



A Story of Triumph: Overcoming My Undiagnosed Mild Learning Disability

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Introduction

Having an undiagnosed mild learning disability (UMLD) made it particularly difficult to succeed in the K-12 school system in the 1980s. With my UMLD, the odds seemed stacked against me from the start because I did not outwardly appear to be any different than my peers but, I could not keep up with their academic milestones even though I tried my hardest. To compound matters, the loss of my mother at the age of twelve plunged me into a deep despair that further hindered my educational progress. The school became a battleground where I endured various academic abuses as I struggled to meet each grade level's new expectations. My school records were marred by bad grades and various behavioral issues, which reflected my overall confusion and inner turmoil. The school administrators (and my family) assumed that I was not giving them my best effort and labeled me as a lazy underachiever, which ignited my struggle with negative thinking cycles.

Personal Perspective of Having an Undiagnosed Mild Learning Disability in Childhood

My primary educational years were profoundly negative because of my UMLD. I experienced frequent in-school punishments for incomplete assignments, such as isolation during recess and extra homework, which greatly exacerbated my pre-existing social and emotional challenges. At this time, I was also subjected to ineffective medication that further alienated me and rendered me aloof and disconnected from others. These punitive measures and endless after-school tutoring sessions only contributed to my academic failure because they broke my spirit. Additionally, I felt silent in the classroom and was denied opportunities for participation. This may sound like I am

bemoaning that the teachers did not call on me at the school, but it is well-known that people have an innate desire to feel important [1]. Without feeling validated, I felt academically shamed and not given equal permission to use my voice in school.

As a teen and young adult, I trapped myself in a victim mentality, attributing my challenges to external circumstances rather than exploring personal growth. This self-imposed limitation hindered my potential and further perpetuated a cycle of negative self-perception that severely restricted my life.

Moving Past My Negative Thinking Cycle

A pivotal shift occurred in my early adulthood when I embraced a proactive approach to life. Inspired by my faith in the Lord and the self-help principles addressed by Norman Vincent Peale [2], I gained the tools necessary to appreciate myself and my unique voice. This was coupled with a burgeoning career in the visual arts that gave me even more confidence. This newfound empowerment, coupled with the supportive environment of higher education, fostered astronomical personal and academic growth. In college, I discovered a sense of belonging and validation. While working with other visual learners in an environment that embraced that learning style, I felt comfortable using my voice in the classroom and finally realized the value of my unique perspective. I understood that my thoughts had always been valuable, my learning style was an amazing thing and that this transformative experience ignited a passion for lifelong learning and a desire to become a doctor.

Conclusion

My story is not meant to criticize any of my former educators

but to offer hope and encouragement to others facing similar difficulties. Many individuals have overcome much greater challenges than mine, but I would like to think that to some people who are like me, I am proof that your negative experience in the K-12 system does not have to define your worth, success or thought processes as an adult. If my schooling had been a straightforward progression and I had achieved early success, I wouldn't have reached the depths of character or personal mastery that I now find to be priceless.

Application

Many children today struggle with the same kind of UMLD underperformance issues and negative thinking cycles that I did [3]. As an educator and a father of children with learning disabilities, I encourage every parent and student struggling with a disability to get a diagnosis and avoid the unnecessary hardship, academic abuse, and punishments that I endured decades ago. A documented diagnosis empowers schools, parents, and caregivers to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for their child's success (What is an Individualized Education Plan? n.d.). [4] With an IEP, a disabled student can have a personalized plan that outlines the specific accommodations and supports they need to thrive in school. My hope is that all K-12 schools in the future can accommodate the various learning styles in the classroom so that all children can flourish in their youth.

References

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