

Supporting Students with Invisible Disabilities: Strategies and Resources for ESL Teachers and Administrators

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Agenda

- ◆ Opening discussion
- ◆ Psychological issues for international students
- ◆ Disabilities at higher education
- ◆ Supporting AEI students with diverse needs
 - ◆ Distinguishing difficulties
 - ◆ Strategy boost
 - ◆ Accommodations
 - ◆ Resources for teachers, administrators and students
- ◆ Reflection

Opening Discussion



Opening Discussion

- ◆ Have you ever wondered if your struggling students have a...
 - ◆ Learning Disability (LD)?
 - ◆ ADHD?
 - ◆ Depression?
 - ◆ Anxiety Disorder?
- ◆ What made you wonder?
- ◆ How did you support them?



Yang's Story – 1

One of your new students in your Reading, Writing & Grammar class, Yang, is a very pleasant student. He works hard in class.

However, you noticed that Yang's speaking/listening skills are far superior compared to his reading/writing skills. He struggles with the most basic writing and reading tasks.

His handwriting is barely legible as well – disorganized and messy.



Psychological Issues



Areas of Major Adjustment

- ◆ Cultural adjustment
- ◆ Language barriers
- ◆ Increased academic demand
- ◆ Financial responsibilities
- ◆ Social and sexual identity
- ◆ Living independently for the first time



Chen & Endale, 2012.; Sisk

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Psychological Issues at Universities

- 24% of 17,000 college students surveyed “felt so depressed it was hard to function”;
21% “seriously considered suicide”
- 20% of the Chinese students at UO report severe-moderate depression



Learning Disabilities



What is an LD?

“.. a handicap that interferes with someone’s ability to store, process or produce information. LDs can create a **gap between a person’s true capacity and his day to day production and performance.**”



Disabilities at Universities

- ◆ Approx. 6~9% of all undergraduates report having a disability
- ◆ Most self-reported disabilities at higher education are:
 - ◆ Learning Disabilities (31%)
 - ◆ ADD or ADHD (18%)
 - ◆ Mental illness (15%)



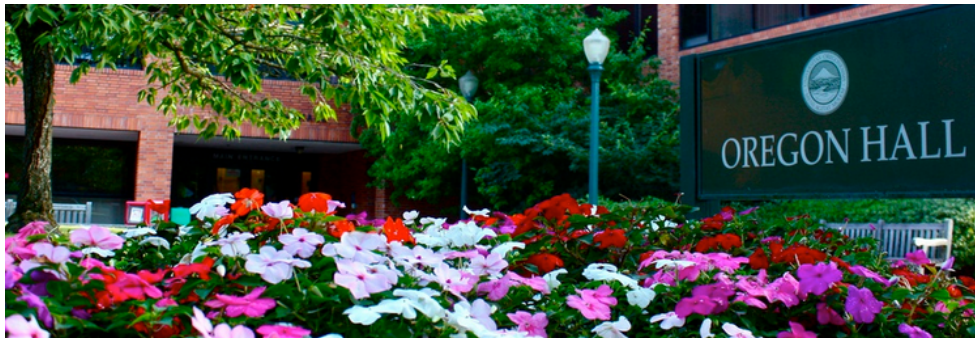
Disabilities at UO

General population (600 students/term)

- LD, ADD/ADHD, mental health issues

International population

- Physical disabilities, mental health issues



Disabilities at AEI

- Faculty Survey -

- 💧 Speaking and listening skills are out of proportion (superior) to skills in reading, writing and spelling
- 💧 Difficulty with spelling (definitely out of the ordinary)
- 💧 Mixing up of letters
- 💧 Messy, disorganized handwriting
- 💧 Trouble writing comprehensibly in their own language

Disabilities at AEI - Faculty Survey -

- ◆ Unable to listen and write at the same time
- ◆ Unable to focus
- ◆ Extreme difficulty learning a new (basic) concept
- ◆ Get stressed with any ambiguity in the lesson
- ◆ Autism spectrum

Yang's Story – 2

You are concerned about Yang. You decided to record your observations on areas he struggles with.



Separating Difference from Disability



Do we have to? Can we really?



YES NO MAYBE™

However...

- 💧 It would be helpful to know when assisting students
- 💧 Students might benefit greatly from accommodations available only with diagnosis

LD or SLA?

What are some of the “hints”?

- ◆ Difficulty following directions?
 - ◆ In general?
 - ◆ Or in English when they are not well understood?
- ◆ Difficulty with phonological awareness?
 - ◆ In general?
 - ◆ Or distinguishing b/w sounds not in L1?



LD or SLA?

Behaviors associated with LD	Behaviors when acquiring an L2
Difficulty following directions	Difficulty following directions in English when they are not well understood
Difficulty with phonological awareness	Difficulty distinguishing between sounds not in L1
Slow to learn sound-symbol correspondence	Confusion w/ sound-symbol correspondence when different than L1
Difficulty remembering sight words	Difficulty remembering sight words when word meaning not understood
Difficulty retelling a story in sequence	May understand more than can convey in L2

LD or SLA?

Behaviors associated with LD	Behaviors when acquiring an L2
Slow to process challenging language	Slow to process challenging language not well understood
May have poor auditory memory	Better auditory memory in L1
Confused by figurative language	Confused by unfamiliar figurative language
May have difficulty concentrating	Processing a L2 can be tiring
May seem easily frustrated	May seem easily frustrated

Klinger, J (2013). Distinguishing between language acquisition and learning disabilities.

Right Questions to Ask

- L1 -

L1- Is the student able to communicate well in L1?

- ◆ If the student has not acquired a developmentally appropriate proficiency in L1 (written or spoken), it may be due to undiagnosed disability



Right Questions to Ask

- Cognitive -

Cognitive– Is the student meeting the benchmarks ?

- ◆ If student cannot, even with learning support (more later), he or she should be encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center (AEC, or Academic Advising Office).

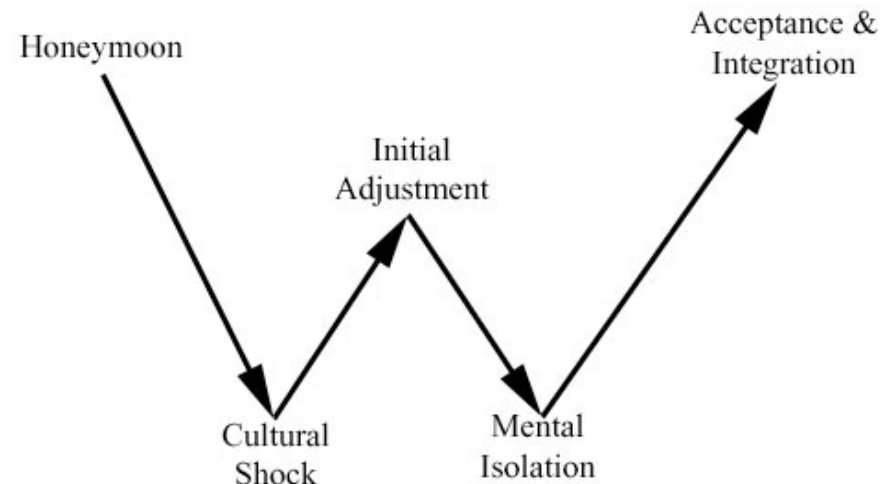


Right Questions to Ask

- Adaptation -

Adaptation – Is the student at risk for culture shock? Is the student adapting to the school at a normal rate?

- 💧 The manifestations of culture shock could look like learning and behavior disabilities
- 💧 Refer to Counseling Center (or Academic Advising Office) if culture shock or depression might be playing a role.



Right Questions to Ask

- Achievement -

Achievement – Is the student's level and rate of academic achievement “normal” for the general population?

- Structured intervention in learning strategies would help establish if the slow progress is learning-based rather than “something else”.



Symptoms of Depression

- ◆ Persistently sad or low mood
- ◆ Loss of interest/lethargy
- ◆ Irregular/loss of sleep
- ◆ Appetite or weight changes
- ◆ Increased tearfulness
- ◆ Restlessness
- ◆ Poor concentration and difficulty making decisions



Yang's Story – 3

Yang consistently scores very low on his tests – it seems like he runs out of time. Spelling seems challenging as well.



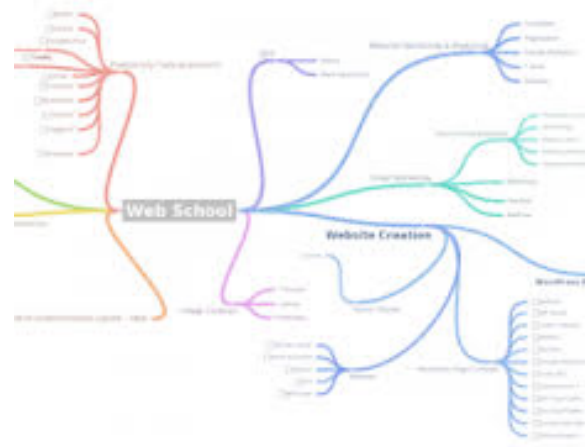
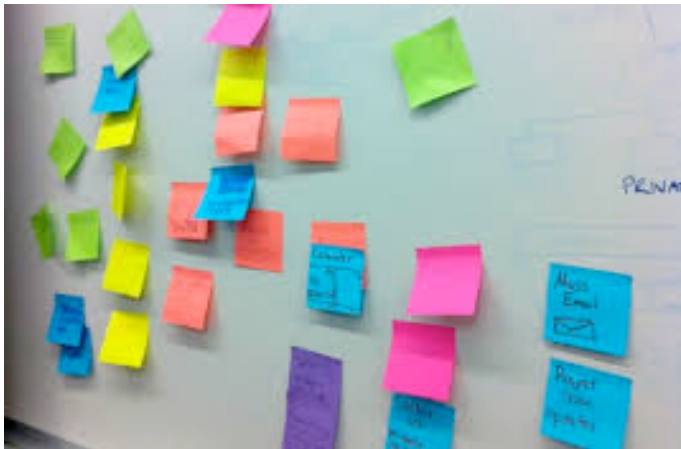
Boosting Strategies



Boosting Strategies

Learning style inventory

- How does the student retain information best?
 - Listening? Reading? Both? Kinesthetic? Definitions?
 - How do they organize their notes best?
 - Visually?



Boosting Strategies

Learning style inventory

- 💧 Aurally
 - 💧 Read-aloud software
 - 💧 “smart-pen” https://youtu.be/J2q8_fR0lTI
 - 💧 Presentation cue-cards



Boosting Strategies

Project/time management skills

- 💧 Teach the skills explicitly
- 💧 “Chunk” projects → tasks → manageable schedule
- 💧 Explore options on how to organize time/projects
 - 💧 Paper? Electronic? Apps? Google calendar? To-do list?
- 💧 Review progress occasionally with students

Yang's Story – 4

Yang and you meet during your office hours. You say, “So, it looks like you’re having difficulty writing fast enough when taking quiz. And scores for the spelling portion are often a bit low.” Yang responds by saying, “Yes, I always run out of time, and I just cannot remember spelling. I was a horrible writer in Chinese as well.”

You and Yang explore different strategies, including different ways to remember spelling and ones on test-taking and time-management.

He shows some improvements after the meeting, but still struggles with spelling and finishing test in time.

Supporting Students



1. When you suspect a disability

“If it seems that a student has a disability and is struggling in some way, **please share your observations/concerns directly with the student.**

It would be appropriate to state, “**it looks like you are having difficulty writing fast enough to meet our timing on this quiz.**”

If the student acknowledges this challenge, it would be appropriate to **refer them to AEC** to explore accommodations.”

1. When you suspect a disability

- ◆ “If a student requests an accommodation without a letter, refer him/her to AEC. However...
- ◆ **Depending on the nature of the request, you may wish to go ahead and respond.** If on file at AEC, student can request an updated letter.
- ◆ **If disability is obvious and the accommodation appears appropriate, teachers may need to provide the accommodation while waiting for the official letter.** If unsure, please contact the AEC.”

1. When you suspect a disability

1. Discuss the challenge with the student.
 - 💧 Talk about the challenges and what might be helpful.
 - 💧 Can you accommodate them within the AEI policies?
2. Refer student to AEC where he/she can make an appointment.
 - 💧 It can take up to 1~2 week(s).
 - 💧 Share the initial with student's permission with AEC.

1. When you suspect a disability

3. AEC counselor meets with the student to determine eligibility to work with AEC.
 - ◆ It is acceptable to bring a friend/teacher for support/translation.
 - ◆ If enough evidence, a **provisional letter with recommended accommodations** may be provided.
 - ◆ Evidence can include **teachers' observation** and students' awareness ("I always had difficulty in school, especially with writing").
 - ◆ Student brings back the letter to AEI teachers/advisors.

1. When you suspect a disability

4. Accommodations will be made.

- Academic Advisors need to be notified.
- If testing accommodations are to be made, student works with AEC.



1. When you suspect a disability

5. Student checks back in with AEC later that term to reevaluate eligibility.



2. Student wants diagnosis

There are community counselors who can help.

- 💧 AEC and Academic Advising Office have a list of counselors.
- 💧 It costs a few hundred dollars+ and takes at least a few weeks.



3. Student has a diagnosis but no letter from AEC

1. Refer student to the Academic Advising and/or AEC.
2. Student makes an initial appointment.
3. AEC helps determine eligibility for service at AEC.
 - ◆ Student might be referred to Counseling Center.
4. Student may receive a letter with recommended accommodations which he/she can bring back to AEI (Academic Advising & teachers).

Accommodations

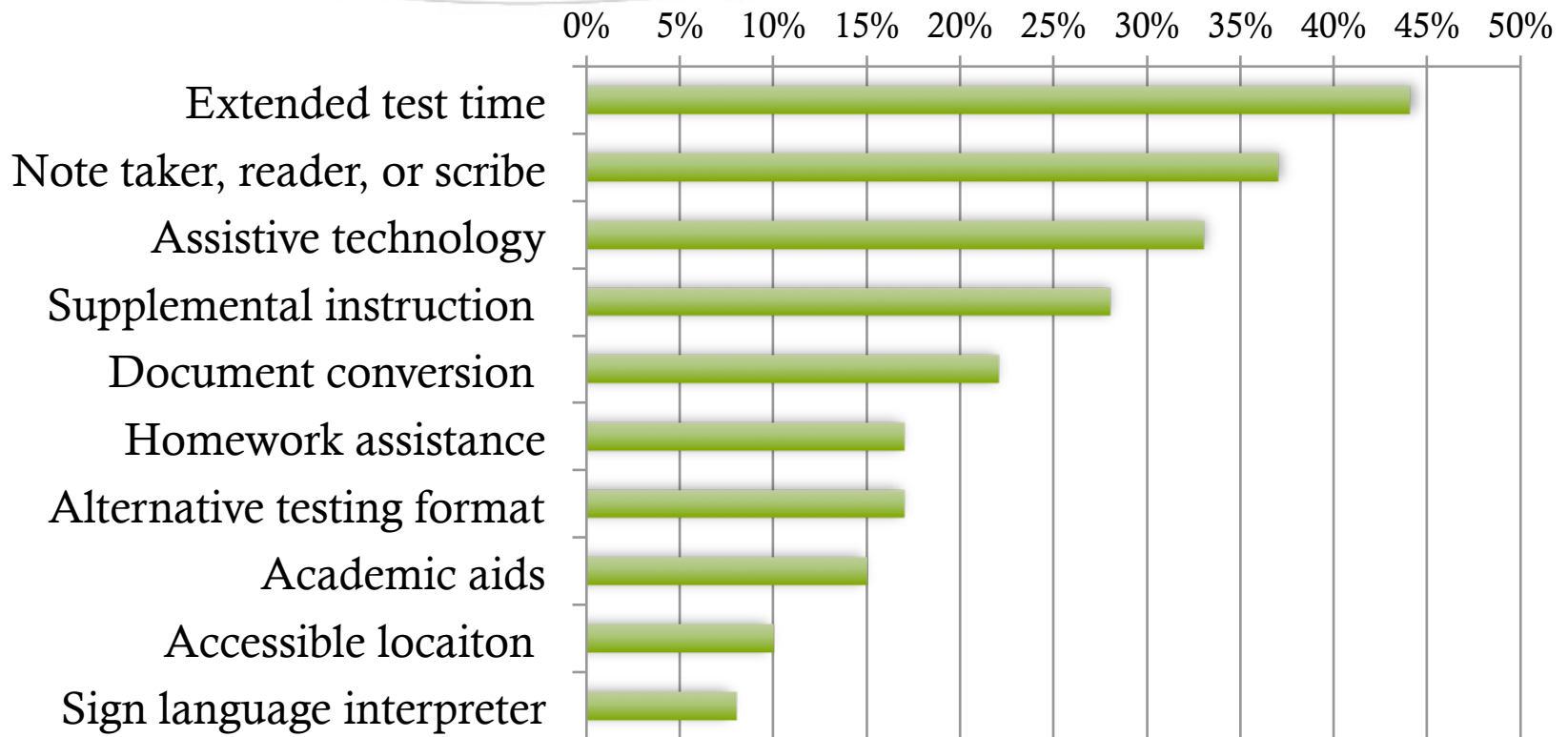


Accommodations for Depression

Depression or medication to treat it can slow down the processing speed.

- ◆ Added time for assignments/tests
- ◆ Other testing accommodations
- ◆ Flexible attendance
- ◆ Consider side effects

Common Accommodations in Language Classes



Yang's Story – 5

You refer Yang to an AEI Academic Advisor who helps him make an initial appointment with AEC. You forward the notes from your meeting with Yang to AEC with his permission.

Yang, after meeting with AEC, receives a provisional letter with accommodation recommendations, which he shares with the AEI Academic Advising Office and the teachers. He makes an arrangement so that he can receive accommodations including extended time for his tests.

He also decides to talk to a local counselor who can diagnose LDs and ADHD because he wants to learn more about them.

Reflection



Limitations

This is all great, but what about...

- ◆ assessments? What if the learning objectives cannot be measured accurately when accommodations take place?
- ◆ students with very low English proficiency? Can they be diagnosed?
- ◆ other students in class who might feel that the accommodations are unfair?
- ◆ Anything else?



Reflection

- 💧 Will you help your students differently in the future?
- 💧 What would you like to find out at your program?



Thank you!

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American English Institute,
University of Oregon

Study group on
disabilities starting
this fall at AEI!

Resources



Resources

Differentiating language acquisition from LD

- ◆ Separating difference from disability, Collier, C. (textbook)
- ◆ A guide to learning disabilities for the ESL classroom practitioner
“... classroom behaviors generally manifested by people w/ LD and common sense techniques to vastly improve the classroom environment”
<http://www.ldonline.org/article/8765>

Resources

Differentiating language acquisition from LD

- ◆ At-risk students and the study of a foreign language
http://www.dyslexia-ca.org/pdf/foreign_language.pdf
- ◆ The Impact of Language and Socio-cultural factors on learning
<http://www.council-for-learning-disabilities.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/CLD-Infosheet-Diversity-2013.pdf>

Resources

Requirements

- ◆ UO Accessible Education Center (AEC)
Responsibilities, procedures and best practices
<http://aec.uoregon.edu/faculty/procedures/responsibility.html>
- ◆ U.S. Department of Education on student responsibilities
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html>

Resources

Universal Design

- ◆ UO Accessible Education Center (AEC)
Planning, delivering and evaluating instruction
<http://aec.uoregon.edu/faculty/universdes/index.html>
- ◆ Common modifications and accommodations
<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/treatments-approaches/educational-strategies/common-modifications-and-accommodations>

Resources

Classroom accommodations to help students

- ◆ Slides shows on accommodations for dyslexia, Executive functioning Issues, ADHD and more
<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/partnering-with-childs-school/instructional-strategies/classroom-accommodations-to-help-students-with-learning-and-attention-issues>

Resources

Depression warning signs

- ◆ Student Against Depression website
<http://studentsagainstd Depression.org/understand-depression/what-is-depression/depression-warning-signs/>

Resources

Dyslexia

- ◆ International Dyslexia Association fact sheets
<http://eida.org/fact-sheets/>
- ◆ Dyslexia: What it is and isn't
https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dyslexia/dyslexia-what-it-is-and-isnt?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=understoodorg

Resources

ADD/ADHD

- 💧 Quiz: Could your child have ADHD?
<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/signs-symptoms/could-your-child-have/quiz-could-your-child-have-adhd>
- 💧 Attention Deficit Disorder Association
<https://add.org/>

Resources

Memoirs

- 💧 Learning outside the lines: Two Ivy League students with learning disabilities and ADHD give you the tools for academic success and educational revolution
<http://amzn.com/068486598X>
- 💧 Born on a blue day
<http://amzn.com/1416549013>