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Jizelle Rios

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Pobody's Nerfect: Improving the Identification and Diagnosis of Learning Disabilities

Estela Hernandez-Martinez, Jocelyn Kiser, Madalyn Nico, Jizelle Rios, Katie Szeto

California State University Monterey Bay

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Dr. Patty Whang

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Abstract

The focus of this Capstone Project is on improving the identification and diagnosis of learning disabilities. This is important because diagnosing a child properly will help teachers understand the students' learning styles and better position the teachers to create more effective learning environments. Also, teachers will be able to better support and accommodate their students both academically and socially. It is argued that many teachers do not have the right resources, understanding, or authority to diagnose learning disabilities. The primary stakeholder perspectives obtained were from teachers, staff, and students because of their relevant experiences and roles in identifying and addressing learning disabilities. After interviewing the participants, three action options emerged from an analysis of the data and were explored as ways to address the issue presented. Implementing monthly check-ups and annual teacher trainings are argued to be the most effective way to achieve the goals of improving the identification and diagnosis of learning disabilities.

Keywords: Learning disabilities, Diagnosis, educational support

Pobody's Nerfect: Improving the Identification and Diagnosis of Learning Disabilities

I am the firstborn of my family and the first grandchild from both my paternal and maternal sides. I have always had so much support, as I was the first to do everything. I was viewed as the child who can do it all and the child who will pave the way as an excellent example for my siblings and cousins who follow me. I was always a good student in manners and classroom behavior, so it was a surprise that I had trouble with my academics.

From kindergarten to third grade, my teachers had noticed a pattern when it came to my academics. At the beginning of the year, I had forgotten everything I had learned from the previous year as if I had a memory chip full of information. Still, my brain had deleted all the information before the new school year had started. This had made it difficult for my teachers and me. We were trying to move on with lessons and progress at a standard rate, but I would have to be taught everything from the year before moving on. This was not a viable option for my teacher as they had other students to tend to, that we were on track. Then, my teachers had noticed that I was writing certain letters backward; an example would be that I wrote the letter "e" as "ə." Which presumably gave me the diagnosis of having dyslexia.

Once my teacher had enough information on my learning and academic behavior, she had referred me to the school psychologist. After the school psychologist did further analysis and testing, they gave me a visual processing disorder diagnosis. This disorder is commonly confused with dyslexia. Making it clear why my teacher had believed I had dyslexia. Once I had my final results, the psychologist informed my future teachers and mother of the diagnosis. Things became smoother after this.

If my teachers had been appropriately informed in detecting learning disabilities, they would have noticed the patterns earlier. They would have been able to assist me and create a proper learning plan to fit my needs. Teachers and other school staff should detect traits and patterns that may be a learning disability. They should also have learning plans and alternatives ready for students that may need them. Being well informed of learning disabilities will help ease the learning environment for both students and teachers.

What is the problem?

Many children attending schools are not getting diagnosed properly or on time. There are an abundant amount of traits that can be found when it comes to learning disabilities. Micheal McDowell mentions, “The predicament for children who have SLD [Specific Learning Disabilities], as noted in the case report, is an unexpected degree of difficulty acquiring learning in one or more curriculum areas” (2018, para. 8). This is a very broad definition that is used in many cases, such as in schools and clinical settings. Having this type of definition can lead to difficulty when it comes to the diagnosis process. McDowell makes a statement directed to doctors, “...If SLD is a possibility, it is beyond the scope of paediatric assessment to clarify the question in full” (2018, para 22). This makes the diagnosis of learning disabilities even more difficult. There is a broad definition, which would lead to believing any student that is academically behind may be suspected as having a learning disability, and if they are suspected it takes a careful and trained eye to diagnose it. Algozzine, Putnam, and Horner also mention, “Learning disabilities(LD) may coexist with other disorders such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder or conduct disorders” (2012). This would mean that the traits can be confused with traits from another disability.

Method

For this Capstone Project, the researchers investigated how teachers and students view difficulties in diagnosing children's learning disabilities and what they think could improve them. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researchers used what they have learned to formulate an action that responds to the difficulties of diagnosing children's learning disabilities in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

Context

Each of the researchers collected data from different schools. Those schools will be described below.

Estela

Sky Union Elementary School is located just south of the city of Salinas California. The school is close to the fields and small, but it is one of the top 50% of public schools in California and serves 330 students. The minority enrollment, 99% of the students are Hispanic according to their 2019-2020 SARC.

Mariposa High School is located in Mariposa California. Mariposa High was opened in 2006 and is within the Monterey Peninsula Unified School district. According to their SARC 2019-2020, the school serves 600 students in grades 9-12 and 23.1% of students are Hispanic, 45.1% are White, Asian 23.3%, and African American 1.0%. In addition, the school has a great program to support students with learning disabilities

Jizelle

Clydesdale Elementary School¹ is located in Southern California. The school is situated in an equestrian district, having large ranches surrounding the school. The two largest ethnic groups in the students' population are Hispanic at 95.6% and Asian at 4%. According to their

¹ Pseudonyms have been used for the names of people, places, and organizations.

2019-2020 SARC (School Accountability Report Card), the school is in good physical condition. Out of the whole student population, 12.5% of students have disabilities.

Akers Elementary School is located in Central California. The school is situated in the middle of a residential neighborhood, next to an open-field park. The two largest ethnic groups in the students' population are Hispanic at 71.5% and white at 11.6%. Relevant statistics indicate that 13.4% of the students have disabilities. According to their 2019-2020 SARC, the school is in good physical condition.

Jocelyn

Card View Elementary is located in Monterey, California. They offer transitional kindergarten (TK) through sixth grade. According to the 2019-2020 SARC, the two largest racial groups are White (at 50.1%) and Hispanic or Latino (at 30.7%). Out of the entire school population, 6.8% of the students have disabilities. When all students with disabilities took the CAASPP, only 17.65% met or exceeded the standards. The school does not have any full-time support services staff. It seems the only support program they have is their Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) system.

Sand Carla School District is located in the Bay Area. They offer kindergarten through eighth grade. According to the 2019-2020 SARC, the two largest racial groups are White (at 56.73%) and Hispanic or Latino (at 14.86%). Out of the entire school population, 7.06% of the students have disabilities. The school does not have any full-time support services staff. However, they do have at least one part-time counselor for social, behavioral, or career development, at least one part-time psychologist, and at least one part-time speech, language, and hearing specialist.

Charles Water is located in Monterey County. They offer second grade through twelfth

grade. According to the 2019-2020 SARC, the two largest racial groups are White (at 78%) and Hispanic or Latino (at 12%). Out of the entire school population, 100% of the students have disabilities. When all students with disabilities took the CAASPP, only 44.5% met or exceeded the standards. The school has academic counselors, a behavior specialist, learning specialists, a speech and language pathologist, an occupational therapist. and classroom aides and assistants.

Katie

Las Positas Elementary school is located in Northern California and opened in September 1973. According to their 2019-2020 SARC, the two largest groups are Asian at 71% and White at 18.5%. Out of the entire school population, about 6.8% have learning disabilities. The school's physical condition is fair.

Birdie Falcon High School is in Bay Area, California and was opened in 1973. According to the 2019-2020 SARC, the two largest groups are Asian at 42% and White at 37.8%. Additionally, 7.5% of the students have learning disabilities. The school's condition is exemplary.

Maddie

Watson school is located in Seashore, California. The elementary school was opened in 1983. The 2019-2020 SARC states that the student population is 78% white, 12% Hispanic or Latino, 5% Asian and African descent. The school facility is in moderate condition.

Christian Church School is a school located in Mountain, California. The School was founded in 1898. According to the Christian Church website, since it is a private school, it does not produce a SARC report. The school has served students from all over Mountain California for 123 years. The school is a faith-based school that teaches religious views along with academics. Many historical buildings at Christian Church School are in good condition.

Participants and Participant Selection

Each researcher interviewed at least two participants.

Estella

K. Farson. A special education teacher at Mariposa High School who teaches ninth grade. Before becoming a Special ED teacher, she started as a Behavior Technician in the LEAP program at Mariposa High School, where she was the support staff in the Special Education classrooms.

B. Jonn. General ED Teacher at Sky elementary school. Took twelve units of special ED classes and have being colobollative with special ED teachers

Jizelle

Y. Rather. A Hispanic teacher at Clydesdale Elementary School who teaches a first and kindergarten combination class. She has taught at charter and public schools. She has over ten years of teaching experience.

D. Cross. A behavior intervention assistant at Akers Elementary School. She helps students with disabilities and behavioral issues by coming up with solutions and teaching appropriate behavior for the classroom.

Jocelyn

J. Hayes. This teacher in training at Card View Elementary was invited to participate due to her relevant experience and role as a kindergarten teacher.

M. Nike. This student attended schools in Sand Carla School District from kindergarten to eighth grade and Charles Water for high school. She was invited to participate due to her relevant experience and role as a student with a learning disability.

Katie

K. Paterson. A white female kindergarten teacher at Las Positas Elementary School. She has been teaching for 30 years at multiple schools. She has taught students with and without learning disabilities.

P. Mason. A white male special education teacher. He has taught at Birdie Falcon High School for three years. He is part of the Special Education program. He teaches Algebra, English, and Learning Lab. He taught Special Education Mild to Moderate last year.

Maddy

C. Royal. A white female principal at Christian Church School. She has taught many students of all different backgrounds of learning for 30 years. She has served as a teacher at other schools conducting special education in grades kindergarten through eighth grade.

M. Road. A white female teacher at Watson school for 20 years. In her time teaching at Watson school, she obtained a degree in teaching and special education. Her goal as a teacher is to help students with learning disabilities be successful in their academics.

A. Numa. A white female principal was also at Watson school for five years. As a principal at Watson school, she has tremendously changed Watson school to be a more accepting and focused school on learning disabilities.

Researcher

Below, each researcher will reflect on their relationship to the issue of the identification and diagnosis of learning disabilities.

Estella

I am interested in this topic because I have relatives who have special needs. I also want to become an elementary school teacher, so having knowledge about this topic will help me to understand my students and to be able to address their problems when necessary. I want to have a

better understanding of this topic as some of the participants have educational backgrounds working with learning disabilities. I will gain insights as my understanding of this topic is very limited. I believe that getting this knowledge from people who already work with students will help me in the long run, and I will be more aware of their needs.

Jizelle

This topic is important to me because, as a child, I was diagnosed with dyslexia. Still, upon further testing, the school psychologist at my elementary school found that I did not have dyslexia but a visual processing disorder. Having a correct diagnosis would have given my teachers a clearer lesson plan that would have benefitted my learning outcome.

I am pursuing a degree in teaching, so I have chosen my participants to be people with educational backgrounds. They also have knowledge of special education and learning disabilities. I am not as well-rounded in disabilities as the participants, but I have a limited understanding of the subject. Being someone with a disability and being misdiagnosed gives me an understanding of how this may impact a student's behavior and academic performance. I learned more about the process that teachers, staff, and school administrators have to help teachers and parents create a learning environment that will help their students academically and emotionally.

Jocelyn

I am interested in teaching special education in elementary school. By researching this topic, I will better understand my students, even in other types of classrooms besides special education. I will also be able to assist students with learning disabilities better. I am similar to our participants because I want to teach in an elementary school. A few of our participants are special education teachers, while others are general education teachers. I am different from the

participants because I do not know how to aid students with learning disabilities. I need to be open-minded when listening to my group members and the participants, and I should also keep in mind that I should ask my group members for help.

Katie

When I was five years old, my parents and I went to a psychiatrist at Dawn Elementary School to find out what my learning disability results were before getting ready for Henry Elementary School. The school psychologist thought I had Autism and had me tested, but I did not have Autism. The school psychologist wanted to send me to Children's Hospital to get more testing. The psychiatrist at Children's Hospital wanted to know if I could interact with the doctors to measure my social interactions, which I was able to do. I found out later that I had speech and language impairment.

The participants are people who have an educational background. I see most teachers who teach special education and they do not appear to have a learning disability. It can be hard to tell if the teacher has a learning disability, so we do not know if the participants have a learning disability. There are other people who have a learning disability like me. We all go through different experiences. I have a background in special education but do not have a background in teaching like the participants.

I feel like we need to get in communication with my group for this project. I think my group should do roles on what we need to do. We should all work as a team. This can help everyone go forward with the project. When I work with students with learning disabilities you have to show care and patience with people. We should make sure we watch out for the timing schedule when we set up a meeting on Zoom.

Maddy

This topic is meaningful to me because, in first grade, I was diagnosed with a learning disability called auditory processing disorder, which causes the brain to process slower than the average person. This has had not only a significant impact on my learning but also my daily life. My goal as a teacher is to show students what they can do despite their disabilities. As for this subject, I feel over the years, I have gained more knowledge not only about my disability but other disabilities as well. This is an excellent tool for our project to understand the difference between misdiagnosing and diagnosing disabilities. Because this topic connects well with my life, the participants I chose understand and have experience in knowing about learning disabilities. These people include connections from schools I have been to and teachers I have developed relationships with. As for differences, I can not say I know all the knowledge about every disability and what other participants have gone through in their own experiences with a learning disability. Still, I will try my best to understand. As for my thoughts, feelings, or assumptions, I need to be mindful of others as I continue with this project by being flexible and coordinating with others' lives outside of class. I will also understand and listen to other thoughts and opinions about the project.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

For this project, three different groups served as participants and unique interview questions were developed for each group. The questions are shared below.

Teacher Interview. The following questions were asked to the teacher and teacher in training participants.

1. What is your background in teaching and working with students with special needs?
2. What are your or your school's protocols to diagnose students with learning disabilities?

3. What are you most concerned about when it comes to identifying and diagnosing children with learning disabilities?
4. What is currently being done to improve the identification and diagnosis of students with learning disabilities - by whom - and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?
5. What do you think should be done to improve the identification and diagnosis of students with learning disabilities?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the identification and diagnosis of students with learning disabilities?

Student Survey. The following questions were asked to student participants.

1. What was your schooling experience like regarding having a learning disability?
2. How were you diagnosed? Did the school have any part in diagnosing you?
3. Based on your experience, what are you most concerned about when it comes to identifying and diagnosing children with learning disabilities?
4. When you were in K-12, was there anything being done to improve the identification and diagnosis of students with learning disabilities - by whom - and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?
5. What do you think should be done to improve the identification and diagnosis of students with learning disabilities?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the identification and diagnosis of students with learning disabilities?

Procedure

Participants have been interviewed. All interviews were conducted individually. When it

was not possible to interview participants in person, they were invited to complete a phone interview or a paper and pencil survey of the same questions. Face-to-Face interviews took less than one hour, audio-recorded (with participant consent), and taken at the participant's school. A semi-structured interview format was used for face-to-face interviews to allow follow-up questions to unclear, interesting, or unexpected responses. All interviews and surveys were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, teachers and school staff were interviewed to see what they think could improve the methods for identifying and diagnosing children with learning disabilities. This is important because diagnosing a child properly will help teachers understand the students' learning styles and create the proper learning environment for the children's needs. The hope is that teachers will be better able to support and accommodate their students academically. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision-making required evaluating each potential option by the following criteria: time, cost, and effectiveness. Time is an essential aspect because the following actions must fit with the schedules of those that are affected and doing the action. Cost can be a determining factor for a school because the cost of implementation must be within the school's annual budget. Effectiveness plays a crucial role, as it considers how successful the outcome could be. Based on the evaluation of each option, an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

Options↓	Criteria→ Time	Cost	Effectiveness
Monthly Check Ups	Medium	Low	Medium
Annual Teacher Training	Medium	Medium	High
Student Improvement Plan	High	Low	Medium

Monthly Check Ups

Monthly check ups are vital because they give school staff a detailed monthly report on all students' who are displaying an academic achievement gap. Based on the data provided from the participant interviews, monthly meetings on the student's progress will give a consistent record of the student's academic and behavioral growth.

This option would not require extra allotted time to be given to school staff or teachers. Many schools already have teachers conducting meetings to check their classrooms' overall academic progress, so adding a monthly check up on students will not need a different time frame. One of the participants had mentioned, "most schools have monthly cycles of inquiry in which students are discussed on a monthly basis based on summative and formative assessments" (Y. Rather, personal communication, November 5, 2021). Based on students' results on these assessments, teachers will decide how to help students that may show a learning gap.

A monthly check up would not have a cost, nor would it need a specific budget. Checking on academic and behavioral report cards from previous years and semesters that previous teachers conducted can be one form of doing the check up. The monthly report will be conducted

by the student's current teacher, and the content within the report will be observational and statistical data from tests, work, and behavior. Analyzing the students' behavior in the classroom and going over their in-class assignments and homework will give substantial evidence of their academic progress.

The effectiveness of monthly checkups is moderate. When a teacher analyzes the data and finds a learning gap within the student, the teacher will then make accommodations for the student. Although they do provide a consistent paper trail of a student's progress, it may be difficult for teachers and administrators to identify traits of specific learning disabilities if they do not know how to spot these traits. One of the teachers that have been interviewed mentioned, "We normally need to meet three times in a year before we can even get the student to be considered for testing instead" (B. Jonn, personal communication, October, 28, 2021). Having the monthly meetings can help expedite the process, since there is evidence of an academic achievement gap.

Annual Teacher Training

Teachers will have an annual mandatory teacher training that focuses on learning disabilities. As the behavior intervention assistant interviewee Cross stated, "As there is a rise in more students having learning disabilities throughout the years, teachers as well should be given training that helps them understand different learning disabilities" (D. Cross, personal communication, October 18, 2021). The training will go over ways to create a better learning environment and identify traits commonly found in specific disabilities. Based on the data provided through the interviews, providing learning disability training helps teachers recognize the signs when students may need help (K. Fason, personal communication, October 27, 2021).

This option would not affect a school's amount of available time because the training would be given during a teacher in-service day, in which students do not attend school, but teachers go to work. The only cost for the training would be bringing in a specialist that knows about learning disabilities, if schools decide to pay for the specialist. Some schools might get volunteer specialists instead of having to pay them. This option would be effective in schools because teachers would know what signs to look for instead of not knowing how to help their students. One of the interviewees stated that, "I feel that if a teacher does not have the training that they need, they can't provide quality instruction" (K. Fason, personal communication, October 27, 2021). Which means that training is a must for teachers to be prepared in order to provide good services for their students. Even though the teachers would not diagnose the students themselves, interviewee Nike asserted that, "Teachers should gain more knowledge about the topic of learning disabilities"(M. Nike, personal communication, November 12, 2021). By gaining more knowledge about the topic, they would go to the school's psychologist or an appropriate administrator with their concerns. Furthermore, Fason agreed that we need quality trained teachers to better support students with learning disabilities, "We need to have more quality trained or trained teachers" (K. Fason, personal communication, October 27, 2021).

Student Improvement Plans

The third strategy to help students is with a Student Improvement Plan. The Student Improvement Plan is made specific to students' individual needs. Students Improvement Plans are created by a student support team. A student support team is a team of school staff that is assigned to a specific student in order to help support the student's educational needs. The team of staff can include the student's teacher, the school psychologist, a counselor, the student's parent/guardian, and any person that has resources to benefit the student. Often, teachers meet

with parents and work together on the student's plan. If the student plan does not seem to give positive results, then the teacher collaborates and cooperates with the student support teams and special education teachers to make required changes. When their needs are adequately met, students with learning disabilities can reach their full potential (Sansom, 2015).

The amount of time for this option is considered high. There are multiple people involved, meaning time will be taken from multiple staff members. Also, the team will meet multiple times to discuss the student plans. So this will take more time from the staff. The cost for this option is considered low. There is no specific budget for student plans and the student support team. Staff members are voluntarily participating in the team, so there will not be a need to pay them more than their salary.

The effectiveness of student improvement plans is medium. Student support teams meet to discuss ways that they can help the student. As mentioned in an interview, "we do a Student Improvement Plan and meet with parents and set goals for six weeks. If needed, we make a second six week improvement plan and goals" (K. Paterson, personal communication, October 15, 2021). The plan is made for a fixed period of time to assess its effectiveness in helping the student academically so the achievement gap reduces. In kindergarten teacher Paterson's words, "if they do not meet their goals on both of those, we bring it up to the student support team with administrators and our special education teachers" (K. Paterson, personal communication, October 15, 2021). The student support team tries its best to help the student do better in school, but there is no guarantee that the student will be diagnosed with a learning disability. As interviewee Mason stated, "When students have been identified, it is the school psychologist that knows the diagnosis" (P. Mason, personal communication, October 18, 2021). This would mean only one person has the knowledge and authority to diagnose the student. As interviewee Rather

mentions, “Most SSTs do not lead to an evaluation, but the team of educators, instructional staff, parents, and psychologists work together to support students’ needs” (Y. Rather, personal communication, November 5, 2021). So, even if a student is not evaluated, the team still finds ways to aid the student. Being able to meet their needs and provide any other support to help them will increase their learning (Samson, 2015).

Conclusion

Based on the evaluation of the action options, the recommendation would be to implement monthly check ups and annual teacher training. Schools would either ask a specialist to volunteer to give the training on learning disabilities or hire a specialist if it is within their budget. The training would be given during a teacher in-service day. Using the information teachers learn from the training, they would do monthly check ups on their students’ academic progress and behavior to see if any students show signs of a learning disability. This would allow teachers to bring any concerns they may have to an administrator or the school psychologist. The administrator or psychologist would take the information given to them and take appropriate steps to get support for the student.

Concessions. The first and second options being recommended as the best options to use does not mean that the third option would not be effective. It is best to see how well the child is doing in school. Based on research, the Student Improvement Plan is not being primarily recommended because there is no direct help from specialists, teachers, or school psychologists. Similarly, through the Student Improvement Plan, students usually do not get any further assistance for evaluations. However, it is important that the purpose of the Student Improvement Plan is to increase the chance of learning. A way of offering support to students would be to encourage teamwork and collaboration.

Limitations. While this recommendation is the best option from the action options provided, it does have limitations. Schools may not be able to get a specialist to volunteer if they can not afford to hire one. This would cause the training to be less effective since teachers would be getting incomplete or possibly incorrect information. If there is no designated administrator for teachers to bring their concerns to, then there will not be a way for students to get support. Not all teachers would feel comfortable bringing up their concerns to a parent or the student directly.

Potential negative outcomes. If this action is implemented, there could be negative outcomes. Students that are diagnosed with a learning disability might not accept their status. This could lead to negative emotions such as frustration, agitation, and sadness. It could also lead to students developing generalized anxiety and clinical depression. Also, even if a student is diagnosed with a learning disability, that does not mean the school has the necessary resources to support the student and give them accommodations. Teachers may not be able to meet students' needs, and their teaching styles may not match the students' learning styles.

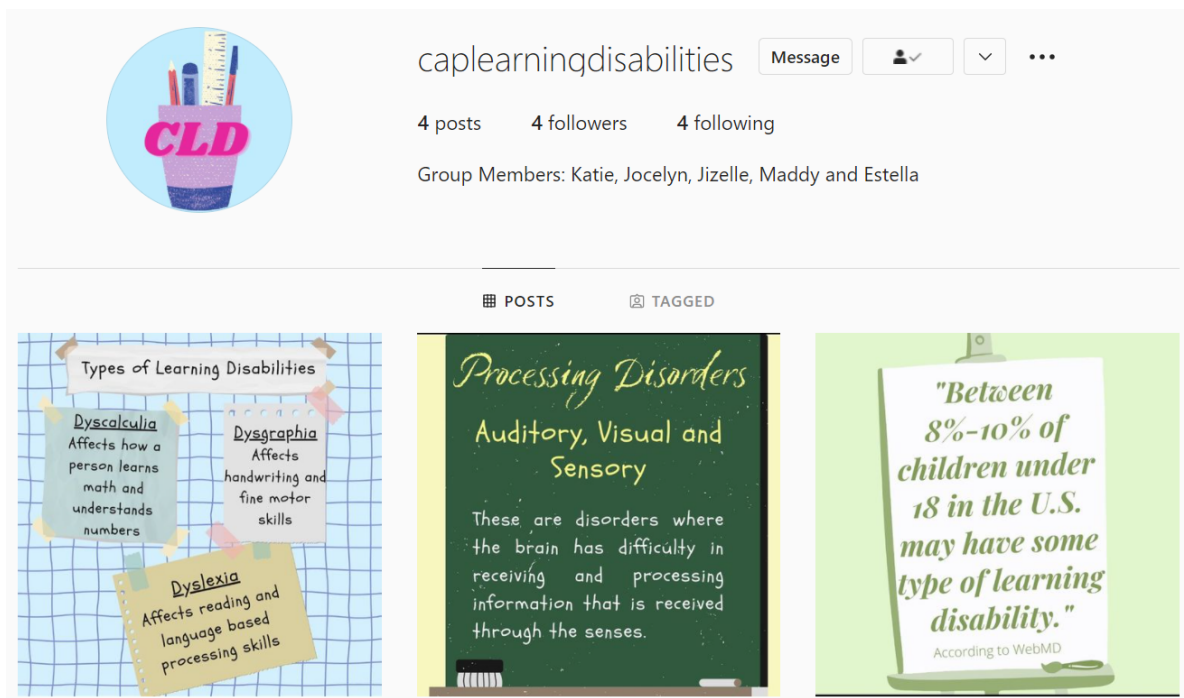
Conclusion.

Despite the concessions, limitations, and potential adverse outcomes, the best action option to recommend is implementing monthly check ups and annual teacher training to help reduce the difficulties of diagnosing students with learning disabilities. The combination of these two action options has the most potential reach. Both monthly check ups and teacher training do not need outside scheduled time, making it easy for staff and teachers to implement it in their busy schedules. They also do not have a high cost making it easy to fit with a school's annual budget. Monthly checkups and annual teacher training work hand in hand. Monthly check ups become more effective when teachers get the proper training to understand and spot learning

disabilities characteristics. For these reasons, having annual training and monthly check ups are highly beneficial to easing the stress in diagnosing students with learning disabilities.

Action Documentation and Critical Reflection

The focus issue for this project is improving the methods for identifying and diagnosing children with learning disabilities. For our data, we interviewed a mix of teachers, school staff, and students. Three action options that emerged were monthly check ups, annual teacher training, and student improvement plans. We were unable to implement our action options, so we chose to create an Instagram account that promotes information about students with learning disabilities. This option was picked because it reaches a larger audience, including our intended audience, parents, teachers, and administrators. The platform is easy to use, and is installed on most people's smart devices. It is also accessible through a search engine or browser, making it accessible to all.



<https://www.instagram.com/caplearningdisabilities/>

Action Research Project Documentation and Reflection

For this project, we researched our audience on Instagram to take action in promoting how teachers can be aware of their students' learning styles when they are dealing with a child with a learning disability in the classroom environment. On the Instagram account, we created posts with flyers and different photos to promote to the audience how to advocate for the students and give them the right tools to be successful. From doing this method of action, we found that our project did encourage teachers to take action in the classroom when handling students with learning disabilities. It was also surprising to see how engaged people were with the Instagram account. We made some changes and improvements when conducting this by directing our social media posts more towards educators than a regular Instagram audience. Because our topic is aimed to change the classroom setting, our audience would take action towards educators who need to be aware of this.

We wish we knew from the start how important it is to research a topic before diving into it. It is essential to get feedback from a professional who has handled students with learning disabilities along with resources we can use. We learned that working towards change can have an enormous impact on someone's academic career. Even though this is a small step, it is a significant step in empowering students to be advocated for and supported.

Critical Reflection

Estella

Taking the LS400 course was an eye-opener for me, because I learned a lot more than I expected to get from the course. Although it has been difficult for me personally during this semester, I was able to move forward with the project. Well, from this project, what I have learned about myself is that I am able to do these things even in the difficulties I was going

through. I found really interesting facts and studies when I was doing my research on learning disabilities. Without imagining that this would help me to be more aware of the needs that students may need and help them appropriately in the future when I work as a teacher. One thing I noticed is that working towards change can be challenging, but with the right support, information and collaboration with the right people, change can happen, although it won't happen overnight. In addition, I was fortunate to have amazing group members to work with and collaborate on for this capstone project.

Jizelle

In the LS 400 - Senior Capstone course I have learned more about myself, the world of education, and working towards change. Putting a whole semester into working towards an educational issue that is important to me, has put perspective on how much work it truly takes to make a change in any social justice issue. I have worked for one semester and have only scratched the surface on how to improve the difficulties in diagnosing children for learning disabilities. People are also working towards improvement, making me not feel alone when it comes to doing the research. There will always be an audience for making change for the greater good. I learned that there is more to education than teaching. Teachers are always trying their best to teach children how to be their best selves, but there is more to that. They are also teaching them how to move forward in a path of strength and knowledge. Yet, there are obstacles in both the learning and teaching. Most schools do not have that many resources and if they do they have to share them within the district. That is why helping educational programs and schools is the best way to ease or lower the amount of obstacles that they have to endure. Not only did I learn about an educational issue, but I learned more about myself. I learned about the way I would want to manage my future classroom in order to help accommodate every student's educational

needs. I also have learned that I want to continue advocating for students with learning disabilities. There is still more to be done, so bringing light to it will help expedite the process of closing the educational disabilities gap.

Jocelyn

Throughout participating in the Liberal Studies 400 course and completing the capstone project, I learned some things about myself, teaching and learning, and working towards change. In the past, I have struggled with my time management and spacing things out, so I have enough time to work on them. Doing the paper sections at different times in the semester helped me learn how to break complex tasks into parts and steps, which has helped me ease my stress levels. Also, it helped me learn how to manage my time better so that I do not overwhelm myself. In my past Liberal Studies courses, I realized that teachers should depend on their coworkers and that they should work in groups. I think working on this project in a group gave me a glimpse into what working with my future coworkers will be like. I learned to listen to other suggestions and how to work with them, which increased my knowledge about the topic. When my group members voiced their opinions, I listened to them and did not judge. When I start working in a school, I will use the knowledge I gained from my group work to participate in group discussions with my fellow teachers. Through doing the research for our topic, I learned different ways to collect information and how to interpret the information. I can use what I learned to look into other challenges that I, my students, or anyone I know face so I can determine ways to help them.

Katie

For my last semester at Cal State Monterey Bay (CSUMB), I thought school was going to be challenging for me. I did not know how I was going to get help, especially taking online

classes. I have a different learning style in school. What I discovered is that I have a great personality that classmates enjoyed in exploring teaching methods. I want to show care with everyone in class. This class was able to help me to understand more. I thought I could do the LS 400 Capstone class in person, but sadly it was canceled due to low enrollment this semester. For LS 400 Capstone class, I had to think of the ideas on what topic I wanted to talk about. For this course, I asked for help by using the services on campus such as the Cooperative Learning Center (CLC). My topic is about Improving the Students with Learning Disabilities. I thought that improving the diagnosis of students with learning disabilities would be great for me to talk about since I have seen teachers misdiagnose students with learning disabilities. Overall, I enjoyed working with the LS 400 Capstone as a group. I was worried that I had to do the project alone. Luckily it was great to collaborate with my group. I was so thankful that my community partners talked about their experiences during the past years.

Through this course, I also learned that getting teachers trained to recognize learning disabilities can be extremely helpful. There are students that have different learning abilities, and students can learn to do well in school, when they receive accurate and timely diagnosis from the concerned departments. School psychologists or doctors could also help students with learning disabilities. Also, when students receive extra help from trained teachers, they are also more likely to succeed in school. In order to work towards change, one needs to have self confidence and express how they feel. We should also make sure that the students' learning disabilities get diagnosed correctly so that they do not fall behind in school. This could include steps like going to the doctor for an early intervention and analyzing symptoms for learning disabilities. Similarly, through Response to Intervention, schools and parents can recognize early signs of learning and behavior problems. If schools, teachers, parents and school psychologists can help

diagnose students with learning disabilities, the student is eligible for Special Education.

Therefore, to receive equal access to education, students with learning disabilities should be accurately diagnosed.

Maddy

For this project, I learned about how important it is to understand students with disabilities and truly as for my disability I was both unsure but confident in my last semester. Overall, from learning from taking courses at CSUMB it has taught me to be more confident in not only my disability but be successful in my learning styles. From learning over the course of the past three years of earning this degree, it helped me understand how I can prioritize my students with learning disabilities and learning styles. From taking this course LS 400 Capstone, it helped me learn even more about this topic and how we change this in our school environments. As for my learning style this semester, it helped me as a writer understand more in depth how to research and summarize information more effectively. To dive deeper into the topic me and my group choose, we choose to take action with helping and supporting students with learning disabilities. I felt from learning about this topic, I also improved my knowledge of how I as an educator can acknowledge a learning disability at a young age so he or she can be supported. In this course the instructor gave me many different methods to identify and analyze learning disabilities as a whole. With this knowledge I can help in my future job accommodate students with learning disabilities so they can succeed in school. My goal is to make sure that students with disabilities feel both accepted and comfortable in the classroom environment. We should also as a general rule make sure that they are given equal opportunities as students without disabilities.

Estela

When I started CSUM I never thought I would go this far with my education. As I am the first generation to get a higher education, it is very difficult for me to navigate and find the right resources to successfully achieve my goals. Even struggling financially and personally, I was able to overcome my problems and stay focused with all my courses. However, the Liberal Studies helped me as a student and prepared me with the right skills as a teacher. MLO 1: This research project helped me gain more knowledge about the topic that I was not aware of. I just knew that I was going to be a teacher without really knowing that students can face difficulty with learning. I have developed skills thinking outside the box and communication. MLO 2: Since I am a Triqui (indigenous) doing this project helps understand how big our diversity can be in our school and community. Although CSUMB is not very diverse, they have done a great job by providing multicultural courses and being open to the different backgrounds of their students. MLO 3: Today it's very important to know and be an expert in technology since we are in an era where everything is technology now. Since the Covid-19 hit, school and work places have changed, with changes we are able to learn more and capable of using technology in our favor. MLO 4: Most of the courses I have taken in the liberal studies program have been planned well. It helped build knowledge on subjects that were essential. Practicing how to work and be ethical and how to advocate for students when it is needed. MLO 5: Liberal studies programs have provided a great program for students where our knowledge and skills are tested in order to become the person we want to be. Working as a teacher is not an easy job, but all the courses I have taken have prepared me well professionally. I believe the next steps I need to take in order to become the professional that I envision being is to get more educated professionally and personally because in order to become that person you want to be, you have to work hard, believe and never give up on yourself. Also being open to the opportunity around me.

Jizelle

The Liberal Studies Main Learning Outcomes helped me as a student. It has provided me with the skills I would need to become a teacher. MLO 1: When entering California State University Monterey Bay my speaking and writing skills were under college level. I had taken an English Literature summer course, but I still was not at the correct level that I should have been entering university. CSUMB had placed me into a communication course for the first two semesters of my freshman year. After taking the course I had developed professional writing and communication skills. I now feel confident with any verbal communication that will be taken in a professional setting. MLO 2: Although CSUMB is not diverse in their student population they have made courses surrounding different multicultural backgrounds. I have taken multiple courses talking about educational and social issues that involve the Latino community. Taking these social issues into account will be a great way to help my future students. Knowing the history of different cultures creates a safe environment for my students as they will appreciate each other's backgrounds. MLO 3: Knowing how to use technology in the classroom is vital in today's technological age. Csumb has provided me with different technological applications that can be used in a classroom setting, or a professional workplace. Having classes online and completing service learning hours in a virtual setting have also made a difference in how I would manage my classroom in an online environment. MLO 4: CSUMB's LS 300 and LS 400 courses have taught me how to conduct research on social justice issues in education. There are many other courses that also cover social justice issues in other aspects, such as race. These two work hand in hand as they can cover a wide spread of issues that are happening in a professional, and a

classroom setting. Being able to uncover the injustices that are happening within my community will help create a wide range of solutions that can benefit my students and their community.

MLO 5: CSUMB Liberal Studies program has created a plan of multi subject classes that is well fit for any person entering public education. The wide range of courses offered make it easy for you to comprehend what would be taught in a public school. It tests your knowledge of all subjects in order for you to teach the subject in the most effective and efficient manner possible. The next step I need to take to become the professional I envision in being is learning the needs of others. Everyone learns differently. I need to take all the information that I have learned and find what my future students would need from me to be successful.

Jocelyn

During my time at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) as a Liberal Studies (LS) major, I have taken courses that impacted my professional development. Every LS course I took in the past years taught me something new about being a teacher (MLO 1). I used to despise public speaking, but now I understand how to control my stress and anxiety while talking to people I do not know and groups of people. Through different presentations I gave and different groups that I worked with, I found my own ways of being confident in myself. My organizational skills have increased since I started my LS courses. Any time conflict occurred, I learned different ways to handle it and resolve issues, whether it was between myself and someone else or other people. Motivation, encouragement, and support are the foundations of building up my future students, and I acquired knowledge about how to do these things. Students require helpful feedback, and through truly useful and unfortunately insignificant feedback that I received from professors, I learned what type of feedback students will appreciate. Before I started college, many people told me that I can be very empathetic, but I never understood how.

Through my courses at CSUMB, I gained knowledge about what it means to be empathetic and how to be empathetic, so I understand better now.

There have been LS classes that were specifically about social identities and multiculturalism (MLO 2). I learned a lot about what contributed to what myself and others went through in school based on how we identify ourselves. Due to my white privilege (even when I was unaware of what this term means), I received opportunities and resources that my peers and students at other schools may not have received. Also, I learned about ways I can help my students that are experiencing inequity in their schooling. Everyone goes through things outside of school, and we should all respect that even when we are unaware of what might be happening.

There was a LS course that was specifically about technology and how to use it in school. While I do not remember the number for it, I do remember what I learned in that class (MLO 3). On a daily basis, I use my personal laptop to complete assignments, and I did so in high school as well. Access to technology starting in elementary school can broaden students' learning and teachers' instruction. Using technology incorporates different learning styles, can improve collaboration, allows students to be more creative, and prepares students for the real world.

The courses that I have taken in which I was required to complete a research project taught me about social change and how to achieve it, even through little acts (MLO 4). I learned about different methods to collect data from stakeholders and how to execute those methods. By collecting data, I can define ways that I can support others, not just my students, in schooling. Overall, I believe that by passing my California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST) after my first year of college, receiving a California Subject Matter Exams (CSET) waiver, being accepted into a dual credential program, and graduating from CSUMB as an LS major shows that I am

proficient in the subject areas that were covered in the LS courses and will be successful in my future career steps (MLO 5).

The next step that I will take on my route to becoming a teacher is attending California State University, Fresno as a dual credential program student. I will be taking classes for two years that will allow me to apply for my multiple subject teaching and my education specialist mild/moderate credentials. Then, I will take classes for another year to achieve my Master of Arts in Special Education. While I take my classes at Fresno State, I will also gain experience as a multiple subject teacher and a special education teacher. Through working in a school, I will make relationships with the staff and administrators that can help me when it comes time to apply for a job after I graduate.

Katie

During my time at CSUMB, I thought I was not going to do well in my classes. I came to CSUMB as a transfer student. I felt like I did not belong at CSUMB. There were some teachers who believed that I could not go to college. A teacher thought if I got a certificate from high school it would not help me go to college.

MLO 1: Developing Educator: Getting help with the CLC really helped me improve my writing and thinking critically. This helped me to speak with confidence. It is best to show enthusiasm with our students by telling stories. It is important to show confidence because the students may like you and get inspired by you. Students will try to get to know you and start to learn better. I had some teachers that showed me how to be an educator.

MLO 2: Diversity and Multicultural Scholar: As for my race, I am Chinese American. I always speak English when I go to school, and only rarely speak Chinese when I am at home. I was feeling the pressure when I had to talk about my race. I felt like I had to talk about my life

growing up. I feel very good about myself for this semester because I can tell a story to my students about my background on race. I can support my students with my life and experiences.

MLO 3: Innovative Technology Practitioner: Using the technology was quite an adjustment.

These resources can help me based on my learning disability. Being online was not going to be easy for me. The technology had to help me with accommodations that I needed to do in an

online school. Tape recording my lectures really helps, note-taking and closed captions were

really helpful because this can help me to use my listening ears in school. I have to make sure I

stay organized in school. Also, I have to make sure I achieve well in school. As for my Service

Learning, I helped the kids get adjusted to technology such as using the computer. There might

be students who do not like to write on paper, but they like writing on a computer better. MLO

4: Social Justice Collaborator: During my Liberal Studies classes, I was to conduct research on

my paper. Also I needed to think critically when writing a paper. The paper had to be about my

education. It is best to understand and know how to change a situation like bullying, so everyone

is aware of it. I created a change to educate all the students with learning disabilities equitably

and treat the students with respect. Each student with a learning disability goes their different

ways based on the pace. Disabled students are denied educational opportunities. As a person with

Speech and Hearing disorders, by educating my classmates I combat these inequalities. MLO 5:

Subject Matter Generalist: I was very successful with my writing during this semester. I thought I

was very successful in doing my Setting the Stage as well. I had to tell a story about the time I

was diagnosed and misdiagnosed with a learning disability. Thus, when working with students

with learning disabilities, it is important that I show care and patience. Each student learns

differently in school. Moreover, some students work at their own pace. It is important to be

aware of the students' accommodations. You never know what the students' ability is on how

they learn in school. As I move forward to becoming an educator, I have to use my confidence when I am writing, speaking and thinking. The greatest thing I learned is to never quit and always do my best in school. Also, I need to make sure I practice critical thinking. This Action Research Project impacted my professional development because it helped me become very responsible in getting to know the students with learning disabilities.

Next step I am going to take is to get my teaching credential. If I learn how to ask for help, I can be very successful in school when pursuing the teaching credential. I do not want to listen to roadblock teachers in school. A roadblock means that someone believes that you cannot succeed in school. Roadblocks can stop me from going to school. The best thing to do is to always keep trying. If I practice the best that I can, I am positive that I will do very well in school. One thing educators can do is make sure students with learning disabilities do not go through negative experiences like I did. I will succeed because I have people who believe in me. For the credential program, I need to make sure I set up a routine. After the credential program, I will also make sure I do my student teaching.

Maddy

From Attending CSUMB the resource that helped me the most in my academic career was the Student Disability Resource Center. From using this center it has helped me advocate to my fellow teachers my rights as a student with a disability and receive the accommodations I needed . **MLO 1:** Hence transferring to CSUMB was a huge transition from my community college MPC. After graduating MPC my writing and english skills were still a major struggle of mine. Because of my processing learning disability it caused my thought process of understanding the concept of writing to be more as a struggle than enjoyable. When I finally decided to apply for the Disability Resource it changed my perspective and accommodated me to get the help I

needed from the instructor to help me improve my writing skills and support me through my educational journey. This changed my learning pathway tremendously and taught me to feel assured that my learning style is although different but I can succeed. **MLO 2:** In the character of my ethnicity, I am of Caucasian descent. Because of my American race, I always spoke English in both my home and classroom environments. From being of Caucasian descent, I felt growing up I was continually educated about diversity and often accepted learning about other cultures and ethnicities besides my own. This semester, I think I have expanded my horizons and educated and respected other cultures with different diversity. I feel it is vital to encourage others to be accepting of each other.

MLO 3: For students, having the right technology tools is essential when accommodating students with learning disabilities. Having these resources and changing their classes to be online has helped me adapt my learning disability and adjust to different styles of learning methods from the CSUMB accommodation center. Structures that can be used to engage students from a different perspective—being on a technology-based platform for all my classes taught me how to incorporate accommodations and support for my students while learning through online technology. Overall being online has changed my learning perspective on my dependency on organizing my assignment and preparing to keep me on a successful pathway. **MLO 4:** In general, both Seminar and Capstone have taught me different issues that have changed my perspective on educating myself about modern-day topics in the education system. The first being is opening up my horizons to other aspects of diversity. This can include the equitability of education.

Numerous teachers have not been educated enough about learning disabilities as a society. Being able to take this class and connect with an issue that is happening daily really motivated me as a

future educator that this issue my group and I picked needs to be discussed and taken action too. Having a learning disability and learning to find the proper accommodations for many years showed me why I want to be an educator. As a future educator, having students with learning disabilities will help me better understand how to accommodate them. **MLO 5:** I feel I have gained more knowledge and understanding of my understanding of the topic of identifying a student with a learning disability. There are numerous ways an educator can provide accommodation for a student to receive the support they need in the classroom. The first method to accommodate students with learning disabilities is by being trained to know the background information of each student's learning style. Each student understands, and the learning style is different and has vast resources that work for each student. Another method is giving assignments that break down the information more complex than the regular assignment. As an educator, my vision is to teach students to feel self-assured in their learning styles. I also strive to see as an educator how I can support my students from learning about this topic to help them succeed.

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