

# Learning Challenges in Adult Education: The link to social and economic inclusion

Project 2.10

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# Introduction

This research aimed to:

- identify the barriers facing adult learners with learning difficulties in post-secondary and basic education settings.
- identify solutions to these barriers, through examination of current and potential strategies to improve accessibility and teaching to these students.



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# Background and Rationale

- relationship between educational, social, economic, and cultural capital.
- gender, poverty, lack of education, family support, etc. all influence the experiences of students with learning challenges.
- education is critical for future work and self-development, esp. for learners with challenges.
- can be very difficult for students and their educators to understand the many factors influencing their lives and the ways to help them achieve their goals.
- findings from this study will inform educational and other social agencies on how they can better serve these students.
- policy recommendations.
- focused on PEI, but its results can be applied to other regional, national and international settings as well.



# Community/University Collaboration (partnership)

- Faculty of Education at UPEI, the Accessibility Service office of UPEI, Holland College's adult education program, the Learning Disabilities Association of PEI, and students and faculty at these settings.
- collaborated on planning and execution.
- continued sharing of practices, ideas for improvement of service, PD for teachers, and policy recommendations for government and contributing bodies.
- agency and voice to students and faculty who were subjects in the study.
- several education students became involved in research, and learned valuable skills for their future studies and work.



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# Project Methodology

Four stages:

1. Interviews with students at UPEI and Holland College
2. Interviews with instructors and professors at UPEI and Holland College
3. Workshops with instructors/students at both institutions
4. Develop recommendations and disseminate



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# Findings

## University:

- (Students) Satisfied with assistance and accommodations
- socially isolated from their peers.
- (Professors) teaching strategies and personal attention increasing
- Lack of education with regards to learning disabilities.
- Lack of ownership

## College:

- (Students) Enjoy the 'learn at your own pace' nature of the college
- personal issues including family, finances, and illness contribute to the stalling of their educations.
- (Instructors) Try many ways to reach their students including team teaching, self-paced learning and conferences with and about students.
- frustrated with their many roles as advocate, confidant, counselor and educator.



# Deliverables

- DiGiorgio, C., Penner, A., McCabe, J., and McCarthy, L. (2007). *Panel presentation: Barriers and solutions to post-secondary study for adults with learning difficulties*. Atlantic Educators Conference, Charlottetown, October 25.
- DiGiorgio, C. (2008). *Access of adults with learning disabilities to post-secondary education*. Presentation given as part of “Advancing Adult Education on Prince Edward Island: A meeting of minds”. Charlottetown, April 11, 2008.
- DiGiorgio, C. (2008). *Learning Disabilities Workshop for University Professors and Instructors*. Webster Centre for Teaching and Learning, UPEI. April 4, Nov. 14.
- DiGiorgio, C. (2008). *Access of students with learning disabilities to higher education: Issues and solutions*. Sponsored by the Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network, Subnode 2: Inclusion and Empowerment, based at the Institute of Island Studies at UPEI, March 7.
- DiGiorgio, C, (2008) *Access of students with learning disabilities to university: Student and instructor perspectives and practices*. Paper submitted to Journal of Applied Research on Learning, 3(1).



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# Students Benefited from the Project

- skills in transcribing interviews, compiling data, writing reports, doing literature reviews and editing.
- firsthand knowledge of a research project from inception to completion.
- understand the perspective of students and educators re. learning challenges.
- see the role of research and community connections for future work and study.
- empowered as females.
- empower future students in their own classrooms.



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# Recommendations

- Start the identification process for learning disabilities earlier in the K-12 experience.
- Provide the accommodations early in the school career and document them, so that the student and family can self-advocate at an early age, and take this information to university.

# Recommendations: University

- accessibility services in all universities.
- train professors in how to recognize, refer, and teach students with learning disabilities.
- counselling for students that takes into consideration their own past experiences, their need for self esteem, friendship, and the ability to be open about their needs and strengths with peers and professors.
- mentoring and buddy systems for all students to allow them to interact with each other and develop bonds during the university experience.
- students with learning disabilities to interact and share their experiences with each other.
- provide career counselling.
- educate professors on the rights of people with disabilities in the work place and the accommodations available in the work place.

# Recommendations: College

- address gender imbalance and economic factors influencing Instructors.
- arrange to meet with their students on a frequent basis and be frank and open with them early on.
- Integrate education and health, community care and support.
- liaison for students for outside agencies.
- distance learning for when students cannot attend school.
- computer skills and assistive technology.
- positive plan for each student that is realistic and doable.
- timely assessments for students.
- address gender needs.
- PD for instructors in LD.

# Conclusions

This study has provided:

- opportunities to shed light on the experiences of students and faculty in university, college and community settings.
- university, college and community collaboration.
- voice to students and educators.
- interconnections between education, economic and social factors in lives in PEI.

## Next Steps

- more opportunities for people who are nontraditional learners to access learning in PEI and elsewhere.
- close the gap between children's education issues and those of their parents and future parents.



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