

## Learning Disabilities and Adult Learners: An Overview

### Presentation Summary

#### **Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities**

Kathy and Liz, directors of the Rest of State Support and Technical Assistance Center and NYC Support and Technical Assistance Center, discussed the importance of literacy and learning disabilities in adult education. They highlighted that 28% of U.S. adults have very low literacy levels, with perhaps 60% having undetected or untreated learning disabilities. The session aimed to provide strategies for identifying and supporting students with such challenges, focusing on building confidence and engagement. Participants shared insights on how undiagnosed learning disabilities affect adult learners, including feelings of inadequacy, the use of compensation strategies, and withdrawal from social activities.

#### **Understanding Adult Learning Disabilities**

The meeting focused on understanding learning disabilities, particularly in adult learners, emphasizing that they are brain-based and not due to lack of effort. Liz discussed the signs of potential learning disabilities, such as inconsistent spelling and difficulty adapting skills across settings, and highlighted the importance of recognizing specific reading comprehension deficits. She suggested using strategies like think-alouds, guided reading questions, and modeling to support students with comprehension issues.

#### **Enhancing Student Text Comprehension**

Liz discussed strategies for improving student comprehension, including providing questions before reading, using accessible and high-interest texts, and engaging in guided annotation. She emphasized the importance of activating prior knowledge and using color-coded questions to differentiate instruction. Kathy highlighted that these strategies are beneficial for all students, not just those with learning disabilities. The discussion also touched on using tiered or scaffolded questions to identify where students may be disconnecting in their understanding of a text.

#### **Supporting Students with Dysgraphia**

Liz presented on dysgraphia, covering writing *process* and *product* deficits, and shared strategies like using word processors, text-to-speech technology, and breaking down writing assignments. The group discussed resources like Novel New York, which offers dyslexia-friendly fonts and text databases.

#### **Q&A**

Kathy and Liz addressed questions about math disabilities, time management, and supporting students with low cognitive functioning versus learning disabilities. The session concluded with a promise of additional sessions for teachers and tutors.

### Resources Shared by Participants in the Chat

[YouTube Video: Dialogic Reading](#)

[CAELA Webpage on Writing for ESOL Students](#)

#### **Two strategies shared that support ESOL students with their writing:**

1. The student dictates the essay/writing to the teacher and the teacher writes what they say. Afterwards, the student and the teacher can go through to polish and flesh out what's on the page.
2. "Passing notes" activity: Each student writes a short response to a prompt on a page. Then they pass the page to another student and the student writes a follow-up question and returns it to the first student. They go back and forth passing the note until the idea is fleshed out. Then the student can turn this into a first draft of a more formal piece of writing