



KNOWING VS. NOT KNOWING

Teaching Students to **Accept**
and **LOVE** their **Diagnosis**

By: Dr. Michael P. McManmon, Ed.D

As individuals plan for success in school, having an understanding of who they are, why they are different, and how to accept, work with and learn to love these differences is critical. The classroom setting is an ideal place to work with adolescents and young adults as they begin or continue to understand their autism and/or learning differences diagnosis because, when young men and women don't know what makes them different, they can develop negative images about themselves. If no one is talking about their differences, they may come to the conclusion that it's a big bad secret.

Recently diagnosed adolescents and young adults have shared that over the years before they knew about their Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Learning Difference (LD) diagnosis, they believed they were crazy, stupid, not good enough and numerous other extremely negative attributions. I drew some of these same conclusions about my own self as I have Asperger's Syndrome and Sensory Processing Disorder. I needed to understand my clinical diagnosis and learn how to accept it.

I can tell you from my own journey into acceptance that helping each individual student understand his or her diagnosis enables each person to talk about it, read about it, ask questions, do research and then identify with a group of similar people. This, in turn, leads each one to feeling more hopeful and courageous about getting help, asking for accommodations, and/or gaining more information in the various learning environments they will encounter.

Adolescents and young adults with ASD or LD have different thinking patterns and brain processing functions – especially in the area of social competencies/social actions. These differences often compromise the ability to under-

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Photo: CIP Staff

stand individual idiosyncrasies, characteristics and personalities, making it hard to have positive social connections with others in school. The interactions of these emerging adults are often more negative and/or stressful than their

interest in pursuing self-growth or change. This makes it hard for teachers to integrate individuals into an everyday classroom setting. Helping individuals understand their differences can ease this challenging task.

Exactly how can knowing about one's diagnosis help? Here are some insights into the issue of knowing vs. not knowing about an individual clinical diagnosis gleaned from working with many students over the years.

KNOWING VS. NOT KNOWING

- Knowing helps individuals with an ASD or LD diagnosis feel proud of who they are.
- Knowing helps adolescents and young adults plan their lives in a realistic manner.



Photo: CIP Staff

- Knowing helps each person move toward greater self-acceptance and less self-blame.
- Knowing helps individuals advocate and talk about their strengths and challenges so that others can understand and accept them.
- Knowing helps these emerging adults have the opportunity to look up to their own role models such as Temple Grandin, Stephen Shore, Jerry Newport, Thomas Jefferson, Albert Einstein, or other individuals with a known or suspected ASD or LD diagnosis.
- Knowing enables adolescents and young adults to seek out others “on the Spectrum” or who have similar Learning Differences for mentoring and/or friendship.

Generally speaking, all individuals with an ASD or LD diagnosis have a right to know, and the classroom setting is an ideal place to begin teaching awareness.



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