Individualized Planning and Student Agency

"When we think of people with disabilities in relation to ministry, we tend automatically to think of doing something for them. We do not reflect that they can do something for us and with us. People with disabilities can, by their example, teach the non-disabled person much about strength and Christian acceptance. Moreover, they have the same duty as all members of the community to do the Lord's work in the world, according to their God-given talents and capacity. Because individuals may not be fully aware of the contribution they can make, Church leaders should consult with them, offering suggestions on practical ways of serving." **(Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities)**

"When these students come into my 11th grade Social class with IPPs that include 'fine motor', 'socialization', 'gross motor', and 'independent living' goals, I wonder if they really ought to be here." (11th Grade Teacher)

Students' IPP goals are based on general education curriculum standards. All students with disabilities have goals for literacy, math, and general information in science and social studies in their IPPs. Learning objectives in the areas of communication, sensory regulation, sensory motor, behavior and social skills are embedded within those major areas. Access to the general education curriculum is assumed for all students and special education takes on its true role as a support service to enable students to benefit from their education.

IPPs and Learning Goals

"Individualized Program Plan" (IPP) means a concise plan of action designed to address the student's special needs, and is based on diagnostic information which provides the basis for intervention strategies. All students with special needs, from severely disabled to the gifted and talented, require an IPP.

The development of a Personal Program Plan serves the following purposes:
- It supports program planning for the student.
- It provides a framework for planning collaboratively with the classroom teacher, parents, and other members of the inter-disciplinary team.
- It assists the learning assistance teacher in communicating with the classroom teacher and the parents regarding the student.
- It provides the student services facilitator and classroom teacher with an opportunity to be reflective about the student's program and to make changes as necessary.
- It supports transition between grades and between schools.
- It informs and guides personnel who are new to the school in working with students.
- It establishes a record of the service provided to the student.
- It establishes accountability.

Source: Education Programs and Services: Special Education (Policy 1.6.2)

The Individual Education Plan (IPP) is used to summarize the assessment(s) and planned interventions for students with special education codes. The IPP does not outline the entire curriculum for a student, but focuses on prioritized goals and objectives that are additional to or different from what most other students in the class may be doing. The teacher who writes the IPP is often known as the Case Manager.

Valued Life Outcomes

COACH 3: Choosing Outcomes and Accommodations for Children: A Guide to Educational Planning for Children with Disabilities, Michael F. Giangreco, Chigee J. Cloninger & Virginia S. Iverson, p 11-12

Student's lives should be better because they attend our schools. We pursue a better life for students by relying on a set of valued life outcomes. Valued life outcomes are designed to facilitate student independence and interdependence, as well as pursue personal growth by expanding access, creating new opportunities, developing individual abilities, and providing ways to contribute to one's community. Valued life outcomes include:
- Safety and health (physical and emotional)
- A home, now and in the future
- Meaningful relationships
- Control and choice (suited to the student's age and culture)
- Meaningful activities in various and valued places

The pursuit of valued life outcomes is through a combination of (1) having students learn relevant skills and (2) providing students with necessary supports. This assumption is consistent with the expectation that all students can learn. At the same time, it does not presume that people with disabilities need to become less disabled in order to be valued and have a good quality of life. By approaching our students as individuals with unique characteristics and focusing on their attributes rather than perceived deficits, we can advance valued life outcomes for students by facilitating their learning as well as our own.

Person Centered Planning and Self-Advocacy

The Inclusion Facilitator's Guide, Cheryl M. Jorgensen, Mary C. Schuh, and Jan Nisbet, p 59-60

> *"Person centered planning is a collection of tools and approaches based upon a set of shared values that can be used **to plan with a person - not for them**. These tools can be used to help the person think about what is important in their lives now and also to think about what would make a good future. Planning should build the person's and/or family's circle of support and involve all the people who are important in that person's life."*

Self-determination includes personal attributes and abilities that facilitate an individual's identification and pursuit of meaningful and self-identified goals. It is reflected in personal attitudes of empowerment, active participation in decision-making and self-directed action to achieve personally valued goals. Within the school curriculum there are opportunities for students with disabilities to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and to begin to advocate for the accommodations they need with teachers and employers. All students with disabilities attend their own IPP meetings, are supported to join organizations that promote self-determination, and to design a post-graduation "futures plan" that has as its goal a fully inclusive life in the community.

Student centered planning help students and families articulate a vision for an inclusive life in the school and community and then helps build the relationships, supports and resources necessary to reach that

vision (Mount, 2000).   Personal futures planning was first developed "between 1973 and 1986 among people from across North America who shared a passion for understanding and teaching how the principles of normalization might be applied to improve the quality of services to people with disabilities" (O'Brien & Lyle-O'Brien, 200. p. 3; see also Forest et al., 1996).

Different versions of personal futures planning all share the following characteristics:
1. The individual, and sometimes the person's family, controls the decisions that will be made, defined by the outcomes desired by them.
2. Planning is not a one-meeting event, but rather a long-term commitment and process that evolves over time.
3. Planning is a not a formula for service planning but rather a creative process through which "a group's ability to create meaningful opportunities and supports emerges as people develop the skills to think strategically together" (Cotton, 2003, p. 16).

The first person centered planning sessions were held with adults who were considering moving out of institutions into the community, but person-centered planning is now a strategy used with school aged students at various points in their educational careers.

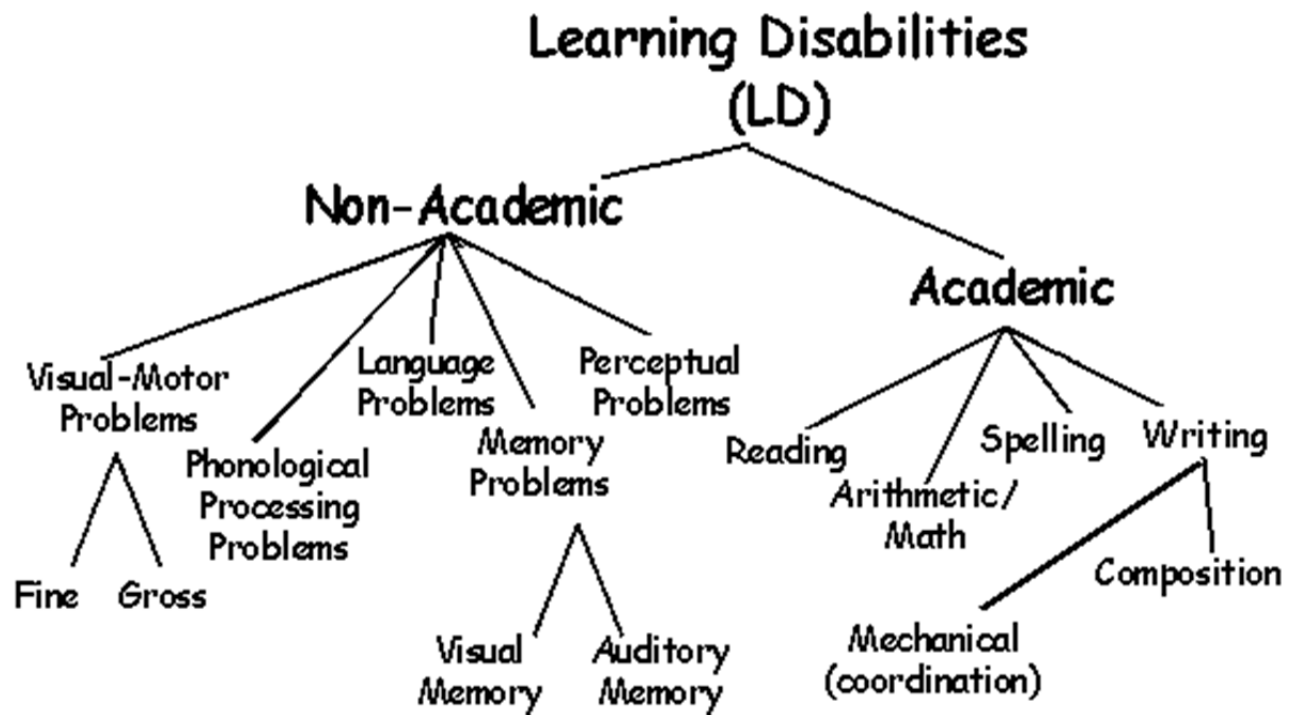## _Learning Style Characteristics of Students with Learning Disabilities_

*** Remember – no two students are the same… We must consider the learning style of the individual student. When planning for and with students it is important to consider patterns of strengths and challenges. It is important for students to become aware of the challenges they face academically so that they can take control of advocating for their own supports and accommodations as they get older. ***

Sometimes, learning disabilities are equated with reading disability. While reading challenges are a major type of academic learning disability, (60% of learning disabled individuals have a reading disability as part of their learning disability) other academic learning disabilities include mathematics, spelling, and writing. As well, there are a number of non-academic learning disabilities that include challenges in the areas of language, phonological processing, memory, perception and visual-motor. These often create non-academic barriers to academic participation.

A student with a learning disability may have any combination of academic and non-academic challenges. It is unlikely that two students with a learning disability would have an identical set of challenges or identical instructional needs (Wong, 1996).   It is important to understand the barriers that can be created as a result of a student's learning disability when planning for instruction and/or supports with and for that student and/or his/her family.

Academic and Non-academic Learning Disabilities
The following diagram outlines the various academic and non-academic areas involved in learning disabilities.

Learning Disabilities (LD)

Non-Academic

- Visual-Motor Problems
  - Fine
  - Gross
- Phonological Processing Problems
- Language Problems
- Perceptual Problems
  - Memory Problems
    - Visual Memory
    - Auditory Memory

Academic

- Reading
- Arithmetic/ Math
- Spelling
- Writing
  - Mechanical (coordination)
  - Composition

Adapted from Wong, B. 1996, p.9

Academic learning disabilities may occur in the following areas:

Reading: A student with a learning disability in the area of reading may experience difficulty with:
- decoding print,
- fluency,
- comprehension, and/or
- interpreting information presented in print form.

These difficulties may be related to perception, language, and/or cognition.

Writing: A student with a learning disability in the area of writing may experience difficulty with writing due to:
- minimal ability to organize and/or communicate ideas in writing,
- limited spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and/or grammar,
- difficulty with the mechanics of writing resulting from:
  - poor motor skills,
  - inability to produce written text that is legible (spaced, formed, sized appropriately).

Math: A student with a learning disability in the area of math may experience difficulty with:
- number concepts and place value,
- sequencing,
- mathematical operations,
- problem solving,
- mathematical reasoning,
- copying.

Non-academic learning disabilities are related to psychological processing problems or information processing problems and may present in the following areas:
- language and phonological processing,
- perceptual processing: visual and auditory discrimination,
- memory processes,
- visual-motor coordination.

    Language and Phonological Processing: In the area of language, a student with a learning disability may experience difficulty with:
- expressive or receptive language,
- processing oral language - attention and/or memory problems may be implicated,
- oral fluency,
- identifying sounds, analyzing and synthesizing sequences of sounds, and/or segmenting words into parts.

    Perceptual Processing and Information Processing: In the area of processing, a student with a learning disability may experience difficulty with:
- receiving and/or organizing information,
- retrieving and/or expressing information,
- developing and/or using cognitive strategies,
- organization in many areas including oral and written work.

    Memory Processes: In the area of memory, a student with a learning disability may experience difficulty with:
- short-term memory,
- memory involving verbal information,
- memory involving familiar items such as letters, words, and numbers,
- memory requiring sequential order of verbal information,
- long-term memory, requiring the use of effective storage and retrieval strategies,
- long-term memory involving both visual and verbal memory and the integration of the two,
- long-term memory that requires semantic processing,
- establishing memory traces and retaining memory traces,
- working memory deficits.

    Visual-Motor Coordination: In the area of visual-motor coordination, a student with a learning disability may experience difficulty with:
- accurate visual perception of letters and words,
- visual discrimination between similar forms,
- visual memory for the patterns of letters and letter strings,
- visual-spatial ability to track print from left to right and top to bottom,
- visual-motor ability to reproduce letters and words in writing.

Educators also need to be aware of the considerable overlap between attention deficit disorder (ADD/ADHD) and learning disabilities. Some researchers have suggested that the degree of overlap may be as high as 90%. Not unexpectedly, when a learning disability and an attention deficit disorder co-occur the child tends to have more severe problems than when only one disorder is present (Wong, 1996). Students with ADD/ADHD, as well as those with many other special needs, often have difficulty

with executive functioning skills and will need supports in these areas to effectively function in the classroom.