ability Scale (PASS) (Boersma & Chapman, 1992) and participated in a six-week course designed to educate students about learning disabilities. Group 2 was administered both the pretest and posttest, and did not participate in the self-understanding group. Group 3 participated in the six-week learning differences group, and received the PASS as a posttest. Group 4 did not participate in the learning differences group and was given the PASS at the same point in time that the other groups were administered the posttest. During all administrations of the PASS, assistance was provided to the students by reading and/or clarifying individual questions on the scales.

Participants in Groups 1 and 3 were asked to verbally commit to participate in the group prior to the initial session. Group 1 was also given a pretest prior to the first session. The number of sessions, the time of the group, and the location was explained to the students. The students were also made aware that as a part of the group, they agreed to meet individually to go over material if they missed a session. All students agreed to join the group. Over the course of the study, three students missed one session. Each of these students was provided extra time to go over previous material with the facilitator.
Confidentiality was discussed during the first session and reinforced during each of the subsequent groups.

Measure

The Perception of Ability Scale (Boersma & Chapman, 1992) was chosen as the pretest and posttest (see Appendix B). Academic self-concept as defined by this test is viewed as similar to yet unique from a general self-concept or self-esteem. In the manual, it is purported that the PASS can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions designed to increase academic-related self-perceptions as well as the academic self-concepts of children with learning disabilities (LD). The PASS is an easily administered self-report measure aimed to assess children’s’ thoughts and feelings about their academic abilities and school-related achievement. This 70-yes/no-item measure is written at a mid-second grade reading level. It was standardized on 831 children Grades 3 through 6 attending nine schools in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington with the students representing a range of achievement levels typically found in regular education classrooms.

As described in the manual, the PASS appears to have adequate reliability. For example, internal consistency estimates for homogenous groups of elementary students in the United States and Canada are approximately .90 for the full-scale PASS score. In addition, the test-retest full-scale reliability estimate over a 4-to 6- week period was .83, and for a longer period of time (2 to 4 ½ years) was approximately .50.

The manual attempts to establish construct validity using content, concurrent and discriminate validity. Support for content validity was gathered by conducting trials and performing item and factor analysis. Concurrent and discriminate validity was
determined by examining the relationship of the PASS and academic and general self-concept measures, logically related affective variables (i.e., achievement expectations, academic locus of control, general personality), academic achievement, intelligence measures, and ratings by teachers and parents. As reported in the manual, the PASS full-scale score shows a moderate relationship with an academic self-concept measure for high school students (.50) and with logically related affective variables (.38 to .56), a strong relationship between academic related subscales of self-concept measures (.74), a moderate relationships with overall self-concept measures (ranging from .35-.70), and a generally low to negative relationship with Full Scale IQ scores (.03 to .32).

Furthermore, the relationship with the PASS and other moderator variables (i.e. socioeconomic background, ethnicity, and gender) are limited but the information reported in the manual suggest that they play a negligible role in determining academic self-concept (.12-.13). Males appear to score lower on the PASS, consequently different norms were established for males and females.

**Treatment**

Permission was gained (S. McMurchie, personal communication, August 1998) to use and adapt material from the Understanding LD (Learning Differences) curriculum (McMurchie, 1994) for use with children with learning disabilities in the six week learning differences group. The curriculum adapted and used in this study is presented in Appendix C. The curriculum was designed to educate students about learning differences, promote positive self-esteem, and teach coping skills. Participants in Groups 1 and 3 were taught this curriculum and were therefore considered the treatment group.

The Understanding LD (Learning Differences) curriculum is divided into five
sections. Specifically, the core section (Part 1), LD awareness and self-esteem, was used in this study. During the first session, the students were introduced to the group rules, wrote down one question about learning differences and determined one thing about their learning difference(s) that bothers them (LD awareness focus). They also listened to a story about how words and actions affect how one feels about oneself (self-esteem focus). Next, the students discussed their LD questions/concerns and tried to formulate answers to their questions (LD awareness focus). The self-esteem portion of this session focused on the students learning how to give positive affirmations to themselves and to one another. The LD awareness activities completed during the third meeting included the following: the students determined their own learning strengths and weaknesses, they learned ways that learning differences can impact learning, and they discussed ways in which their LD can affect them. The students also learned that there are other students who have similar thoughts and feelings (self-esteem focus). During the next session, students were asked to state one way their learning differences had impacted their learning (LD awareness focus). In addition, students wrote about or illustrated one of their individual strengths as well as strength of another group member (self-esteem focus). Session five focused on students learning about different types of learning differences and deciding the types of learning differences that were similar to their own learning differences. They also learned some important LD related terms and their meanings (e.g., LD, LDA, Public Law 94-142, Resource Room, Mainstreaming, and LD teacher, Psychologist). The students were also given time to share their personal positive affirmations and give each other positive affirmations (self-esteem focus). During the last session, the students learned about the process of special education (i.e. what had to
happen for them to receive extra help), and talked about an Individualized Education Plan. In addition, also during the final session, self-esteem was promoted through a group activity (i.e. making posters about their likes and dislikes).
Results

The participants’ group means and standard deviations for both pretest and posttest scores, for all four groups, are reported in Table 2. Results of a 2 by 2 full factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) with the postscore as the dependent variable (GROUP/NO GROUP X PRE/POSTTEST) showed no main effects or interaction effects (see Table 3). Participation in the self-understanding of learning differences group did not significantly increase the participants’ academic self-concept in comparison to the control group when controlling for history, maturation, and testing.

Additional statistics were also conducted in order to investigate the existence of relationships. Specifically, a one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) examined the difference of the change score (i.e. between the pre and post PASS scores) between the control and the treatment group. Analysis of the difference of the change between the pre/post scores indicated that the treatment group’s (n, 4) change score increased significantly more than the control group (n, 4) (t (6)=2.21, F1-tail=.035)(see Table 4). This suggests that when not controlling for testing, significant gains were made in the academic self-concept scores of students in the treatment group who received the pre/post test and the control group who received the pre/post test.

The results of this one way ANOVA, however, must be considered with caution because of the presence of an outlier. One student in the pretest/posttest treatment group received a perfect score on the PASS. The PASS manual indicates that when this occurs, the student’s results should be treated with caution and assessed to determine if the student was merely answering in a socially appropriate manner. Through discussions with this student and investigation of his or her answers, it was uncertain whether this
Table 2
Posttest Perception of Ability Scale Scores for All Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1 (group-pretest/posttest)</td>
<td>46.75</td>
<td>18.40</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 (no group-pretest/posttest)</td>
<td>44.75</td>
<td>7.932</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 (group-posttest)</td>
<td>44.50</td>
<td>12.15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4 (no group-posttest)</td>
<td>43.00</td>
<td>8.98</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

2 X 2 Analysis of Variance for Perception of Ability Scale for Students Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Mean Squares</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P ≤</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group/No Group (G)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.25</td>
<td>12.25</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest/Posttest (PP)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>.755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G X PP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.250</td>
<td>.250</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1890.500</td>
<td>157.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 4
One way Analysis of Variance of Change Score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P≤</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>180.500</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36.917</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
student's change in scores was due to real improvements in her self-perception or due to the fact that the student was trying to answer in a socially appropriate manner. Therefore the gains made by the treatment group may have been due to the presence of this high score.
Discussion

When controlling for history, maturation, and testing no significant differences were found between students who participated in the self-understanding groups and those who did not participate. Although there is no overall evidence that participation in the self-understanding group increased the participants' academic self-concept, the small sample size may have contributed to the lack of significant findings. For example, when considering the change between the pretest and the posttest scores on the PASS, the four students who received the pre/post test and participated in the self understanding group did significantly improve more than the four students who received the pre/post test but did not participate in the self-understanding groups. This supports the research that by teaching students about their learning differences, their self-concept positively increases (McMurchie, 1994; McWhirter et al., 1985; Rosenthal, 1973; Serafica & Harway, 1973; Yuan, 1994). In particular, it is considered that an area particularly important for students with learning disabilities is their academic self-concept (Bloom, 1976; Boersma & Chapman, 1981; Chapman, 1988; Chapman & Boersma, 1979) and therefore indicating the importance of examining interventions to positively increase their thoughts and feelings in this area (Boersma & Chapman, 1992).

This study was designed using the Solomon Four-Group Design to control for the effects of maturation, history, and testing, in each of the groups, as endorsed by Campbell and Stanley (1966). At the onset of this study, there were two facilitators and two schools willing to participate. After considering the small number of learning disabled students in each setting, and consulting with knowledgeable school psychologists, the minimum number of participants was estimated at 30 subjects. Although the original number of
eligible learning disabled students was small in both schools, the principle examiner did underestimate the length of time and effort it takes to gain parental consent. In addition, the apprehension of parents to consent to have their child participate in a research study about learning differences was surprising. It is also important to note that the facilitator from the second school setting did not receive enough positive feedback from parents to consider forming one group and therefore her students did not participate in this research study. Consequently, the sample size of the research study is extremely small and one suggested statistical analyses for a Solomon Four Group Design was not able to be conducted (i.e., an ANCOVA covarying for pretest scores), which would examine the presence or absence of the impact of testing.

Due to the small sample size, the results found in this study should be interpreted with caution. The sample size may have been too small to discern meaningful relationships, which may explain the lack of a significance difference between groups when exploring all possible relationships.

Although the results of participation in the self-understanding group has limited quantitative support, the students who participated in this study seemed to qualitatively benefit from participation in this group. When asked to indicate at the end of the group "things they liked or didn’t like so that the leader can better help other students" the students made mostly positive comments (e.g., "It was great," "It was awesome," "I liked when we drew things," "I like the group the way it is," "I would have liked the group to be longer." "I liked how intelligent people were and that everybody has different talents") The negative comments made by the students focused on the fact that they wanted to have more group sessions or they wanted to do more of a certain activity
(e.g., drawing). In particular, one student thought it was “hard to be part of a group and then not be part of one.” One student indicated that this group would have been better if all of the students in the group were male but the facilitator was female. Specifically, he stated, “I like most of the time a group with all males so they can understand each other better but the leader can be the opposite because then she can help the kids understand better how girls think.”

Future Directions

While it can be said that the academic self-concept of the participants in this study increased, it is not certain that this difference was due to participation in the group. These participants may have made similar gains due to history and maturation, regardless of participation in the group. In addition, they may still display a lower perception of ability as compared to their peers who do not have learning disabilities. The length of time that these students will exhibit an increased positive self-concept is also undetermined. Future research should include a larger sample of students, addresses changes in perception of ability scores over time and run the groups for a longer length of time. In this way, research could more thoroughly determine the impact or lack of impact of the participation in the group and to examine if participation in programs run for a longer length of time have a greater impact on and more lasting effects on academic self-concept scores than programs run for shorter periods of time.

Although the curriculum used for the self-understanding groups was written for students ages 8-13, it was qualitatively observed that the students who were 10 and 11 seemed to enjoy the lessons and activities in this curriculum more than the students that were 8 and 9. Although the students who were 8 and 9 seemed to understand the main
ideas in this curriculum, many of the concepts and words had to be clarified. In addition, although both groups seemed to learn from the curriculum, the older students seemed better able to attend to the paper and pencil activities and asked more questions that were specifically related to the activity.

**Modifications**

Additional changes would be made to the curriculum that was used in the study before it would be used again for younger students. First, a couple of the stories about learning differences would be changed to include more multisensory and creative approaches when the learning differences information was presented. For example, the use of puppets (for younger students) or videos of other students explaining their learning differences could be added. Although this curriculum uses many hands-on activities for the self-esteem focus, adding game-like activities about learning differences and self-esteem would enhance the curriculum. For example, at the end of the group, the students could participate in board game where they have to answer questions related to learning differences and self-esteem.

Furthermore, in order to increase the number of students who could participate, additional modifications should be completed. For example, in order to address the apprehension of parents to have their children participate, one could provide an informational session prior to the onset of the group. In addition, the consent form could be changed to be more “user friendly” by decreasing the length, adding color, pictures and comments from students who had previously participated in the group.
References


Appendix A

MYNDERSE ACADEMY
DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL SERVICES

305 TROY STREET
SCHENECTADY, NEW YORK 12155

Director/CSE Chair (518) 568-5339
School Psychologist (518) 568-2639

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am pleased to inform you that __________ has been invited to join a 6-week discussion group about learning differences (LD). While LD means "learning disabilities" to some people, in this group it means "learning differences," because all students learn in their own unique ways.

This group is designed to help students develop coping strategies, and create an awareness of learning differences in a safe, relaxed, and fun setting. The group will meet for once a week for 30 minutes for 6 weeks during your child's lunch or study hall and will be offered at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. Students will participate in this group at different times, but all students who have parental permission, and are willing to participate, will be given the chance to be involved before the end of the year.

Group activities are designed to give students opportunities to be more accepting of themselves and how they learn. We also consider the benefits of group participation to outweigh any disadvantages. However, some students may initially feel uncomfortable discussing their learning disability in a group setting. Again, we believe that there are many positive results of being involved in a group and students involved in similar groups in other districts have enjoyed the experience.

Participation in this group means that your child will be part of a study that will judge the benefits of taking part in a group designed to help students understand learning differences. As a part of the research study, the students will fill out a short questionnaire about their thoughts and feelings about school related topics. This form will be filled out before, after, or both before and after participation in the group. Information collected will be used in a research study conducted by Naomi Peters, a school psychology intern from Rochester Institute of Technology.

The names of students will be used only for record keeping purposes. Names and other identifying information will not be included in a written report of the study, and any record of student names will be destroyed after participation in the group. After completion of the study, the results will be made available to the parents/guardians.

Because effective groups are based on a trusting relationship, the group leader will keep the information shared by group members confidential, except in situations in which there is an ethical responsibility to reveal information. For example, you will be notified: 1) if your child gives information about possible harm to himself/herself or another person or 2) if the counselor's records are subpoenaed by the courts.

In addition, while a goal is for students to become more familiar and comfortable with their learning style, parents are encouraged to talk with your child about joining this group. Again, participation is voluntary and a student may stop his or her participation in the group at anytime. Please mark below whether or not you give permission for the above named student to participate in this understanding learning differences group.

( ) I give permission for the above named student to participate in this group.
( ) I do not give permission for the above named student to participate in this group.

Parent/Guardian Signature: ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Please complete and return this form ASAP in the self-addressed stamped envelope. If you have any questions, please call Naomi Peters, School Psychology Intern (518-583-2639), Heather M. Stanton, School Psychologist (518-583-2631) or Susan Gage, School Psychologist (518-583-2639).
## Appendix B

### Measure

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### Perception of Ability Scale for Students (PASS)

Frederic J. Boerma, Ph.D. and James W. Chapman, Ph.D.

Published by

**Western Psychological Services**

Los Angeles, California 90063-0764

**Name:**

**ID Number:**

**Sex:** □ M □ F **Grade:**

**School:**

**Birthdate:**

**Age:**

**Today's Date:**

**Teacher's Name:**

### Directions

Here are some statements that tell how people feel about themselves in school. Read each sentence carefully and decide whether or not you feel the same way. If you agree, darken the Y circle in the YES column. If you do not agree, darken the N circle in the NO column.

Choose an answer for each statement, even if it is hard to decide. Choose the answer that is closest to the way you feel most of the time. Do not check both yes and no for the same statement. If you wish to change an answer, draw an X through the incorrect circle and completely darken the correct circle.

Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. Only you can tell us how you really feel about yourself, so answer each question honestly.

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*Printed in U.S.A.*
1. I like spelling.
2. I like math.
3. I am a messy writer.
4. Tests are easy for me to take.
5. I like to sound out words.
6. My teacher often makes me write my work again.
7. I have difficulty looking up words in the dictionary.
8. I like to use big words when I talk.
9. I like telling my friends about schoolwork.
10. My teacher thinks I am dumb in math.
11. I like going to school.
12. I like playing spelling games.
13. I have difficulty thinking up good stories.
14. My spelling is always right.
15. Saying new words is hard for me.
16. I am unhappy with how I do math.
17. I am a smart kid.
18. I have difficulty doing what my teacher says.
19. I find spelling hard.
20. I usually get my math right.
21. I am a slow reader.
22. I feel I often say the wrong things.
23. In school I find new things difficult to learn.
24. I usually spell words right.
25. My teacher thinks I am good at printing.
26. All new words are hard for me to understand.
27. I have trouble telling others what I mean.
28. I am good at math.
29. I like to tell stories in class.
30. I find multiplication fun.
31. I always get everything in math right.

**Effect of Participation**

I like math.
I am a messy writer.
Tests are easy for me to take.
I like to sound out words.
My teacher often makes me write my work again.
I have difficulty looking up words in the dictionary.
I like to use big words when I talk.
I like telling my friends about schoolwork.
My teacher thinks I am dumb in math.
I like going to school.
I like playing spelling games.
I have difficulty thinking up good stories.
My spelling is always right.
Saying new words is hard for me.
I am unhappy with how I do math.
I am a smart kid.
I have difficulty doing what my teacher says.
I find spelling hard.
I usually get my math right.
I am a slow reader.
In school I find new things difficult to learn.
I usually spell words right.
My teacher thinks I am good at printing.
All new words are hard for me to understand.
I have trouble telling others what I mean.
I am good at math.
I like to tell stories in class.
I feel I often say the wrong things.
I find multiplication fun.
I always get everything in math right.
PART 1

LD Awareness
LD AWARENESS

Effect of Participation

SESSION 1

I Am, I Can

LD Awareness

Focus

Students formulate one question about learning differences they would like to have answered before the group ends. They write one thing about their learning difference(s) that bothers them.

Self-Esteem Focus

Students listen to the story, “I Am, I Can,” and prepare their own “I Am, I Can” sign to use when sharing the story with their parents.

Handouts

“Welcome” (page 13)

“Group Rules” (page 14)

“I Am, I Can’’ List” (page 15)

“I Am, I Can” story (page 17)

“Five Facts about ’I Am, I Can’’” (pages 18-19)

Supplies

Paper, pencils, and markers, enough for all students

Folders, one for each student (write their names on the folders ahead of time)

Tape

One copy of the “I Am, I Can” sign (page 16) for use during the story

The Survival Guide for Kids with LD

Optional: The Survival Guide for Kids with LD audio cassette

Optional: Josh: A Boy with Dyslexia or any other book of your choice from the Children’s Literature section (pages 127-142)
### The Session

1. Welcome the students. Introduce the children to each other, or have them introduce themselves.

2. Distribute the “Group Rules” handout. Say, In order to make our group safe and fun, we have some group rules.” Go over the rules. Make sure that the students understand the rules.


Listen to all responses. Then say, “In this group, LD always means ‘learning different’ or ‘learning differences.’ Everybody learns in his or her own way. Everybody learns differently. Some people are good at some things and not good at other things. LD never means ‘dumb,’” “retarded,” [or other negative words students used]. We will not use those words in this group.”

4. Distribute paper and pencils. Say, “Fold your paper in half. Write your name on the top. Then open your paper. On one half, write one question you have about Learning Differences (you may have to expand and say something like...questions about how all people learn in their own way and some people are good at some things and not good at other things). On the other half of the paper write something that bothers you about your own learning difference. If you want, you can write more than one question and problem. Sometimes kids like me to write their question for them or help them spell some of the words. Let me know if you would like some help.”

Collect the papers for use in Session 2. Make copies for your files so you are sure to have the questions and gripes for future reference.

5. Distribute the “I Am, I Can’ List” handout. Read through the statements and invite the students to repeat the statement after you read them. Ask the students to complete the last three. Say, “These are important statements we all must practice using. Now, I’m going to read a story that will show you why these statements are important” You may want to invite the students to participate (For example, you could say, “While I’m reading, I am going to need some help from the group. Who would like to hold the sign and help act out the story? Who would like to be the tape person? The rest of the group gets the special job of listening and watching to see if the other students are following the directions). Then read aloud the “I Am, I can” story. As you read, help the students rip and tape the sign at the appropriate times.

6. Say, “Let’s see who can tell me what your ‘I Am, I Can’ sign stands for? Does everyone have a sign? “This ‘I Am, I Can’ sign stands for your self-esteem (how you feel about yourself). Not everybody has a ‘I Am, I Can’ sign but everybody has self-esteem.

7. Distribute paper, markers, and copies of the “I Am, I Can” story. Invite the students to make their own “I Am, I Can” signs to take home. Encourage them to share the story with their parents.

8. Distribute the “Five Facts about ‘I Am, I Can” handout. Read through the statements. Emphasize their importance. Say, “During the next session, we will be learning specific ways to take care of our own ‘I Am, I Can’ signs.”

9. Distribute the folders. Point out that each group member has his or her own folder. Say, “We will be using these to collect the handouts and other materials we use in this group.”

Instruct the students to put the handouts from this session in their folders. They will be taking the stories home, so you may want to have extra copies of the stories for their folders.
The Session


11. End the session by thanking the students for coming and for sharing with each other. Tell them to be sure to take care of their “I Am, I Can” signs. Either let the students take their folders or tell the students that you are going to hold on to their folders until the last session. At the end of every session, remind them to bring their folders to each group.
SESSION 1

Welcome!

This group is for students who have been told they have a learning disability and who may not be sure just what that means.

You may be having trouble with some of your school work. Some people think that having trouble in school means that you are dumb. THAT IS NOT TRUE! If you were dumb, you would have trouble learning and doing everything. But you only have trouble learning and doing some things. And you can learn and do those things with practice and help.

In this group, you will find out what it means to have learning disabilities. But we don't call them learning disabilities. We call them learning differences. Everybody learns differently, not just people with LD.

Once you understand better what it means to have learning differences, you will understand yourself more. You will like yourself more.

Share what you learn with your parents. Sometimes they have trouble understanding LD.

Remember:
The problems you have aren't the most important thing.
What you do about your problems is the most important thing.
GROUP RULES

1
One person talks at a time

2
Keep your hands to your self
(NO PUNCHING)

3
If you don’t feel like sharing, say, “I PASS”

4
No putdowns or saying mean things

5
Sit in your chair
(NO TIPPING)

6
Everything we say in the group stays in the group
(Don’t tell other people’s business, but you can tell your own business)

7
Follow Directions
SESSION 1

"I Am, I Can" List

I am special.
I'm worth it.
I deserve this.
I can do it.
I can handle this.
I'm worth being friends with.
I can cope.
I will make it through this.
I can keep trying.
I can stick with it.
I will try my best.

I am really good at ________________.
I did a nice job on ________________.
I was helpful when I ________________.

SESSION 1

I Am, I Can

This is a story about a boy I am going to call Johnny. However, the name is not important. It could be Maria, Ann, Jake, Sam, or anyone.

It is 7:00 in the morning and the alarm goes off. Johnny is starting his day. The first thing he does is to put on his “I Am, I Can” sign.

Johnny decides to crawl back into bed just for a few minutes. Suddenly, he is awakened by his mother’s yelling, “Get out of bed this very minute, you lazy thing!” This RIPS off a piece of his “I Am, I Can” sign.

Johnny’s sister calls him a little creep when he tells her to hurry up and get out of the bathroom because he is running late. Another piece of his “I Am, I Can” sign is RIPPED off.

After breakfast, Johnny’s mother apologizes for calling him lazy. She gives him a kiss and a hug and tells him to have a good day. This PUTS A PIECE BACK on his “I Am, I Can” sign.

As Johnny boards the bus to school, he notices his friends sitting together at the back. They pretend not to see him and don’t ask him to join them. Another piece of Johnny’s “I Am, I Can” sign is RIPPED off.

When Johnny arrives at school, he realizes that he left his math homework at home. In math class, his teacher is angry with him for forgetting it. What happens to his “I Am, I Can” sign?

In gym class, Johnny is the last person picked to be on the volleyball team. What happens to his “I Am, I Can” sign?

In language class, Johnny gets seven wrong on his practice spelling test. He is very mad at himself because he didn’t get more right. What does he do to his own “I Am, I Can” sign?

As the day goes on, good and bad things continue to happen in Johnny’s life. When he goes to bed that night, he takes his “I Am, I Can” sign off. It is much smaller than it was in the morning.

SESSION 1

Five Facts about "I Am, I Can"

1

Your "I Am, I Can" sign needs TLC (Tender Loving Care) EVERY day.

2

These are some things that can harm your "I Am, I Can" sign:
- mean criticism (from others or from yourself)
- being judged unfairly
- teasing
- being ignored or left out

3

A rip in your "I Am, I Can" sign is SERIOUS! You need immediate Self-Esteem First Aid. If you can't get it from another person, you'll have to give it to yourself. Tell yourself "I Am Smart, I Can Do It!" Or choose a saying from your "I Am, I Can' List" to tell yourself.
Five Facts about "I Am, I Can" continued

4

These are some things that can keep your "I Am, I Can" sign healthy and whole:

► kindness
► someone who listens to you
► encouragement (from others or from yourself)
► being appreciated
► forgiveness (by others or by yourself)
► understanding

5

You are responsible for taking care of your own "I Am, I Can" sign. You are also responsible for not harming anyone else's "I Am, I Can" sign.

Remember:

Other people want to be treated the same way YOU want to be treated.

Session 1
**LD AWARENESS**

**SESSION 2**

**Affirmations**

**LD'Awareness Focus**

Students formulate answers to their own questions about learning differences.

**Self-Esteem Focus**

Students give positive affirmations to themselves and one another.

**Materials Needed**

**Handouts**
- “I Am, I Can’ Journal” (page 23), enough for each student to last for one to two weeks
- Extra copies of the “I Am, I Can' List” (Session 1, page 15)

**Supplies**
- Poster paper, pencils, and markers, enough for all students
- Whiteboard, chalkboard, or flip chart; marker or chalk
- Students’ questions and gripes saved from Session 1
- A list of positive words or phrases beginning with the letters of the students' names (see #12 in “The Session”)
- *The Survival Guide for Kids with LD*
- Optional: *The Survival Guide for Kids with LD* audio cassette
- Optional: Josh: A Boy with Dyslexia or any other book of your choice from the Children’s Literature section (pages 127–142)
**The Session**

1. Welcome the students back to the group. Go over rules. Say, “Let’s see, who can tell me what we learned last week?” Last week we wrote questions and things that bother us, read important statements we must practice using, the “I Am I Can” list (show), and we read the “I Am, I Can” story. Who can tell me what the “I Am, I Can” sign stands for? The “I Am, I Can” sign stands for self-esteem or how we feel about ourselves.”

2. Distribute the students’ questions and gripes from Session 1. Invite the students to share their questions. Write them on the board or flip chart.

3. Read aloud “Ten More Things You Might Want to Know about LD” from *The Survival Guide for Kids with LD* (pages 77-82) or play the audio cassette. Afterward, draw the group’s attention to the questions or statements you wrote on the board. Read aloud. Say, “Who has ever felt this way?” or “Has anyone else wondered about this question?” or “How would you answer this question?” Leave blank any questions the students can’t answer immediately. Have the students work together in pairs or small groups to come up with possible answers. Record them on the board or flip chart.

4. Ask, “Do you agree that these are problems for kids with learning differences?” Ask, “Does anyone have something new that bothers them (sometimes we call them a gripe) to add to the list?”

5. Ask, “Can someone tell me what a compliment is?” Give examples by complimenting each student in the group.

6. Invite the students to compliment one another: Say, “I’m going to keep track of the compliments that you make to each other.” Then ask, “How does it feel to get a compliment?” OPTIONAL: Say, “If you make 6 compliments to someone else by our last group, you will get a prize (some type of reinforcer). You will be given time to make compliments during group; however, only three per group will count towards your prize” Keep track of each students compliments using the “I Am, I Can” Journal.

7. Ask, “Have you ever given yourself a compliment?” Give examples of compliments students might give themselves: “I did a good job on that assignment,” “I knew I could read this story. It was hard, but I tried my best,” “I’m good at making friends,” “I’m a really fast runner,” “I have a nice smile,” etc. Invite the students to compliment themselves. Then ask, “How does it feel to give yourself a compliment?” OPTIONAL: Say, “if you make 6 compliments to yourself by our last group, you will get a prize. You will be given time to give yourself compliments during group; however, only three per group will count towards your prize.”

8. Say, “Another word for a compliment is ‘affirmation.’ Giving and getting affirmations make us feel good. It also feels good to give ourselves affirmations. This is something we can do for ourselves every day.” Ask, “What would an affirmation—from someone else, or from you to yourself—do to a rip in your ‘I Am, I Can’ sign?”

9. Ask students to take the “I Am, I Can’ List” out of their folders. Read through the statements and say, “These are all affirmations we can give ourselves.” Encourage students to add more affirmations to the list.

10. Say, “There are other kinds of affirmations besides words. A kind action—helping another person, doing something nice just because, or smiling at someone—can also be an affirmation. Positive words and actions are both very powerful.” Ask the students to give examples of affirming actions and behaviors.

11. For some younger students this activity may be difficult. If you think the students may have difficulty with this activity, please see Alternative Activity.

Distribute poster paper and markers. Say, “We are going to make positive affirmation name posters. Start by printing your name in large letters along the left side.
The Session

of your paper. Then pick one letter and write one positive word or phrase about yourself that stars with that letter.”

Model on the board or flip chart. Use your own name or the name of a student in your group. Example: “G-R-E-G. G is for Great. R is for Responsible, E is for Excellent, G is for Good Swimmer.”

Say, “After you do one letter, pass your paper to another student. Then write a positive word or phrase about the person whose paper you have.” (If the group is sitting in a circle, you might instruct them to pass to the right or left.)

Make sure that everyone understands what they will be doing. Allow time for students to complete the posters. Explain that it’s okay to write more than one word or phrase for students with shorter names. Be ready to help with the list of adjectives you prepared in advance.

The posters can be sent home with the students or collected and displayed during future sessions.

11a. Alternative Activity. Distribute poster paper and markers. Say, “We are going to make positive posters about ourselves. Start by printing your name on the top of your paper. Then draw a picture about something you like about yourself or something that you are good at.”

Model this for the students. Hold up a picture you drew about something that you feel good about yourself or something that you are good at.

12. Optional: Read aloud Chapters 2 and 3 of Josh: A Boy with Dyslexia (pages 7-15). Or read from an alternate title from the Children’s Literature section. Allow time for questions and discussion.

13. End the session by reminding the students that giving themselves or others compliments (affirmations) is a good way to take care of our “I Am, I Can’ signs” (how we feel about ourselves or self-esteem). Remind students that using these “I Am, I Can’ list” statements can help us feel good about ourselves. Thank the students for working so hard. Encourage them to give compliments and to share what they have learned with their parents.
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Effect of Participation

LD AWARENESS
SESSION 3

How LD Affects Me

**LD Awareness Focus**

Students learn about ways their LD can affect them, and they assess their own strengths and weaknesses.

**Self-Esteem Focus**

Students learn that they have peers who are like them and who accept them for who they are.

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**Materials Needed**

**Handouts**
- “What Are Learning Differences?” (pages 26–28)
- “How LD Affects Me” (pages 29–30)
- Extra copies of the “I Am, I Can’ Journal” (Session 2, page 23)

**Supplies**
- Pencils, enough for all students
- Whiteboard, chalkboard, or flip chart; marker or chalk
- *The Survival Guide for Kids with LD*
- **Optional:** *The Survival Guide for Kids with LD* audio cassette
- **Optional:** *Josh: A Boy with Dyslexia* or any other book of your choice from the Children’s Literature section (pages 127–142)
SESSION 3: HOW LD AFFECTS ME

The Session

1. Welcome the students’ back to the group. Review rules and what they learned last week.

2. Read aloud Chapter 1 of The Survival Guide for Kids with LD (“Why Do Some People Have LD?,” pages 7-10) or play the audiocassette.

3. Distribute the “What Are Learning Differences?” handout. Say, “You all have one thing in common: You have LD. But your learning differences are not all alike. Today we’re going to find out more about what it means to have LD. We’re going to really think about how LD affects your life.” Read through the handout. Allow time for questions and discussion.

4. Distribute the “How LD Affects Me” handout and pencils. Say, “It’s important to understand how your learning differences can affect some of the things you do. When you don’t understand, it’s easy to get frustrated and angry with yourself.”

“This handout lists pairs of choices. As I read each pair, circle or check the one that is like you most of the time. For some of the choices, it may be hard to decided. Just do the best you can.”

NOTE: If you are working with other students you may want to let them complete the handout independently.

5. Write the category headings from the handout—“Difficulty with Reading,” “Difficulty with Spelling and Writing,” etc.—on the board or flip chart. Beneath each heading, write “Yes” and “No.”

6. Read through the handout again and ask for a show of hands as you read each choice. Put tally marks by “Yes” for each student who circled the first statements in each pair. Put tally marks by “No” for each student who circled the second statement.

When you are finished, guide the students to see that they have similarities and differences. This activity builds group cohesiveness. Students learn that some things are difficult for them and for their peers. You might say, “Now you know that there are people who can really understand your learning differences. Some of them are in this group.”


7. End the session by thanking the students for having the courage to share more about their LD. Remind them to keep giving themselves—and each other—“I Am, I Can” messages.
Effect of Participation 53

SESSION 3

What Are Learning Differences?

People with learning differences are intelligent. Some are VERY smart. This can be confusing, because in school they might not work up to their intelligence in some areas. Because they have learning differences, their brains sometimes mix up the information they receive. Your brain is like a gigantic file cabinet. All of the information is stored in files in the drawers. Your learning differences can misplace the files, mix up the files, or cause the drawers to get stuck so you can't get the information you are trying to find. But you are NOT dumb. If you were, your file cabinet would be empty!

Every person with LD is different. Some have a hard time doing one or two things. Some have a hard time doing many things. These are some of the things people with LD might have trouble with. See which ones sound like you.

Difficulty with Reading
You don't like to read. Letters like "b," "d," "p," and "q" often look alike to you. You know a word one time and forget it the next. Sometimes you skip words and lines on a page, or you put letter sounds into words that aren't there. You get confused when someone asks you questions about what you have read.

Difficulty with Spelling and Writing
You learn how to spell words, but you forget them later. You can't remember if the word "they" is spelled "thay," "thae," or "thea." You have poor handwriting. Even when you think it looks neat, the spacing is wrong and other people can't read it. Your ideas are good, but you have a lot of trouble writing them down.
Are Learning Differences? continued

Difficulty with Math

You put numbers in the wrong place, or you forget what step to do in a long math problem. In word problems, you don't know if you should add, subtract, multiply, or divide. You could put down the same answer to four different problems and not notice that you have done this. Sometimes you reverse numbers. It seems like you will never be able to remember all of the math facts.

Difficulty with Memory

You often forget what adults tell you to do. You can't remember what a word looks like when it is erased or taken away. You forget phone numbers and addresses. You say "What?" and "I don't remember" a lot. You forget the rules to games you play often.

Difficulty with Paying Attention

It is hard to focus on your assignments. You are distracted by noises or what others are doing. Many times you interrupt people when they are talking. Adults often tell you to pay attention.

Difficulty with Getting and Staying Organized

Many times you can't find your homework, or you leave it at home. You often misplace things, and you forget where you put them. Your bedroom is messy, and when you go to clean it up, you don't know where to start. At school, your locker or desk has everything just jammed in.
What Are Learning Differences? continued

Difficulty with Directions, Time, and Space
You get left and right confused. You can't remember if New York is east or west. You have trouble putting months of the year in order or knowing what season certain months go with. It is hard to copy things from a distance or from up close, like problems from a math book. Learning to tell time was difficult for you.

Very Active
Your hands need to fiddle with things. You have trouble sitting still. You often rock back and forth in your chair. Many times you are told to sit down. Sometimes you get in trouble for talking too much, acting silly, or interrupting.

Very Quiet
You'd rather watch games than play them. Many people say that you are very quiet and serious. You try to keep people from finding out about your learning differences.

Difficulty with Physical Education
You have trouble with team sports. You get the rules mixed up, you make mistakes, and you are often picked last for teams. When you were younger, you had trouble learning to ride a bike. You knock things over or bump into things. You feel clumsy.

Remember:
Just because you have learning differences doesn't mean you are dumb. It doesn't mean you can't learn. You just learn differently. Your teachers and parents need to help you learn in ways that are right for you.
SESSION 3

How LD Affects Me

As you read each pair of statements, circle or check the one that is like you most of the time.

Difficulty with Reading

☐ Reading is often difficult for me. It takes a lot of hard work for me to do well.
☐ Reading is very easy for me. It does not take a lot of effort to do well.

Difficulty with Spelling and Writing

☐ I forget how to spell many words. It is very hard for me to put my ideas on paper.
☐ I can spell words very easily. I have very little trouble writing sentences and paragraphs.

Difficulty with Math

☐ It is hard for me to remember math facts. Doing story problems and math problems is hard for me.
☐ I don't have trouble doing my math work on my own.

Difficulty with Memory

☐ I often forget words and things that have been written or said.
☐ I hardly ever forget words and things that have been written or said.
How LD Affects Me continued

Difficulty with Paying Attention
☐ It is hard for me to pay attention.
☐ It is easy for me to pay attention.

Difficulty with Getting and Staying Organized
☐ I have trouble keeping my things organized at home and at school.
☐ It is easy for me to keep my things organized.

Difficulty with Directions, Time, and Space
☐ I have trouble remembering directions or copying things.
☐ It is easy for me to remember directions or to copy things.

Very Active
☐ I have trouble sitting still.
☐ It is easy for me to sit still and concentrate.

Very Quiet
☐ I would rather watch than play.
☐ I would rather play than watch.

Difficulty with Physical Education
☐ Most things in gym are hard for me and I don’t enjoy it.
☐ Gym is a lot of fun for me and I don’t have trouble with it.

Session 3
LD AWARENESS
SESSION 4

How Learning Happens

LD Awareness Focus
Students state one way in which learning differences affect learning.

Self-Esteem Focus
Students write about and illustrate one of their individual strengths and a strength of one peer.

Materials Needed

Handouts
- “How Learning Happens” (pages 33–34)
- “We All Have Strengths” (page 35)

Supplies
- Pencils, markers, and crayons, enough for all students
- The Survival Guide for Kids with LD
- Optional: The Survival Guide for Kids with LD audio cassette
- Optional: Josh: A Boy with Dyslexia or any other book of your choice from the Children’s Literature section (pages 127–142)
1. Welcome the students’ back to the group. Quickly review the group rules. Summarize what was done last week. You might simply say, “Last week we talked about how each of us has some things we are good at and other things we find difficult. We also found out that we may have similar feelings as other people in this group and other people in this group may understand what it feels like to have Learning Differences.” The students may want to share what they learned from last week. Allow a few minutes for the students to share something with the group.

2. Distribute the “How Learning Happens” handout. Say, “This is a diagram of your brain. Today we will find out how the brain allows everyone to learn. We’ll also learn what happens in your brain if you have LD. It’s important to understand that when you have LD, there is nothing wrong with your brain. It just works differently.

“There is no brain, no brain, no brain, no brain...”

Your brain is something like a file cabinet. It stores information. If you were dumb, or if your brain didn’t work, your file cabinet would be completely empty and it would be locked up. Now, we know that people with learning differences have file drawers that are full of information. So they can’t possibly be dumb. What happens is that the files sometimes get misplaced or put in the wrong drawers. Sometimes, when LD is really getting in the way, the drawers may get temporarily stuck. It takes a lot of hard work and effort to put the files back where they belong or to unstick the drawers.”

Read through the handout. Allow time for questions and comments.

3. Read aloud Chapter 2 of The Survival Guide for Kids with LD (“Why Is It Hard for Kids with LD to Learn,” pages 11-15) or play the audiocassette. Afterward, invite the students to share their ideas how and where learning breaks down for them.

4. Next, invite students to tell the group about ways to learn that work for them. Some of these may already be listed on page 15 of The Survival Guide for Kids with LD; others may be new ideas. Write down any new ideas the children share with you.

5. Distribute the “We All Have Strengths” handout and pencils, markers, or crayons. Say, “Write your name on one of the barbells (point). Then, on the other character, write the name I will give you. I want you to keep the second name a secret until the next session. Let’s all agree to do that.” Assign each student the name of another student in the group. You may want to whisper the name of write it on a slip of paper and give it to the student to copy on the handout.

Say, “In the space under the barbell with your name, write or draw something that is one of your personal strengths. This should be something you know very well or do very well.”

Next, in the space under the barbell with the other person’s name, write or draw something that is one of his or her personal strengths.” Allow time for the students to complete this activity, then collect the handouts for use in the next session.

6. If time, allow a few moments for the students to give themselves or other students compliments.

6a. Optional: Read aloud Chapter 5 of Josh: A Boy with Dyslexia (pages 20-26). Or read from an alternate title from the Children’s Literature section. Allow time for questions and discussion.

7. End the session by thanking the students for their hard work. Remind them to keep secret the name of the student whose strength they wrote or drew about today.
SESSION 4

How Learning Happens

1. Concentration, judgment
2. Organizes thoughts
3. Forms sentences, remembers music, understands spoken words
4. Remembers words
5. Recognizes and organizes what you see

Input

When you learn, information gets into your brain through one or more of your five senses. Your five senses are:

1. sight
2. hearing
3. taste
4. smell
5. touch

Most of the information you learn in school goes into your brain through your first two senses, sight and hearing.

Attention

Your brain must pay attention to the information that comes through your senses. If you aren't paying attention, you won't keep much of the information that your senses bring to your brain.

Memory, Perception, and Organization

Your brain must figure out what the information means. Some of the information is stored in your memory. Your brain must have perception (understanding) of the information. It must be able to organize the information and decide what, if anything, your body needs to do about it.

It is in these three areas of learning—memory, perception, and organization—that LD mixes things up and gets in the way.

Output

Information doesn't just go into your brain. It also comes out of your brain. To communicate the information in your brain, you can talk, write, or move your body.

Teachers measure what you know by looking at your output. At school, output usually means talking or writing. Some students with LD need different ways to show what they know.
Understanding My LD

**LD Awareness Focus**
Students match their learning difference to one of the five types of learning differences. They learn several LD-related terms and their meanings.

**Self-Esteem Focus**
Students reinforce their personal strengths and give each other positive affirmations.

**Materials Needed**

**Handouts**
- “LD Language” (pages 38–39)

**Supplies**
- Pencils, enough for all students
- Whiteboard, chalkboard, or flip chart; marker or chalk
- “We All Have Strengths” handouts saved from Session 4
- *The Survival Guide for Kids with LD*
- Optional: *The Survival Guide for Kids with LD* audio cassette
- Optional: *Josh: A Boy with Dyslexia* or any other book of your choice from the Children's Literature section (pages 127–142)
**The Session**

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<td>1. Welcome the students’ back to the group. Review rules and what they learned last week.</td>
<td>After you finish recording the definitions, allow time for questions and discussion.</td>
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<td>2. Distribute the “We All Have Strengths” handouts from Session 4. Invite the students to read aloud what they wrote about themselves and their strengths (or share their drawings). Then invite them to share what they wrote or drew about the other student whose name you assigned them during the last session. Afterward, thank the students for cooperating with the activity.</td>
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<td>3. Read aloud Chapter 3 of The Survival Guide for Kids with LD (“Five Kinds of LD,” pages 17-21) or play the audiocassette. Afterward, encourage the students to try to identify their own LD. Ask, “What kind of learning is hardest for you” Allow time for discussion. Then ask the students. “Do you think you might have more than one type of LD?”</td>
<td>6. Optional: Read aloud Chapter 6 of Josh: A Boy with Dyslexia (pages 27-34). Or read from an alternate title from the Children’s Literature section. Allow time for questions and discussion.</td>
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<td>4. Say, “Now we are going to learn more about LD language-some special words and phrase people use to talk about LD. Listen carefully, when I’m finished reading, I’m going to ask you questions.” Read aloud Chapter 4 of The Survival Guide for Kids with LD (23-28).</td>
<td>7. End the session by thanking the students for their cooperative work in pairs, and for sharing their definitions with the rest of the group. Say, “You’re helping each other to learn and understand more about LD, and that’s terrific.” Remind them to keep giving themselves-and each other-“I Am, I Can” messages.</td>
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<td>5. Distribute the “LD Language” handout and pencils. Read allowed the words. Divide the group into pairs. Assign each pair one or two terms from the list to define. Allow time for the students to work together to come up with their definitions. Make copies of The Survival Guide for Kids with LD available for students who need them (23-28). Offer assistance to students who need help. Afterward, have the students share their definitions.</td>
<td>If you are only doing PART ONE: Tell the students that next week is your last session together. Thank the students for working hard.</td>
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Record their responses on the board or flip chart. If students are having trouble defining some of the words, say to the group. “Let’s see if we can do some of these together as a group.” Go over some of the words they are having difficulty defining. Write definitions on the board for any words they could not define. Encourage the students to complete their “LD Language” lists by copying the answers you write.
SESSION 5

LD Language

LD

LDA

Public Law 94-142
LD Language continued

Resource Room

Mainstreaming

LD Teacher

Psychologist

Session 5
My LD History

LD Awareness Focus

Students learn about the IEP and recall when they first began working in an LD program.

Self-Esteem Focus

Students identify some of their likes and dislikes, then compare their likes and dislikes with those of their peers.

Materials Needed

Handouts

There are no handouts for this session.

Supplies

- Construction paper or tagboard (any size to make a small poster), one piece per student
- Old magazines, catalogs, and/or newspapers
- Scissors, glue, and markers, enough for all students

\* The Survival Guide for Kids with LD

\* The School Survival Guide for Kids with LD

- Optional: The Survival Guide for Kids with LD audio cassette
- Optional: Josh: A Boy with Dyslexia or any other book of your choice from the Children's Literature section (pages 127–142)
- Optional: Overhead transparencies of your local special education forms; overhead projector
- Optional: Copies of the students' IEPs
The Session

1. Welcome the students back to the group and allow a few moments for conversation. Ask, “How many of you remember when you first started working with an LD teacher or resource room teacher to get special help for your learning differences?” Allow time for the children to think back on their experiences and respond. Then say, “Today you will find out just what had to happen for you to get help from an LD teacher. You’ll learn more about the people who were involved and you’ll hear what needed to be done so you could receive special help.”

2. Read aloud Chapter 5 of The Survival Guide for Kids with LD (“Getting Into an LD Program,” pages 29-33) or play the audiocassette. Be sure to stress the information on pages 32-33 about the IEP.

Ask, “Who can remind the group what an IEP is? Why is it so important for each of you to have an IEP? How many of you have seen your own IEP?” Allow time for discussion.

3. Optional: Show overhead transparencies of your local special education forms. (You might prefer to show them at appropriate points during your readings from the Survival Guides.) Students are very interested in knowing that all of this important paperwork is done for each of them. They also appreciate having the mystery taken out of what can be for them a confusing and overwhelming process.

4. Say, “We have talked about how having LD is one way you are different from other people, and about how it is one way you are like one another. Now we’re going to think more about differences.

“There are many things that make us all different from one another. For example, we don’t all like the same things. We don’t all dislike the same things, either.”

Distribute construction paper or tagboard; magazines, catalogs, and newspapers; scissors, glue, and markers. While you are handing out the materials, say, “We’re going to make posters about our likes and dislikes.

Print your name at the top, draw a line down the middle, and label one side ‘Likes’ and the other side ‘Dislikes.’ Then look through the magazines, catalogs, and newspapers to find at least two or three things that illustrate your personal likes and dislikes. Cut them out and glue them onto your poster.”

This activity will lend itself to natural conversation and increase awareness among the students that even though they have LD, they have unique personalities.

Afterward, invite the students to show their posters to the group and talk briefly about their likes and dislikes. Point out interesting differences and similarities, or ask the students to point them out.

The finished posters may be sent home or posted in the room.

5. Optional: If you have obtained copies of the students’ IEPs, you might use the poster activity time to briefly show each student what his or her IEP looks like.


6a. If you are only doing PART ONE: Remind students that this is their last group. Invite students to share what they have learned. You might say, “I would like to know what your thoughts and feelings are about this group so that I can help other kids. What about the group did you like best? Can anyone tell me one thing that they learned? Was there anything that you didn’t like about the group so that I can help other kids? Ask the students how they feel about it being their last group. Allow time for discussion.

7. Thank the students for all their hard work in the group. Suggest that this week they take some time to talk to a friend who doesn’t have LD hand find out something they both like and or dislike. Give the group a compliment.