

# "I just have to try harder:" Examining students with LD's Self-Perceptions

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## INTRODUCTION

- Recently, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5, 2013) has amended their information regarding the diagnosis of a Learning Disability (LD).
- Students' perception of their own disability can impact their self-concept/self-efficacy in an education setting (Denhart, 2008).
- Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine: (a) how students perceive their own diagnosis of LD and (b) their causal attributions for their school performance (based on the perceived severity of their LD).

# **METHOD**

- 52 high school students who self-identified as having a LD completed our questionnaire.
- Students responded to:
  - "What does it mean TO YOU to have a learning disability?" (free response)
  - The Multidimensional-Multiattributional Causality Scale (MMSC; Lefcourt, et. al., 1979), with subscales: ability, effort, context and luck (scale: 0= disagree to 4= agree).
  - "How would you rate the severity of your
    LD?" (scale: 1= very mild to 7= very severe).

# RESULTS

- Sample: 29 males, 19 females & 4 unidentified.
- The mean rating for severity of LD was 3.54.
  - Low severity group  $\leq 3$  (n = 25), and high severity group  $\geq 4$  (n = 24).

#### FREE RESPONSE RESULTS:

- Students' free responses were open-coded.
  General themes that emerged: (1) having to try harder, (2) identifying challenges experienced
  & (3) comparison to others.
  - No differences between low & high groups.

# What does it mean TO YOU to have a learning disability? One bump in my path Means that you are that i just have to I cannot focus as well Just another hurdle going to have more work harder. in class and I have to to overcome. obstacles that you are work twice as hard as going to have to my classmates (and overcome compared studying takes twice to other people. the time it should) in Having a learning order to achieve the Just means I have to disability means I have grades I want. work harder to achieve to work extra hard to better grades. get good grades. That I need a little more extra help Not able to then anyone else, comprehend and that I get more tests and That I have to work a time on my tests exams like It means things little harder to keep up and also have others are harder for me with some people. someone there to students. than others. read the questions to me. What do you attribute academic outcomes to? ■ Low ■ High

**Effort** 

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Context

Check out ACME projects at:

https://sites.google.com/ualberta.ca/acme

Luck

### RESULTS

#### BETWEEN GROUPS COMPARISIONS

- Means on MMCS subscales were compared between the low and high severity groups.
- Students in the **high** group were more likely to attribute effort to academic outcomes than students in the **low** group, t(47) = 2.68, p = .01.

#### WITHIN GROUP COMPARISONS

- No differences on the subscales for those who identified with low severity (p < .05).</li>
- The high group rated internal attributes (effort & ability) higher than external factors (context & luck; p ranged from .01 to .004).

## CONCLUSION / IMPACT

- Our results are consistent with the prevalent understanding of LD: individuals with LD require high levels of effort and support to achieve similarly to their peers (LDAC, 2015).
- According to attribution theory (Weiner, 2014), students' internal attribution of effort can increase self-esteem when linked to success.
- Ability causation when failure occurs can lead to feelings of helplessness, which can negatively impact future performance.
- Understanding students' causal attributions is important for supporting future learning.

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