

Edition (i.e., DSM-IV) used by psychologists during diagnostic assessments. Moreover, according to criteria established by government funding sources (e.g., OSAP, BSWD), only students diagnosed with Learning Disabilities or Intellectual Disabilities are deemed eligible for funding to support accommodations. Consequently, students with intellectual potential (IQ) between the 3rd to 24th percentile are ineligible for funding support and are considered “Not Otherwise Qualified”.

The 2013 revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – Fifth Edition (i.e., DSM-5), however, introduced new diagnostic criteria for Specific Learning Disorders which potentially impact both eligibility for and provision of accommodations to College students with disabilities. This paper explores the concepts of *ability* and *disability*, changes in the diagnostic criteria in the DSM-5 and the potential impact on Disability Services within the College system.

What is MID?

The question “Is MID a diagnosis?” requires an understanding of how MID is currently used in Ontario’s school systems as well as an understanding of diagnosis. According to Ontario’s Ministry of Colleges and Universities and the Ministry of Education, the term Mild Intellectual Disability (MID) is used to describe individuals at the lower limits of the Borderline Intellectual Functioning (BIF) range. The BIF range, in turn, is divided into Borderline (3rd to 9th percentile) and Low Average (9th to 24th percentile) ranges. MID is generally defined by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (2012) and by the Ministry of Education (2001) as an *Identification* described as:

A learning disorder characterized by (a) an ability to profit educationally within a regular class with the aid of considerable curriculum modification and supportive service (b) an inability to profit educationally within a regular class because of slow intellectual development (c) a potential for academic learning, independent social adjustment, and economic self-support (p. A20).

A preliminary survey conducted in 2008 by Dr. A. Harrison reported that this term is used inconsistently by Ontario School Boards in their identification processes (i.e., the Identification, Placement and Review Committees) (Harrison & Holmes 2013). Moreover, she reported that the terms Learning challenges, General Learning Disabilities, MID, as well as the concepts of *accommodation* and *modification*, as well as *diagnosis* and *identification* are frequently used interchangeably and/or inconsistently by Ontario’s School Boards and also by psychologists in their Psychoeducational assessments (Harrison & Holmes, 2013). This inconsistency has, in turn, contributed to the variability determining whether or not students are “Otherwise Qualified” or “Not Otherwise Qualified” to receive accommodations to support their College studies.

It is important to clarify that MID is not a recognized diagnosis in the DSM-IV. That is, MID is a term developed by the Ministry of Education to *identify* students who are not Learning Disabled and not Intellectually Disabled.

Changes in Ontario's College Demographics

In addition to the confusion in the use of the term MID and the variable labels that are currently being used by School Boards and psychologists when either *identifying* and/or *diagnosing* learning disorders, other factors are compounding the provision of disability services to today's College population. One of the key contributing factors has been the dramatic increase in the sheer numbers of students entering the College system over the last several years. This increase has been paralleled by remarkable diversity in the student population in terms of ethnicity, socio-economic status, English as a Second Language/Dialect, learning potential as well as their educational histories and experiences (Wiggers & Arnold, 2011). Also impacting this trend, is the remarkable variability in the number of students who have been previously identified by their School Boards without diagnosis, who have received an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) without a formal Psychoeducational assessment, who have received *modifications* instead of *accommodations* to support their studies, and/or were *promoted* instead of *passed*. Moreover, students who would have chosen to work instead of pursuing post-secondary studies over a decade ago are now entering the College system in response to unemployment and challenges in our economy. Another factor is the re-introduction of the apprenticeship programs in Ontario and the linking of licensing in the skilled trades to the successful completion of College managed courses. In my professional experience, it is noteworthy that apprenticeship students are an even more remarkably diverse group with notably varied, and in many cases, challenged educational histories. Moreover, many of these students had at one point actively chosen *not* to continue in school for an assortment of reasons, but are now back in the classroom after a hiatus, in some cases, of decades. Consequently, given these factors, there is also a corresponding increase in the number of students entering the College system who are functioning in the BIF and MID ranges of intellectual ability. This trend is expected to continue, and actually escalate, over the next decade given current assessment and identification practices in school boards and the economic pressures of our times (e.g., unemployment).

MID = No Diagnosis = Not Able?

As indicated, Disability Consultants have found some students identified as MID to be motivated, hardworking individuals who they consider to be *able* candidates for specific programs. Disability Consultants have also found that some of these students respond well to and appear to benefit from accommodations. However, since MID (and BIF) are not diagnosable as disabilities these students are viewed by funding sources as "Not Otherwise Qualified". Unfortunately, the use of this latter term gives the impression that these students are not disabled, but rather they are simply not able. This, in turn, implies that these students would not benefit from the financial investment of funding for accommodations reserved for disabled students. For these latter students, the term "Otherwise Qualified" is a funding distinction reserved for students who are within and/or above the Average range of intellectual ability and also meet the criteria of

Learning Disabilities as defined by the DSM-IV. Consequently, the apparent underlying assumption is that these students are considered good investments for financial support and can be expected to demonstrate good rates of success. This leads to the question: “Are the success rates of these College students supported by evidence-based statistics?”

Research Statistics: College Student Success:

Statistics on College Students are collected by Colleges Ontario and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. According to available statistics, 65% of the students attending Colleges in Ontario graduated in 2013 (Colleges Ontario, 2014) and one third of college students with disabilities have Learning Disabilities, which is roughly 4.2% of students (Colleges Ontario, 2013). The number of College students with Learning Disabilities in 2007 was approximately 4.8% which suggests a relatively stable proportion (Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario LDAO, 2009). The number of College students who were served by the various Offices for Students with Disabilities in 2007 was 40.8% (LDAO, 2009). Generally, however, evidence-based statistics on success rates are not currently readily available.

A review of research studies conducted over the last decade by educational and government agencies in Ontario and in the U.S. on the academic success rates of College students identified as MID resulted in only one article. According to this article roughly 25% of students with MID were “successful” at their postsecondary institution (Harrison & Holmes, 2013). It is important to point out, however, that this statistic was compiled seven years ago and it was based upon a survey questionnaire sent to one representative at each of the Colleges in Ontario. Respondents were asked to estimate the success rate of their MID students using the checklist of options provided. Importantly, this statistic was not based on actual records or an existing database. Furthermore, the definitions of MID and of success were not operationalized and instead left up to the respondent to determine. In line with this observation, generally, research studies measuring success of students with disabilities are not consistent in the way they define success or how they measure it. Success has been measured as graduation rates (Herbert, Hong, Byun, Welsh, Kurz & Atkinson, 2014), drop-out rates (Harrison, Areepattamannil & Freeman, 2012), and the relation between the use of learning supports and improvements in GPA (Troiano, Liefeld & Trachtenberg, 2010). Moreover, given the variation in selection criteria and method of measuring results, statistics on postsecondary students with LDs and other disabilities are difficult to find and compare.

An examination of College statistics collected by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Post-secondary Accountability Branch revealed that, in fact, there are no statistics being collected and/or currently available on the graduation rates of MID or BIF students. Moreover, there are no statistics currently being collected and/or available which detail the success rates of students who are “Otherwise Qualified” (i.e., diagnosed with LD). As a

postscript, recent communication with the MTCU Post-secondary Accountability Branch indicated that they do intend to collect these specific statistics for the 2014/2015 academic year. Until this information is collected, we have no valid evidence-based statistics on the success rates of College students identified with MID and/or students diagnosed with LD.

Ability vs. Disability: The role of IQ

Given the lack of evidence-based statistics linking College success with ability and/or disability, it is important to clarify how *ability* is determined in a Psychoeducational assessment. The role of IQ as a measure of intellectual potential is central to the concept of ability. The testing instrument used to determine IQ with adults is the WAIS-IV (Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale – Fourth Edition).

The following three figures summarize the *Ranges of Ability* based on IQ.

Figure 1: Students who are Able

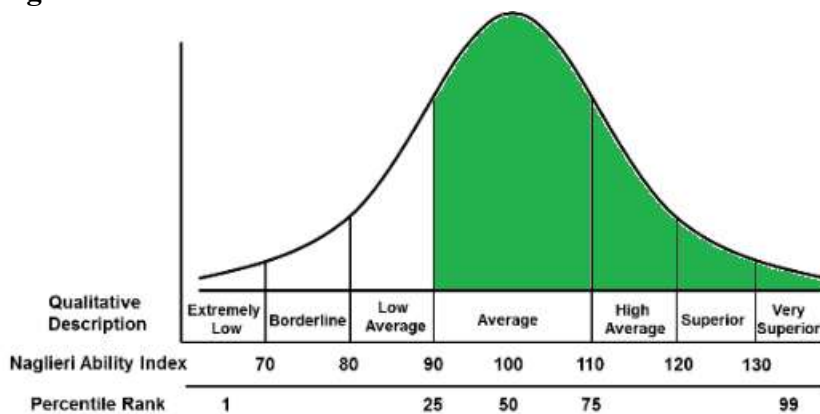


Figure 2: Students who are *not* Able

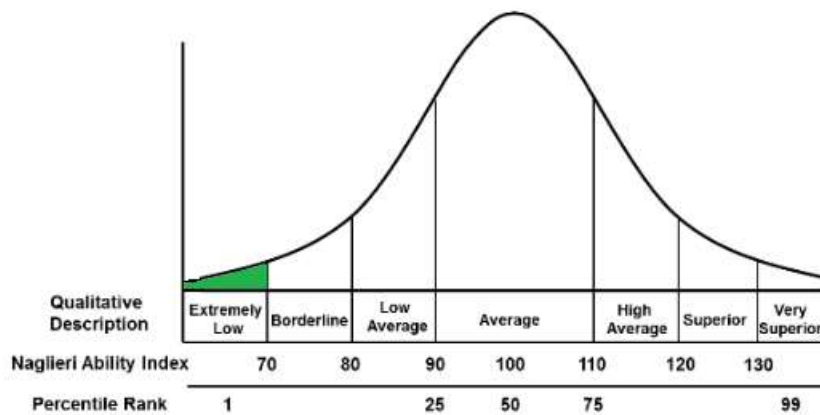
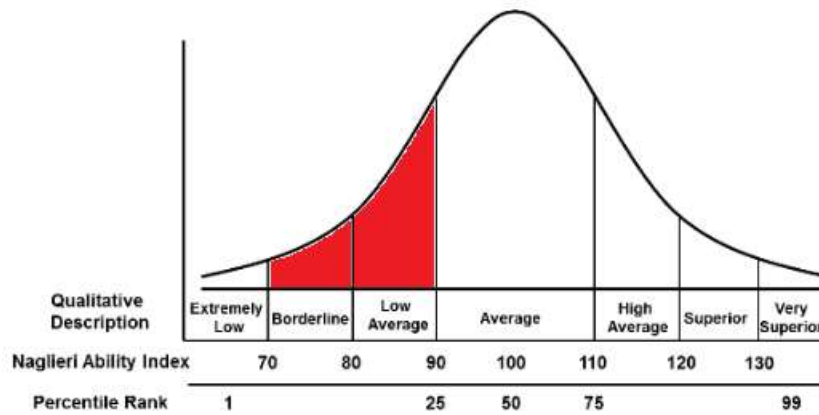


Figure 3: Students who are Able, but below the Average range of abilities



These three groups constitute the ranges of ability. The largest group (Figure 1) represents the 75% of the student demographic who are intellectually within the Average to above Average IQ range (i.e., IQ of 90 plus). The smallest group (Figure 2) is the 2% of students who fall within the Intellectually Disabled IQ range (i.e., 69 IQ and below). These latter students are considered to be *not* Able because they are unable to learn and adapt without external help. Then there is the remaining 23% of the student population (Figure 3) who fall within the BIF IQ range (i.e., IQ from 70 to 89). This group includes students identified by School Boards as MID. With respect to the use of IQ, although this group of College students is considered able, they present with intellectual potential below the average range. That is, IQ only addresses the concept of ability.

Since students who are within the Intellectually Disabled range are considered to be *not* Able *and* have deficit adaptive skills, they are qualified for funding to support their studies at the post-secondary level. Similarly, students who fall within the Average to Above Average IQ range and are diagnosed with a Learning Disability are considered “Otherwise Qualified” for funding for accommodations to support their post-secondary studies. As BIF and MID are *not* diagnoses according to the DSM-IV, the 23% of College students who fall within this range of ability are considered ineligible for funding for accommodations to support their post-secondary studies. As indicated, however, in some Ontario Colleges students identified as MID currently receive full accommodations (Harrison & Holmes, 2013). Understandably, this inequity in the provision of supports between Colleges is a source of frustration and confusion for Disability Consultants.

Ability vs. Disability: Funding Sources

Variability in the definition of “Disability” contributes further to this inequity. That is, ‘disability’ is used in a multitude of ways, sometimes contradictory, by funding agencies.

What is a disability? The following lists definitions of ‘disability’ relevant to College students:

Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC, 2009)

1. Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,
2. A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,
3. A learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
4. A mental disorder, or
5. An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997* (Section 2.1).

Ontario Student Assistance Plan (OSAP) (Government of Ontario, 2014)

For the purposes of this grant, a permanent disability is defined as a *functional limitation* that is caused by a *physical or mental impairment* that *restricts your ability* to perform the daily activities necessary to participate in studies at a postsecondary level or in the labour force, and that is expected to *remain with you for your life* (Permanent Disability section).

Bursary for Students with Disabilities (BSWD) (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2010)

Full-time and part-time students with either permanent or temporary disabilities who have disability-related educational costs for services or equipment that are not covered by another agency or service and are required for postsecondary participation (Just the Facts Section).

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO, 2012)

“Learning Disabilities” refers to a variety of disorders that affect the acquisition, retention, understanding, organization or use of verbal and/or nonverbal information. These disorders result from impairments in one or more psychological processes related to learning, in combination with otherwise average abilities essential for thinking and reasoning. Learning disabilities are specific not global impairments and as such are distinct from intellectual disabilities (p. 7).

Ability vs. Disability: DSM-IV vs. DSM-5

For the purposes of addressing the question “Is MID a diagnosis?” a cross-comparison of the criteria used to determine diagnosis in both the DSM-IV and the DSM-5 revision was undertaken by examining the criteria for diagnosing Intellectual Disabilities and Specific Learning Disorders.

Intellectual Disability: Diagnosis

Whereas the DSM-IV only used IQ to determine the diagnosis of ‘Mental Retardation’, the DSM-5 uses two criteria to diagnose ‘Intellectual Disabilities. Although an IQ below the 2nd percentile continues to serve as the intellectual criteria, the administration of an Adaptive measure indicating skills in the same level of functioning is now required in the DSM-5. These changes actually took place in Ontario prior to the revision of the DSM-5 and are now a diagnostic requirement in Ontario for funding for services both within the educational systems and social services. In the DSM-5, the term MID can be a diagnosable Neurodevelopmental Disorder if it meets the criteria established for an Intellectual Disability 317 (F70) within the *Mild* range. That is, if there is both an intellectual *and* an adaptive deficit, MID is a diagnosis in the DSM-5. This diagnosis of MID as an Intellectual Disability, however, does not address the question which underlays the purpose of the original presentation as it deals with intellectual inability and does not address the segment of the student population who are adaptive and fall within the BIF range of ability.

Specific Learning Disorder: Diagnosis

In contrast, the revised criteria used to diagnose Specific Learning Disorders in the DSM-5 have a potentially much more significant impact with respect to MID as well as on the current confusion between: identification vs. diagnosis; able vs. not able; ability/capability vs. disability; and, Otherwise Qualified vs. Not Otherwise Qualified.

Quite simply, the diagnostic criteria for the determination of Specific Learning Disorders no longer link Average or Above Average intellectual potential and aptitude/achievement discrepancies as criteria for this diagnosis. That is, the updated diagnostic criteria in the DSM-5 now place the lower limits of the intellectual cut off at 70 IQ (2nd percentile) instead of 90 IQ (i.e., 25th percentile). The implication is that students within the BIF range of intellectual ‘ability’ who also present with levels of academic functioning in reading, writing and/or math which are significantly below expectations based on their chronological age (i.e., 7th percentile or lower) can now be diagnosed with a Specific Learning Disorder. Consequently, some of the students within this range of ability who have been or are currently being identified by their School Boards with MID or as Low Average or Borderline may now meet the criteria for the diagnosis of a Specific Learning Disorder. That is, the 23% of the student population who present within this range of ability can now potentially be diagnosed with a Specific Learning Disorder and become “Otherwise Qualified”.

What is the Impact on Disability Services?

The impact of this significant change in diagnostic criteria in the DSM-5 revision has far reaching implications with respect to the potential increase in the number of students who may now be diagnosed and considered “Otherwise Qualified”. This potential increase in the number of students deemed eligible for accommodations to assist their studies, in turn, will have an impact on funding.

A major potential impact on future funding for students with disabilities could be the introduction of administrative demands by the funding agencies for the implementation of specific monitoring and evidence-based statistics of student ‘success’. Moreover, the demand for evidence-based statistics of how student success is linked to the specific accommodations and diagnosis may also become a requirement. That is, it follows with the potential increase in eligible demand by students for services, and there will be increasing pressure by governmental agencies for outcome statistics indicating how the accommodations provided are being used by ‘qualified’ students. It is also probable that there will be a greater demand for pragmatically based rationale linking the diagnosis determined by a Psychoeducational assessment with the specific accommodations recommended.

Some of these changes are currently being implemented by insurance companies, in medical/legal disputes and by educational agencies in the US. So far, there are no known Human Rights challenges underway in Ontario. As a postscript, it is noteworthy, that although Ontario’s School Boards have not as yet acted on or responded to the implications of the changes in the DSM-5, a memorandum from the Deputy Minister of Education released on August 26, 2014 states that the current “Identification of and program planning for students with Learning Disabilities”, unchanged since 1982, will continue to be implemented using the definition and criteria currently used by the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario which requires the “average intellectual” and “aptitude/achievement discrepancy criteria” (Ministry of Education, 2014). Within this news release, however, there remains an inherent conflict between identification and diagnosis. That is, although diagnosis is not mentioned in the memorandum, the role of the psychologist as a diagnostician is clearly stated as “All psycho-educational and psychological assessments must be performed by or under the supervision of a qualified member of the College of Psychologists of Ontario.”

This latest memorandum from Ontario’s Ministry of Education, in effect, perpetuates the Identification process without incorporating the significant changes in diagnostic criteria in the DSM-5. Where does Ontario’s Ministry of Colleges and Universities stand on this issue? Will 23% of College students who are intellectually able and who may be potentially diagnosable with underlying Specific Learning Disorders continue to be considered Not Otherwise Qualified for accommodations to support their College studies?

Beyond the issue of diagnosis vs. identification, however, is the question: do students benefit from accommodations? Evidence-based statistics indicating the actual success rates of students who present with different forms of Disability are currently *not* available. Furthermore, there is no record of whether students who receive accommodations are actually using them and/or whether the provision of accommodations reflects the specific nature of their needs for compensatory supports. Moreover, there is currently no statistical record of (or definition of) success rates for students with disabilities. Clearly, as the diagnostic changes in the DSM-5 are implemented and/or challenged, a probable next demand will be the operationalization and implementation of evidence-based record keeping to ensure equitable provision of funding and accommodations for College students.

These changes will have a significant impact on the role of the College Disability Consultants as record keepers. What is the next step to take to prepare for these changes?

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