

## A Brief Introduction to Learning Difficulties

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### Historical overview

The historical evolution of learning difficulties study provides vast information on how various researchers have begun to study it as a problem, which areas and aspects of one's daily and academic life are affected, with which brain structures they relate to and, thus, how can individuals suffering from these difficulties be assisted. The definition of learning disabilities changed over time in order to properly describe them, adapting to new research data and to the ever-changing social environment.

Precisely, during the first period of study on the topic of learning disabilities, researchers had the view that the cause of learning difficulties was a trauma to the individual's brain region and therefore these problems were endogenous. Afterwards, the interest of research was shifted from adults to children and it was found that these difficulties were not, ultimately, related to trauma but stemmed from a brain malfunction. Evolving the definition, it was pointed out that these difficulties were not related to any mental retardation or sensory difficulties, and the areas of learning difficulties affecting the individual were slowly defined [1]. This, certainly, is very important to know, as it helps us to diagnose such problems, which areas to search for and how. Thus, over the years, it is realized that the interest is being directed by the person bringing the problem to the society and the state, the ways of evaluation and intervention.

The understanding of learning disabilities evolution is highly important in order to identify the causational factors of the problem, investigate the areas of the brain that are affected and which practical and intellectual skills they affect. Knowledge of learning disabilities historical background makes it easier to perform a problem-focused assessment of the individual so as to move on to the problem itself and provide guidance to the individual and the institutional bodies as to the best practices that can be followed in order to face them.

### The importance of a valid diagnosis

Learning disabilities are a problem since a child's birth and can therefore be diagnosed from an early age, even in infancy. An interesting example, worth mentioning here, is the finding of symptoms such as increased infant mobility and fewer hours of sleep in children who are subsequently diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [2]. A valid diagnosis of the problem, however, is just as important and can be provided after the first semester of the first grade in elementary school, i.e. once the child's skills and difficulties have been identified.

The positive effects of a valid diagnosis are to avoid the psychological problems which a child may develop due to the rejection he or she may experience from teachers, classmates or even parents. Furthermore, taking advantage of the offered help, as it will be given early and adapted to the child's problem and achieve a proper awareness of the parents to the problem, its effects, the intervention and directions for creating a safe environment.

Supplying teachers with fundamental information concerning the child is essential and benefits the school environment, as the awareness of what to expect ahead of time will aid in adapting the requirements he or she has, taking certain difficulties into consideration. With

a diagnosis forthcoming, the school may facilitate the child's education and offer alternatives to the standard teaching methodology and therefore meet the requirements of each class on a more independent basis. Finally, an accurate and timely diagnosis will help cater to the child's needs so as to receive the most appropriate help, as well as to avoid perpetuating future problematic situations.

### Learning disabilities as disorders. Pros and cons

The DSM statistical manual includes learning disabilities in disorders, as people with such problems are considered to deviate from the average, while they also face some form of dysfunction that is evident in their daily lives. The categories in which these disorders are classified are in the field of reading, mathematics, written expression, learning difficulties not otherwise specified and specific learning disorder.

However, the complex issue of viewing learning disabilities as mental disorders offers both advantages and disadvantages. In the positive sense one could say that the symptomatology of learning disabilities is recorded in detail so that each mental health professional can extract more accurate and consistent diagnoses and therefore classify the child's problem into a specific category so as to make the appropriate therapeutic intervention. Furthermore, a diagnosis makes communication between scientific professionals easier as each is better informed on the comorbidity of any disorder, when the diagnosis is very specific. Concerning the disadvantages of the learning disorder perceived as a mental health disorder, a diagnosis such as this can give a child a 'stigma' that is likely to exist and persevere through their life. In conclusion, each disorder adheres to a specific symptomatology and in cases where the symptoms are not fulfilled, diagnosis is made harder and has the potential to create disagreements between experts.

### Bibliography

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2. Kakouros E and Maniadaki K. "Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder". Athens: Greek Letters (2002).

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