

# Learning Disabilities: Issues in the Preparation of Professional Personnel

*National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities*

WHEREAS, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) has supported the need for quality professional education by adopting requirements for a Certificate of Clinical Competence and standards for accrediting graduate education programs, and

WHEREAS, it is ASHA's belief that the quality of personnel prepared in all professional areas can be improved if institutions of higher education adopt philosophies, policies, procedures and practices designed to improve professional education programs, and

WHEREAS, currently, there are no national standards for the preparation of professional personnel in the area of learning disabilities, and

WHEREAS, ASHA representatives to the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities have cooperated with other national organizations to arrive at consensus on the recommendations for preparation of professional personnel in the area of learning disabilities; therefore

RESOLVED, That the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) endorses in concept the position paper of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) titled "Learning Disabilities: Issues in the Preparation of Professional Personnel"; and further

RESOLVED, That the Executive Board communicate to the NJCLD ASHA's support for the concepts embodied in the position paper; and further

Reference this material as: The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. *Learning Disabilities: Issues in the Preparation of Professional Personnel*. A position paper of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. September 26, 1982, the Orton Dyslexia Society, Baltimore, Maryland.

Index terms: Personnel preparation, learning disabilities, NJCLD, academic programs (see graduate education programs)

RESOLVED, That the NJCLD position paper entitled "Learning Disabilities: Issues in the Preparation of Professional Personnel" be published in *Asha*.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association has endorsed the following position paper of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. For further information, contact Stan Dublinske, Director, State/Regulatory Policy, ASHA.

Note: Recommendations for personnel preparation included in this position statement *do not* supersede requirements established by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association for the Certificate of Clinical Competence.

The understanding of the nature of learning disabilities as well as the needs of individuals with these problems has changed within the last 10 years. In response to current issues in learning disabilities, the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities has developed previously a series of position papers that address definition (1), inservice programs (2), and educational services (3). This position paper is concerned with the preparation of professional personnel and states problems and recommendations germane to this topic.

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) believes that there is an urgent need to reevaluate current concepts and practices in the preparation of professionals who will be responsible for the education and management of individuals with learning disabilities. It also is essential that institutions of higher education reevaluate their roles and responsibilities for the preparation of these prospective professional personnel. The NJCLD realizes that professional education\* within the professions that deal with learning disabilities will vary according to the specific areas of study required for professional practice. However, the concepts and recom-

\* Professional education refers to coursework, practicum and other educational experiences that take place at the graduate level.

recommendations included in this position paper are regarded by the NJCLD as appropriate and pertinent to the education of all prospective professionals who will provide service to individuals with learning disabilities.

Any attempt to delineate changes in curricula, including domains of study, curricular sequences, specification of competency standards, and structure of practica must consider the following problems and issues:

1. Philosophical plurality and the vested interests of some professionals have resulted in diverse differences in professional education.

2. The ability to effect changes in educational policy, curricula and practica has been impeded by the organizational complexity and rigidity of institutions.

3. Competition for diminishing financial resources has fostered separatism and territoriality among professional education programs within institutions of higher education.

4. There is a lack of interdisciplinary (including interdepartmental and intercollegiate) professional education in academic programs and a lack of university incentive to provide for this kind of interdisciplinary education and training.

5. The goals of professional education differ from those of accrediting, certifying, or licensing agencies and this difference often has a negative effect on curriculum and training policy.

6. It is increasingly difficult to recruit potentially promising and academically competent personnel into regular and special education at all levels because of salaries that are not competitive, inadequate work environments, and reductions in support services.

7. Many university faculty are distanced from the realities of educational systems and resistant to modifications in professional education programs.

The resolution of these problems and issues will need to occur prior to or simultaneously with bold changes in academic curricula and practica experience.

The NJCLD has developed this position paper based on the belief that the goal of professional education is the development of well-informed and prepared professionals who will meet effectively the educational needs of all individuals. The ability to attain this goal is predicated on the design and implementation of undergraduate, graduate, and professional education programs that will guide and ensure the self-actualization of prospective professionals. After careful consideration of the previously noted

problems and a review of current professional education practices in the preparation of professionals who provide services to individuals with learning disabilities and their families, the NJCLD makes the following recommendations regarding professional education.

1. *To meet fully the needs of the learning disabled requires that professionals complete a graduate education program as the minimum level of professional preparation.* Because of the complexities of identifying, assessing, diagnosing and planning of programs for the learning disabled, there is a need to provide personnel preparation at the graduate level to ensure that professionals serving the learning disabled have the knowledge and skills necessary to provide or obtain the comprehensive services that are needed to meet the needs of individuals with learning disabilities.

2. *Institutions of higher education should establish and maintain the highest criteria possible for admission to and continuation of prospective personnel in professional education programs.* Even with the availability of adequate funding, excellent faculty, and appropriate facilities and resources, the quality of the students in a program is the major determinant to the success of that program's efforts to develop well-informed and prepared professionals.

3. *Professional education programs as well as tenured and nontenured faculty members in institutions of higher education should be evaluated periodically with regard to their respective abilities to meet current professional education goals and objectives.* It is essential that professional education programs as well as faculty members provide prospective professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to deliver appropriate and effective services to individuals with learning disabilities. This will necessitate evaluation at all levels of the program through such review mechanisms as professional accrediting bodies, state education agencies, peer review, student assessments, or internal administrative review.

4. *Institutions of higher education should design and implement comprehensive guidance, monitoring, evaluation, and support systems in order to ensure accountability in professional education and to allow for individual growth during professional preparation.* Although essential attributes exist that cannot be described adequately within the format of competency statements, much of the knowledge and skill required by professionals is amenable to such a delineation. The advantages of implementing such a competency-based program include (a) increased accountability for programs as a result of requiring students to demonstrate that they have mastered specific competencies the program purports to provide and (b) greater op-

portunities to systematically individualize a student's program based on previously acquired skills and knowledge rather than requiring all students to complete virtually identical curricular sequences. Advisors' decision making on a student's course work and practica would be based on the existing and needed competencies of each student, instead of upon transcripts containing generic course titles (e.g., Introduction to Learning Disabilities, Methods of Teaching Learning Disabled Children) that yield little information about the actual skills and knowledge acquired by the student.

5. *Institutions of higher education should establish comprehensive interdisciplinary professional education programs for preparation of professionals.* The need for cooperative interdisciplinary programs in professional education becomes self-evident when consideration is given to the effects of diminishing financial resources for education and training, the extreme variability and lack of uniformity in programs that prepare professionals to provide services for individuals with learning disabilities, the heterogeneous nature of the learning disabilities, and the different manifestations and consequences of the learning disabilities.

The development of cooperative interdisciplinary professional education programs necessitates the following:

- a. A review of the roles and responsibilities of institutions of higher education in personnel preparation.
- b. The development of cooperative and shared professional education.
- c. The establishment of a comprehensive interdisciplinary program that consists of didactic and practica experiences in the following areas:
  - Human Development and Its Psychology. This area would include knowledge of human growth, development and its variations, theories of learning, including the basis of motor, cognitive and linguistic development, knowledge of social and emotional growth, and the development of critical thinking and problem solving abilities.
  - Theories of Language Acquisition and Use. This area would include knowledge of the interacting components of the language, such as phonology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics; variations in the development of language, discourse and text comprehension; and the relationship of language to school achievement, social and emotional growth.

— Educational Theory and Practice in Learning Disabilities. This area would include knowledge of the nature and manifestations of learning disabilities, including the social and emotional concomitants, the identification and assessment of the individual with learning disabilities, educational/therapeutic management and intervention for the learning disabilities, knowledge and appraisal of teaching/clinical methods, curriculum planning and sequences, systems of teaching content material, systems for the development of adaptive, modified, alternative or unique curriculum, technical support systems, e.g., computer technology, as well as instruction in effective communication with students, their families, other professionals and various publics. d. The development of clinical consortia professional education centers.

6. *Practica and field experiences in professional education programs must be structured to enable students to demonstrate pre-specified competencies in actual teaching/clinical situations.* It is essential that the practica and field experiences provide for comprehensive, graduated, and varied student-centered experiences in regular and special education. These practica and field experiences must be supervised directly by master teachers and clinicians. The site of the practica or field placement should be selected on the basis of the pre-professional trainees' needs and not simply on the basis of site availability or convenience.

7. *Requirement of a one-year teaching internship should be considered for all students who have otherwise completed a professional education program at an institution of higher education.* Such a prerequisite experience is required currently for professional certification in clinical psychology and speech-language pathology audiology. Although students may acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to implement adequate and appropriate programs for the individual with learning disabilities, their ability to use the knowledge and skills in an actual work experience usually has not been evaluated completely in the program. This evaluation can best take

The NJCLD is aware of the implications of this recommendation. It will be necessary for state and local education agencies, private school accrediting bodies, institutions of higher education, and professional organizations to work in cooperation to establish guidelines and criteria for the successful completion of the internship year.

8. *Innovative and creative funding patterns and procedures should be explored for the development of model*

*interdisciplinary professional education programs in learning disabilities.* Current funding procedures for professional education programs tend to impede the development of interdisciplinary programs. Institutions of higher education should explore funding methods that will facilitate development of interdisciplinary programs. These would include cooperative efforts among professional organizations, institutions of higher education, private and public foundations as with as local, state, and federal agencies.

In order to ensure the design of appropriate and effective professional education programs, institutions of higher education must be responsive to the stated and demonstrated needs of consumers at all levels, including parents, local and state educational agencies, private schools, and most importantly the individual with learning disabilities.

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities is a committee of cooperating organizations concerned with individuals with learning disabilities. Organizations represented and representatives for the September, 1982 meeting included: the Associa-

tion for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (Martha Kabbes, Sylvia Richardson, Shari Sowards); the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (Anthony Bashir, Katharine Butler, Stan Dublinske); the Council for Learning Disabilities (Don Hammill, James Leigh); the Division for Children with Communication Disorders, Council for Exceptional Children (Sr. Rita Alice FitzGerald, Joel Stark); the International Reading Association (Jules Abrams, Jack Cassidy, Ralph Staiger); The Orton Dyslexia Society (Drake Duane, William Ellis, Mary Lee Enfield, Linda Frank).

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