

Recent research results:

Emotional state:

- Studies have found that children with LD are **less persistent** and **less socially-flexible** than children without LD. At our College, we see that they give up easily and are prone to not persevere when faced with a challenging task rather than engage with the task, wrestle with it and perhaps “fail”.
- Coupled with the fact that the High School curriculum makes more demands on a child’s academic and intellectual faculties, teens with LD sometimes reach their skill level and can’t progress. This often results in a **sense of hopelessness** due to an **increased failure rate** (Snyder, 1994 cited in Deschler et al (2004)).
- We also know that youth with LD are **more prone to depression** and **lower self-esteem** when compared to their non-LD peers.
- It is also well documented that the learning disabled young person is more likely to have **negative self-perceptions** than their peers. When I look at the percentage of boys who are referred to my office for counselling for depression, 65% of them have been diagnosed with some form of a LD.
- It has also been shown that SWD experience higher levels of **victimisation** (name-calling, pushed, sworn at or teased). However, a study done in 2008 points out that even though adolescents with LD have a lower sense of self-worth in the academic domain, they actually are on a par with their non-disabled peers in terms of their over-all sense of self-worth. This seems to be due to the fact that they have been able to participate and achieve in other non-academic domains.

Barrier to learning/classroom environment:

- Many studies have found that secondary school students with LD do not maintain an academic orientation that is on a par with their non-LD peers. When a subgroup of students with co-morbid LD/ADHD was examined, it was found that their grades were lower than the LD students. ADHD is a complicating factor.

- Most SWD do not choose subject packages that are rigorous. In our school, we find that the SWD tend to choose subjects that have a practical component to them e.g. Art and Drama where approximately 50% of the assessment mark is based on practical work. They also like Geography.
- On a positive note, some researchers have found that “SWD are very much a part of and not apart from nor isolated in the social and academic milieu of the classroom” (p 40). Teachers often have as many interactions with the SWD as with others in the class and in some cases the SWD initiate more interaction with teachers than other students do.
- However, the opposite is true in some cases and the SWD are often disconnected from their teachers and ‘unknown’ by them” (p44). Keep both possible scenarios in mind. Sometimes our staff find that they are spending more time on the SWD than the rest of the class especially if the student’s behaviour is challenging.
- In some cases teachers will need to make accommodations for SWD. These accommodations required little planning.

Organisational structure:

- If a boy has been able to participate and achieve in other non-academic domains he will develop a sense of success and may be able to counteract the sense of failure he may experience in the classroom. It is helpful if schools try to have a holistic approach to the “education” they offer by providing alternative areas for SWD to show competence. Examples of this could be for a school to offer a variety of clubs and societies e.g. Comedy Club, Survival Club or perhaps cultural activities e.g. a choir, orchestra.
- Community service – (Tony Jarvis)
- Traditions – do certain traditions create anxiety or genuine barriers to SWD? e.g. war cry practice, greeting all Seniors by name

Practical suggestions:

- McNamara et al (2005) comment on the importance of giving attention to the LD/ADHD students as they are “at risk for developing unhealthy patterns of well-being” (p242).

- They comment that school personnel have the opportunity to interact with the LD/ADHD student from the early Grades, build a rapport and attempt to prepare them for life after school as well as monitor their academic progress and intervene if they show signs of becoming at risk for developing unhealthy patterns of well-being. In our school, we see the following unhealthy patterns in SWD: learned helplessness, debilitating shyness, lack of study skills, inappropriate coping with anxiety.
- As the literature points out, individuals with LD are able to maintain a positive global sense of worth if they have other areas in their life that they are able to achieve in (LaBarbera, 2008). It becomes important then for schools to have a holistic approach to education and provide other avenues for participation and achievement e.g. extra mural programmes, community service.
- Bender (2004) cited in McNamara (2005) comments that students must be given the necessary support to enable them to have **meaningful participation** in the classroom. This might help reduce feelings of victimisation and boost self-esteem.
 - Remedial/speech-language therapy still helpful during adolescent years
 - Academic support staff, pull-out system, audio/MP3 version of notes
 - Electives – study skills, English, Afrikaans, Maths, Surviving in the Bush
 - Exam concessions
 - Assistance during Prep. Times in the Boarding houses
- Staff need support and staff development to help them feel equipped to teach effectively in a school that enrolls SWD. Housemasters need support and input with regard to dealing with boarders who might be struggling in some way.
- Schools should not forget the important role that a child's parents and family have to play in determining a child's experience at school. McNamara et al (2005) found that teenagers without LD reported much stronger relationships with their parents than the LD students.
- When one considers how turbulent adolescence is, schools could perhaps try to help prepare the parents of LD teens for the years to come – they should be extra supportive

of their children, take time out to spend time with them, get to know their friends etc. Schools should consider running parenting workshops that are aimed at addressing the needs of parents with LD teens.

- LaBarbera (2008) found that support from parents plays a more significant role than support from classmates, close friends and teachers in the development of an adolescent's self-worth.

Conclusion:

Key role players to take into account (as a result of the context of the boy) are your **staff**, the boy's **parents/family** and the **other boys** in the school.