A Case for Psychoeducational Assessments for Students in ABE Upgrading: A Policy Brief

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We accept this Graduate Applied Project as conforming to the required standard.

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Abstract

This project cumulates into a policy brief which provides recommendations for changes to the policy involving psychoeducational assessment for students with learning disabilities enrolled in Adult Basic Upgrading (ABE). As much as 25% of students enrolled in ABE programs have a documented disability and many more are suspected. This project provides a review of the literature outlining the implications of education on societal and individual functioning as well as its significance in supporting inclusion and social justice practices. The writer was further informed through examining government documentation and websites, e-mail communication with two international initiations, an interview with a former department head of a disability service center, meetings with members of the provincial articulation subcommittee and attendance at meetings involving educators and support staff of ABE students. This project is intended to promote awareness of the inequality created by current policies around academic accommodations for students with learning disabilities and provide justification for policy reform.

Keywords: Psychoeducational Assessment, ABE, Adult Upgrading, Social Justice
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

Education has been identified as one of the major determinants of health. According to the World Health Organization, “Education reduces poverty through increased employment and provides skills for attaining better health” (p.13). Furthermore, “the health and well-being of children are influenced by the family’s social, economic and educational status” (p.13). Presently “153,300 or 1 in 5 children in BC are living in poverty” (First Call, 2017, p.4). BC, in general, has the second-highest poverty rate in Canada. According to research “approximately 557,000 people in BC live below the poverty line, 40% of whom are working adults” (BC Poverty Reduction, para.3). The opportunity to participate in further education and job skills enhancement is crucial to the wellbeing of these families.

Adult upgrading programs offer individuals the opportunity to participate at various levels of education from high school completion to post-secondary preparatory curriculum. Adult Upgrading includes students enrolled in Adult Basic Education (ABE), English Language Learners (ELL) and Adult Special Education (ASE). These programs are housed on university and college campuses across the country. ABE courses are also available through participating high schools and fall under the authority of the Ministry of Education while programs housed on campuses are governed by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training.

A high percentage of students in ABE are from low-income families. According to Horvast (2014), “71% of ABE students live below the poverty line” (p.15). ABE has long been identified as a means for individuals to gain the secondary level education credential. These credentials offer students the opportunity to enter the labor market in higher paying jobs and/or meet pre-requisite criteria toward upper-level programs leading to greater career opportunities. However, there are other reasons why
Students return to education. Students report a variety of personal reasons for attending ABE, including “making a better life for their children and being at a crossroad such as a job loss or health issues” (Auchinachie & Bowe, 2017, p.9).

Literacy and Numeracy – the ability to read, write and comprehend, as well as perform basic math within the parameters of societal expectations - are of national concern. Research suggests that 48% of Canadians score within a low literacy level (Conference Board, 2014). Moreover, with a rating from 1-5; “31.7% perform at level 2, 12.6% perform at level 1 and 3.8% function below level1” (Conference Board, 2014). The research specifies that “individuals must be able to understand, process, and respond to textual and numerical information, print and digital, if they are to participate fully in society” (Conference Board, 2014). According to Drewes (2015) “approximately 15% of Canadian adults report being underqualified for their current jobs” (p.11). Conversely, the BC government has reported an anticipated growth of one million jobs by 2022 (Developmental Student Survey, 2014, p.11). According to the report “more than three-quarters of these jobs will require some post-secondary training” (p.11). However, a substantial portion of ABE students will not receive the academic support they require to be successful in their coursework or gain the skills required to enter the labor market at a competitive level.

A sizable number of these students have or are suspected of having a learning disability. Research reveals that as many as 20 - 25% of ABE students have a documented learning disability (Auchinachie & Bowe, 2017, p.6). Learning disability has been identified as the leading reported disorder of students accessing services through disability service centers in post-secondary institutions (Showers & Kinsman, 2017). Additionally, individuals with learning disabilities have the most challenges in staying attached to education and the labor market (p.81). Research supports the theory that accommodations and academic support for students with learning disabilities improve positive
outcomes with implications reaching beyond education into employment security and satisfaction. These benefits were not meant to be exclusive of adults in ABE. As noted by UNESCO (2013), education is considered a lifelong engagement. It is also an opportunity for older workers and new Canadians to upgrade skills that more so reflect changing trends in the labor market. A large percentage of these students will require basic upgrading, and the current research indicates that a large number of these students also have some form of learning disability.

Currently, students with a suspected learning disability but with no documentation to support their claim do not qualify for academic accommodations or support services. Existing policy states that a student must provide documented proof of a disorder along with individualized recommendations for support. Furthermore, documentation must be current within the last five years and students must be enrolled in post-secondary curriculum. Further complicating the matter, only two professional credentials, a registered psychologist or registered school psychologist, are recognized with the authority to conduct a psychoeducation assessment for a specific learning disability. Fees for assessments vary anywhere from $1800.00 through to $2100.00.

While students enrolled in post-secondary courses can access a learning disability bursary through Student Aid to pay for a psychoeducational assessment, current policies disqualify students in ABE from eligibility to request the funding. Select ABE students are eligible for other types of funding through the Adult Upgrading Grant (AUG). AUG funding offers students deemed eligible, by way of a needs assessment, the opportunity to apply for funding for “The unsubsidized portion of child care expenses, transportation, books, and supplies” (Chen, 2018, p.15) while attending ABE. While ABE students have access to AUG funding, it does not cover the cost of psychoeducational assessments and or other support services for students with learning disabilities, with or without documentation.

In the past, students have been able to access assessments through the support of local employment
agencies. However, these agencies have come under more stringent accountability and reporting practices. According to local employment agency staff, to be considered for a psychoeducational assessment funding through employment services, students must prove that they are unemployed or underemployed and actively seeking employment and have had a history of academic problems that would interfere with job stability. Students engaged in full-time studies are not eligible for these services.

University students also face personal barriers to obtaining a psychoeducational assessment. Obtaining an assessment in the adult arena requires self-advocacy on the part of the student. In addition to self-disclosure, students must access the disability services center, complete required paperwork, adhere to specific timelines and communicate their needs to course instructors. For students with learning disabilities, these rigid guidelines may prove challenging. In addition, the fear of having to self-disclose and negotiate accommodations with instructors may be intimidating for many first-year students.

Additionally, Ross-Gordon, Plotts, Joesel, & Wells (as cited in Reynolds, Johnson, & Salzman, 2012) found a number of other factors that create barriers to assessment. “awareness of indicators, access to screening tools and training in their use, access to diagnostic services, and funds for evaluation” (as cited in Reynolds, Johnson, & Salzman, 2012, p.182). Polson & White (as cited in Reynolds et al., 2012) found a lack of financial resources appears to be the most prevalent barrier and includes both student and institution responders.

As noted students enrolled in ABE have further restrictions that create barriers to psychoeducational assessment. The wording used in policies around accommodation for students with learning disabilities creates adverse conditions involving equitable access to education and cultivates a universal tolerance of social injustice toward these students.
People with learning disabilities also experience stigma within the education system and on the job. The Human Rights laws and the Employment Equity Act, provide guidelines that protect the interests of students and employees with learning disabilities, however, little has been discussed about the social justice issues presented to ABE students in need of academic accommodation. An investigation into the policies around accommodation of universities in major cities indicates a global phenomenon.

**Social Justice and Education Policy**

“I believe that education is the civil rights issue of our generation. And if you care about promoting opportunity and reducing inequality, the classroom is the place to start. Great teaching is about so much more than education; it is a daily fight for social justice.”

~ Secretary Arne Duncan, October 9, 2009

A global search of major universities resulted in similar jargon in policies involving psychoeducational assessments for students with learning disabilities. These policies mirror the language used by provincial government agencies such as Student Aid BC, who oversees the disbursement of student loans. The use of the words “documented disability” which appears in the policies, serves to disqualify the portion of students who may not have been previously diagnosed in childhood and/or those whose documentation is outside of the 5-year parameter.

Due to a variety of reasons some adults go without being identified as LD until adulthood (Nichols, 2012). For some, a late onset in the presentation of difficulties may be cause for not having been assessed. According to the DSM-5 (2013), “difficulties may not become apparent until the demands on learning exceed the individual’s abilities” (p.67). As an invisible disability, being referred for an assessment relies on the teacher’s knowledge and recognition of symptoms within the student. Learning disabilities by nature are not immediately apparent (Fletcher, 2012; Nalavany, Carawan &
Sauber, 2013) and getting referred relies heavily on the teacher’s knowledge and recognition of symptoms which may be specific to each student. The age of the student may also have bearing on whether or not they have had a formal assessment. Knowledge around learning disabilities and testing procedures have evolved greatly over the past couple of decades. Students who may not have been diagnosed as LD before would potentially fit the diagnosis under the current guidelines (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2007). Studies indicate that as many as 40% to 60% of adult students identified with LD had received the diagnosis after beginning postsecondary education (Nichols, 2012). Additionally, research conducted by Sparks and Lovett (2009) reported as many as 378 students having been identified with LD during post-secondary studies (p.378).

Denying these students access to funding for psychoeducational assessment creates further barriers to academic success, further perpetuating a marginalized standard of living. Carr (2007), states “Acknowledging the political nature of education is key to the concept of social justice; allowing for and promoting the inclusion of marginalized voices is fundamental” (p.3). However, Levin (2009), urges that “although advocacy is legitimate – indeed vital – it has to be informed advocacy” (p.125). In other words, effective advocacy involves a well-researched presentation of the issue and a well-formulated set of solutions involving the impact on various stakeholders and cost to taxpayers (Levin, 2009).

The impact of education on society including the judicial system and the welfare state has been written about extensively. Inclusion policies in primary, secondary and post-secondary education mitigate potential negative outcomes for many individuals. However, the research indicates that post-secondary institutions have different standards of service delivery for students attending upper-level curriculum than they do for students attending ABE. To better prepare these students to compete in the knowledge economy and participate fully in society, they require access to an equitable education.
**Personal Context**

As a parent of two children with learning disabilities and a former educational assistant, I have experienced firsthand the struggles and frustration of students who failed to reach the potential that they intuitively knew they were capable of. Students with invisible disabilities, such as a learning disability, are more vulnerable than their peers due to the very nature of the diagnosis. As learning disabilities manifest differently to each student, the signs are often overlooked. Students who are less impacted by their disorder, are often misunderstood by educators and often chastised for their inconsistency in work production and inability to grasp concepts.

Educators have historically lacked specific training in learning disabilities and are often unable to identify even if a problem exists. Advocating for these students, whether as a parent or paraprofessional, has at times been an adversarial and futile undertaking. Many students with learning disabilities, such as the case with my children, maintain a passing GPA and lack behavioral challenges. Due to financial restraints, these students are frequently passed over for formal assessment in favor of students with greater learning or behavioral challenges.

As an individual with dyslexia and dysgraphia, I have had my own struggles in learning. However, as a college student, I benefited from the services of an onsite psychoeducational assessment which, at that time, was free to students. The assessment gave me access to academic accommodations that allowed me to be successful in my studies. In contrast, gaining my university credentials proved more challenging as I no longer had access to academic accommodations nor the financial resources to pay for a new psychoeducational assessment.

During the undertaking of my graduate degree, I accessed student loans. However, student loans do not cover the full cost of a psychoeducational assessment and students are expected to pay the residual amount. This is not always an option for students living on student loans, and like many other
students, I could not afford to pay the outstanding balance and had to forego the assessment. Although I was successful in my studies and was placed on the dean’s list for two years of my studies, I experienced extreme periods of stress and struggled with assignment expectations and deadlines. There were courses in which I would have benefited from the use of academic support services. My interest in this project stems from an organic desire to seek social justice for future students with undiagnosed learning disabilities and/or students with outdated assessment documentation.

Overview of the Project

There is overwhelming evidence that academic accommodations and support services lead to positive outcomes for students with learning disabilities. Upgrading, more than not, leads to higher education and/or easier access to the labor market. Given these factors, funding for psychoeducational assessment should be considered a built-in component of government-funded education programs.

Therefore, this project responds to the question: why is there no funding for ABE students with learning disabilities to pay for psychoeducational assessments and support services?

The purpose of this project is to create a policy brief to inform a working group of the Provincial Articulation Committee. Research gathered for this policy brief will be presented at an annual provincial meeting.

The research compiled through this project will provide the committee with the data and rationale to support a request for a policy change to the Ministry of Advanced Education to assist ABE students with learning disabilities to pay for psychoeducational assessments individually and/or funding to provide for in-house services. The policy brief will provide examples of active systems which support students by providing psychoeducational assessment and finally make a recommendation along with considerations for each.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Purpose and Overview of Chapter

Although much research has been conducted on teaching methods for university and college students with learning disabilities, little has been focused on the outcomes of students who receive academic accommodations and fewer again involving adult students attending ABE. The following chapter provides an overview of the literature starting with a definition of learning disabilities (LD) and their impact of education and overall daily living, the benefits of accommodations, and the influence of instructors. The chapter also discusses the university experience of students with LD, the impact of LD post-university studies, the impact of LD on academic achievement. Finally, the chapter explores the meaning of social justice and social justice as it pertains to ABE.

Defining Learning Disabilities

A learning disability (LD) is understood as a marked discrepancy between cognitive ability and academic achievement. According to the Learning Disability Association of BC (2018), “they are specific neurological disorders that affect the way a person stores, understands, retrieves and/or communicates information” (LD Association)

The term learning disability is an umbrella term that involves several specific deficits including reading, written expression, and math (DSM-5, 2013). People with learning disabilities are categorized within the average to above average range of intelligence. Specific types of learning disabilities as described by the Learning Disabilities Association of BC are:

**Dyslexia**: described as difficulty in processing language and involves reading, writing, and spelling.

**Dyscalculia**: described as difficulty with math skills and concepts. May include computation, remembering math facts, the concept of time, money, and grasping math concepts.
Dysgraphia: described as difficulty with written expression. May involve problems with handwriting, spelling and expressing ideas on paper. May manifest as illegible handwriting, difficulty organizing ideas and getting thoughts on paper.

Dyspraxia: described as difficulty with fine motor skills. May involve coordination and problems with manual dexterity (DSM-5, p.66).

Specific Learning disabilities vary in severity from mild, moderate or severe (DSM-5, 2013). An individual may be mildly impaired and have the ability to compensate or function well with intervention. A student with a moderate disability will demonstrate highly noticeable difficulties in learning specific skills and require intensive intervention. Finally, a student with severe learning disabilities may demonstrate ongoing difficulties in learning and maintenance of skills and often requires long-term intervention and accommodations across several domains of daily living (DSM-5, 2013).

Adults with learning disabilities experience the same range of emotional reactions as described in children and youth with disabilities. As noted by LD Online (2018), adults with learning disabilities may present with a variety of social and emotional characteristics which materialize whether they are unsuccessful or successful. According to Barton & Fuhrmann (as cited in LD Online, 2018) it is not uncommon for adults with LD to battle feelings of low self-worth or diminished self-esteem and has an overall negative concept of themselves. Furthermore, Gerber, Ginsberg, and Reiff (as cited in LD Online, 2018), found that adults with LD experience periods of feeling dumb or stupid and a belief that they are incompetent. It may be characteristic for adults with LD to feel inadequate. Research conducted by Groteluschen, Barkowski, and Hale (as cited in LD Online, 2018), found that some adults with LD have an attitude of learned helplessness resulting in a feeling of being incapable of seeing themselves as a loser. Adults with LD are at risk of health issues relating to anxiety and
depression. As discussed in LD Online (2018), the emotional turmoil created by these internal thought processes is demonstrated in activities of daily living and learning environments, leaving individuals vulnerable to mental health issues including anxiety and depression.

The impact of emotion on learning has been well documented. Seemingly, negative emotions experienced while studying can depress memory and interfere with information processing. According to Baron (as cited in Bryan, 2004), “it affects the performance of complex cognitive functions that require flexibility, integration, and utilization of cognitive material” (p.46). According to the Ministry of Education (2011), a variety of negative performance situations including embarrassment, shame, anger, and anxiety cause students to doubt their abilities. Furthermore “these responses combined with self-regulation may impede the student’s ability to learn” (p.50).

Students who struggle with learning in early years will continue to struggle as adults. Research conducted by Shifer (as cited in Showers, 2017), found that many students enrolled in upgrading have been identified as students who have failed to complete high school and or have not achieved the marks or coursework required for eligibility toward their desired post-secondary pursuits.

Learning disorders often come in clusters. Perhaps the most discussed comorbid disorders associated with Specific Learning Disabilities is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Approximately 2.5% of the adult population is afflicted with ADHD (DSM-5). ADD/ADHD merits discussion here due to the overlap in problems related to associated emotional problems.

ADD/ADHD is defined as “a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development, as characterized by inattention or hyperactivity and impulsivity” (DSM-5 p.60).

Adults with ADHD are associated with an “increased risk of suicide attempt, primarily when comorbid with mood, conduct, and substance use disorders” (p.61). Anxiety and depression are a
factor for a percentage of these individuals (DSM-5). As students with LD already demonstrate a tendency toward these negative emotions the combination of LD and ADD/ADHD would be twofold. Learning under these conditions can prove overwhelming without a high level of metacognition on behalf of the student and appropriate intervention and accommodation from instructors.

**University Experience**

The number of students with learning disabilities who choose to attend post-secondary education continues to increase (Troinano, Leifeld & Trachtenbert, 2010; Showers & Kinsman, 2017). However, the experience of those attending is not always positive.

Students with learning disabilities often struggle to keep up with the demands and academic standards expected in university-level programs. Students frequently report spending longer hours than their non-labeled peers on the same assignment (Denhart, 2008). Incidents of spending as much time as twenty hours on a project that their peers spent two or three hours on the same project are not uncommon (p.490).

Students with learning disabilities struggle with a variety of situations around learning. According to McGregor et al., (2016), “5.9% of the students with learning disabilities reported having had difficulty with assignments” (p.1). They also presented with greater obstacles in academic achievement due to barriers in their personal lives (McGregor et al., 2016), and may experience greater stop out rates as a result (Auchinachie & Bowe, 2017).

Additionally, students with learning disabilities may struggle to be understood. Variations in thinking patterns and verbal communication skills can make it difficult when interacting in class discussions and group activities. Students cited problems such as not being able to talk under pressure or having a clear thought in mind but not being able to clearly articulate what they want to say (Denhart, 2008). Others report “needing to understand a process and/or why things are the way they
are” (p. 492), a practice which may be in contrast to their instructor’s teaching style, leading to miscommunication and frustration.

Organizational skills are another area of concern for students with LD. Difficulties with organizing concepts appear to result in frustration and longer time spent on assignments and report writing (Denhart, 2008). Students report difficulties in arranging concepts into sentences and in breaking down texts to pinpoint key information (p. 492). In Denhart’s research, one student explained “the point is, is everything’s important to me, so making an outline that’s only supposed to be like two pages [. . .] I have no idea. It’s all important” (p. 492).

Additionally, identifying as a student with LD may have a negative impact on the university experience. Research shows that many students with learning disabilities report college or university involvement as a negative experience (McGregor, Langenfeld, Van Horne, Olsen & Jacobson, 2016). Among these reasons are negative reactions from instructors and peers to self-disclosure of having an LD. The decision to self-identify and or request accommodations may leave a student in a situation of being perceived negatively by their instructors. Students report elicit varying responses including being labeled lazy and “trying to take advantage” and “overt discrimination and harassment” (Lock & Layton, 2001). However, as students who do self-disclose and request academic accommodation have higher success rates (Troiano, Leifeld & Trachtenbert, 2010), educator knowledge of LD and understanding of how to support students with learning disabilities is an important factor toward their academic success.

**Instructor Influence**

The instructor/student relationship has a significant role in the academic achievement of students, perhaps more so for those with LD. According to Tierney’s model of persistence “faculty and staff support, sense of belonging and community, mattering or sense of importance” (Jensen, 2011, p.2) are
among some of the top external and social indicators of student retention. According to Kuh, Kinzie, and Buckley (2006), student satisfaction has a strong impact on student’s grades and should be considered an important factor in student success (p.13).

There are a variety of practices instructors can adopt to support students in enhancing their experience in post-secondary education. According to Field, Sarver, and Shaw (2003), role modeling self-determination, adopting a talent development philosophy and pedagogical approaches including active and collaborative learning and inquiry/problem-based learning are helpful. Additionally, use of the Teaching with Integrity, Reflection and Self-Determination model has proven successful. The model involves creating a curriculum based on the principles of “know yourself, value yourself, plan, act, experience outcomes, and learn” (p.344).

The research of Kuh et al. (2006), found the Talent Development Model to be particularly supportive of underserved students. This model adopts the student’s prior knowledge as an asset and places value on the sharing of information within the classroom environment (p.66). Kuh et al. (2016) promote the use of pedagogical approaches such as active collaborative learning. This model creates an interactive and active learning environment as well as promotes problem and inquiry-based learning methods (Kuh et al., 2006). Studies show that students “learned more effectively by participating in a cooperative group, enjoyed their social interaction; characterized the classroom environment as friendly, non-threatening, fun and dynamic; and reported a sense of belonging and camaraderie” (p.66).

**Accommodations**

Students in ABE are seeking the opportunity to raise their standard of living and participate more fully as active members of society. Many of these students are low-income wage earners with one or more jobs or employees who require skills enhancement to maintain their competitiveness in the labor market (Auchinachie & Bowe, 2017). Without access to accommodation and support services, ABE
students with learning disabilities are at risk of non-completion.

The purpose of academic accommodations and supports is to allow students with learning and other disabilities access to equitable education. According to Ofiesh (as cited in Weis, 2014), accommodations may involve adjustments in teaching to make up for the manner in which students learn, or adjustments to evaluation criteria allowing students equal access to knowledge and an accessible platform to demonstrate knowledge transfer equal to that of their peers (p.485). As noted by Gregg and Lindstrom, and Lovett, (as cited in Weis, 2014), accommodations must be presented in a manner which modifies practices that restrict the student’s ability to learn without risking the integrity of academic standards or validity of exam outcomes (p.485).

The Disability Services Framework (2001), identifies the student’s rights under the British Columbia Human Rights Code and provides an explanation of the services of various programs involved with adult students with learning disabilities. The document provides a link to disability matrix, a document which serves as a guide for disability service staff in the determination and allocation of academic accommodations and support services.

Many accommodations are based on test accommodations and may include additional “time, use of technology (i.e., calculator, spellcheck, speech-to-text and text-to-speech software, word processor), access to a reader, testing in a separate room, use of a dictionary or thesaurus, use of outlining rubrics for essays/papers, and additional rest breaks” (Gregg, 2012, p.49). Additionally, students may qualify for instructional accommodations including “special tutoring, access to recorded books or e-books, scribe, permission to record lectures, preferential seating, and preferential registration” (p.49).

**Impact on Academic Achievement**

Academic accommodations and support services have proven to increase the outcomes of university
and college students with learning disabilities (Troiano, Liefeld & Trachtenbert 2010; Kim & Lee 2016; Herbert, Welsh, Hong, Byun, Kurz, & Atkinson (2014). The research of Abreau, Hillier, Frye, and Goldstein (2016). and Herbert et al., (2014) reported a positive correlation between the number of visits students reported and GPA. Additionally, Abreu (2016) found that GPA was also strongly correlated with degree completion. Although initial contact with disability services is a mandatory component in initiating services, students report getting help in additional areas including coaching in time management and organization, collaborating with faculty and or other departments, asking questions and gaining advice (Abreau, 2016).

Test accommodations, in particular, an extension of time to write tests, has been noted as having the most impact on test scores and overall GPA (Kim & Lee, 2016; Abreu et al., 2016). Modifications on exam materials also have a positive correlation, however, changes to the overall course development show little impact (Kim & Lee 2016). According to Abreu et al., (2016) “students directly reported extended time on tests, reduced distraction environment for taking tests, and permission to tape lectures as the most useful accommodations of those they were granted” (p.325).

Impact Beyond Education

Without proper support to complete education, people with learning disabilities typically demonstrate lower success in gaining sustainable employment, lower income, and less satisfaction in work. Literacy issues have been linked to greater health issues, including drug and alcohol addiction and participation in illegal activity. It is estimated that (33%) of youth in the justice system have been diagnosed with an LD (Literature Review, 2017, p.3).

Obtaining sustainable employment without completion of formal education is difficult if not next to impossible in today’s labor market. Individuals with LD may have greater challenges with job maintenance than the initial acquisition. According to Arkell (2015), people with dyslexia may
demonstrate difficulties in situations requiring flexibility and timely knowledge acquisition following “changes in work duties, including new operational systems or technology; changes in environment; changes in job role either through promotion or restructuring of departments or operational changes such as a new manager” (para.3).

Research supports the theory that completion of post-secondary education benefits individuals with LD in income security in the same manner as it does their peers without learning disabilities. In a longitudinal study, Lindstrom, Doren and Miesch (2011), found that “completion of formal higher education led directly to opportunities for higher wage employment for these respondents” (p.429). These individuals were also in receipt of health and other benefits. Employment stability was another area where higher education made a difference. Lindstrom et al. (2011), found that the males in their study maintained steady employment with a trajectory of gradual wage increases over the postschool study period. The women, however, varied in fluctuating stability due mainly to parenting responsibilities and illness.

ABE students in a longitudinal study reported a variety of health and lifestyle benefits. According to Auchinachie (2017), students reported “quit smoking (14%), healthier eating/exercise (24%), improved housing (27%), improved finances (35%), improved self-esteem/self-confidence (54%) and resolved long-term health issues (21%)” (p.13).

Positive Aspects of Learning Disabilities

On the other hand, given the right circumstances, people with learning disabilities have contributed greatly to society and offer many benefits to their chosen careers. Some famous individuals with signs of dyslexia include Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Astronomer and Space Scientist Maggie Aderin-Pocock and Leonardo da Vinci, (Dyslexia Victoria, 2018). According to researchers, people with learning disabilities rely on the right hemisphere of the brain. As such, they
process information differently. For instance, people with dyslexia “see concepts in terms of whole images” (Dyslexia Victoria, 2018, para.2). In other words, they solve problems and come up with new perspectives by seeing first what an idea, process, or project is in its entirety and then pick out the individual parts and its relation to the overall view (Dyslexia Victoria, 2018). When they see all of these parts and their purposes in connection to the “whole picture” they can expand, add or fix anything” (Dyslexia Victoria, 2018 para.2).

Predominately right brain processors have strong analytical skills. They excel in the areas of creativity, curiosity, empathy, intuition, problem-solving and multi-tasking which allow them to think and process form a whole image point of view. As they typically see things from a broader perspective or the “Bigger Picture” they are able to produce a variety of ideas and or solutions to problems (Dyslexia Victoria, 2018).

**Defining Social Justice**

Although many definitions are available, for the purpose of this project, social justice will be defined as this project. “the equal access to wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society” (Parchamama Alliance, 2018, para.1). According to Capeheart and Milovanovic (2007), social justice is concerned not in the narrow focus of what is just for the individual alone, but what is just for the social whole. Given the current global condition, social justice must include an understanding of the interactions within and between a multitude of peoples.

According to Ornstein (2017), “the notion of social justice is based on the Christian doctrine of helping less fortunate people – the weak, sickly, and oppressed” (p. 545). Social justice arose around the time of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century as a response to the growing inequality of distribution of money and resources within the labor force under the capitalistic society (Parchamama Alliance, 2018). “Since the 1920’s social democrat governments in Western Europe have reinforced
the view that all citizens should be treated equally” (Ornstein, 2017 p.545).

Although primarily a concern of economics, there have been a number of protests and movements that broadened the scope of social justice. Among other areas of concern, social justice now includes issues such as human rights, cultural pluralism, voice (of the weak and oppressed), economic and social rights and state action as social justice (Grant and Gibson, 2013).

One notable distinction between social justice definitions is that of “distributive justice” and “retributive justice”. According to Capeheart (2007), Distributive justice concerns the various philosophies attending to the fair allocation of resources as well as of burden” (p.3). Conversely, Retributive Justice refers to the “recompense[…]the dispensing or receiving of reward or punishment according to the deserts of the individual[…]that given or exacted in recompense[…]to give an equivalent for; to make up for as by atoning or requiting[…]and equivalent or return for something done, suffered[…]a repayment as by way of satisfaction, restitution, retribution, etc.” (p.3).


According to McCormick (as cited in Burkemper et al., 2003), John Rawle’s Social Contract Model is based on the theory of “justice and fairness”. The Social Contract Model is concerned with the rights of the individual person as well as providing support to larger pockets of society, including the poor and marginalized citizens. Rawl’s (1999), Social Construct model utilizes two principles which reflect current education-based policies around accommodations: “1. The principle of equal liberty, which would assure each person an equal right to the greatest amount of the most basic liberties, and 2. The difference principle, which would allow for social and economic inequalities only when they result in an improved situation for the poor and marginalized” (p.11).
Social justice involves a broad scope of issues associated with education. According to Carr (2007), “Within the educational policy context, social justice is concerned with inclusion, representation, processes, content, and outcomes from a critical perspective, seeking to contextualize, frame and promote debate and action around these issues” (p. 2).

**Social Justice and ABE**

Canada has had a long history of injustice for individuals with disabilities both inside and outside of the classroom. “For millennia, moral model-based laws and policies focused on the confinement, exclusion, and societal protection of people with disabilities” (Mackelprang, 2009 p. 133).

ABE programs have shifted dramatically over the past several decades. In 2014 the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training cut $6.9 million dollars funding cut ABE programs (Horvat, 2014). ABE continues to be the least funded and least supported among the education programs. They are also the only group of students who are impacted by regulations from the social service sector.

Policy changes within the income assistance and employment insurance programs restrict many students from attending ABE. Strict limitations imposed through Student Aid BC in 2002 forced many students to drop out of upgrading (Mapuranga, 2011). These changes were in alignment with funding cuts from the Ministry of Advanced Education to Institution Based Training programs, which provided funds for targeted populations to attend training and or upgrading (Mapuranga, 2011).

A shift in the financial allocation of funds from targeted to block funding highly impacted ABE programs ability to provide quality services. While targeted funding is tied to the individual student, block funding provides money for the overall program, regardless of the volume of students. “With the block funding approach, the provincial government leaves it up the institution to distribute the funding to specific programs and departments” (Mapuranga, 201, p.29). The change in funding leaves ABE programs vulnerable to the vision and perception of upper management. Moreover, Mapuranga (2011),
found notable tension between instructors of the ABE and university faculty. In particular, he noted that university faculty lack a proper understanding of funding allocation and held the position that funding was wasted on ABE programs. Furthermore, Mapuranga’s research (2011) reported students shared concerns that ABE programs lacked the funds to provide a proper evaluation to support their learning needs.
Chapter 3

Justification for Project

This project was developed in response to a request from a working group of the Provincial Articulation Committee, to conduct independent research on why there are no funding options to support students in ABE to obtain a psychoeducational assessment.

In chapter one, I provided an overview of the scope of this issue, including an explanation of how current policies serve to deem student’s ineligible for assessment and support services. Chapter two provided a review of the literature involving the personal benefits and academic outcomes of students who receive assessment and services. The literature supports the theory that students who receive psychoeducational assessment and support services have better outcomes in both GPA and degree completion, signifying the need for policy change. The following chapter provides an overview of the purpose and development of the policy paper.

Background of Policy Papers

Public policy may be defined as the process of “making decisions that reflect values and allocating resources based on those values” (Best Practice Briefs, 2005, p.1). They require an exceptional degree of consideration, based on theory and experience, on the part of the government in responding to social issues. Public policies have a direct impact on a variety of stakeholders varying from policy advisors to government agencies and non-governmental or community groups to individual citizens (Young & Quinn, 2002, p.6).

Policy papers are presented in a variety of formats including the policy memo, policy brief, and the policy paper. A policy memo is written in memorandum format, is one to two pages in length, and “is typically a short distillation of the major findings or recommendations on a key issue or significant problem” (Herman, n.d. p.1). The policy brief is a 2-4-page document that “presents the findings and recommendations of a research project to a non-specialized audience” (International Development,
2018, p.4). Finally, the policy paper, also known as a white paper, is an in-depth report or research piece which “focuses on a specific policy issue and provides clear recommendations for policymakers” (Scotten, 2011, p. 3.).

Furthermore, policy papers provide the target audience with solutions to real-world problems. According to Young and Quinn (2002), the purpose of a policy paper is to “provide a comprehensive and persuasive argument justifying the policy recommendations presented in the paper and therefore, to act as a decision-making tool and a call to action for the target audience” (p.18). The policy paper allows readers with limited time the benefit of being able to make practical decisions based on research targeted to their industry (Harris, 2018).

The preparation of any one of these papers is typically carried out by a policy analyst, or policy researchers who have an understanding of policy mapping, stakeholder analysis, and the policy cycle.

**Policy Mapping**

Nash, Hudson, and Lutrell (2006) define policy as “the result of interactions among different organizations with particular interests and ideas about what course of action should be taken” (p.1). They go further to state that “the sum of these interactions constitutes the policy process” (p.1). Conducting a policy map serves to provide a contextual portrayal of the political atmosphere. Policy mapping bridges research and policy. According to Helms and Biggs (2008), “Policy maps enable the comparative analysis of individual policy initiatives across diverse policy domains and contexts” (p. 566).

Another form of policy mapping involves case studies. Kaarbo and Beasley (1999) describe case study as “a method of obtaining a "case" or a number of "cases" through an empirical examination of a real-world phenomenon within its naturally occurring context, without directly manipulating either the phenomenon or the context” (p.372).
Case studies may incorporate multiple types of evidence including interviews, surveys, and content analysis. They may be presented in a narrative style or reflect a quantitative or analytic style. Kaarbo and Beasley (1999), describe several types of case studies including 1. using cases for description, 2. using theory to explore cases, 3. using cases to develop theory, 4. using cases to explore and refine theory and 5. using cases as tests of theory (p. 373).

**Stakeholder Analysis**

Stakeholder Analysis refers to a range of techniques for mapping and understanding the power, positions, and perspectives of the stakeholders who have an interest in, and/or are likely to be affected by, a particular policy reform (Buse, Mays & Walt, 2012). Schmeer (1999), refers to stakeholder analysis as “a process of systematically gathering and analyzing qualitative information to determine whose interests should be taken into account when developing and/or implementing a policy or program (p.3).


**Policy Cycle**

Policy writers require an understanding of the policy process to be able to engage effectively with political policy writers. The stages of the policy cycle are helpful in simplifying the process of policymaking by helping to “identify policymaker aims, identify policies to achieve those aims, select a policy measure, ensure that the selection is legitimized by the population or its legislature, identify the necessary resources, implement and then evaluate the policy” (Cairney, 2013, para.5).
There has been discord among theorists on the placement of the steps within the policy cycle. To assist researchers in incorporating the crucial components, Hardee et al. (2004) introduced the concept of the “6 “p’s”. Hardee et al. (2004) process involves “P” designations to help users remember the six main components of policy: 1. the Problems that arise requiring policy attention 2. the People who participate in policy and the Places they represent 3. the Process of policymaking 4. the Price Tag of the policy (the cost of policy options and how resources are allocated) 5. the Paper produced (actual laws and policies) 6. the Programs that result from implementing policies and their Performance in achieving policy goals and objectives (p.4).

**Writing the policy brief**

“A policy brief is a short, to the point, jargon-free document written for non-specialists” (Ffrench-Constant, 2014, p.4). According to Jones & Walsh (2008), “79% of policy actors from both developing and developed countries rated policy brief as a ‘key tool’ (as cited in Ffrench-Constant, p.4). Both the paper and the brief require extensive research as well as a methodical demonstration of primary and secondary sources. However, the policy brief is typically more succinct (Harris, 2018).

The policy paper is designed to offer research on a particular subject and does not necessarily offer
the author’s opinion. On the other hand, the policy brief is more opinion based. According to Harris, (2018) “Policy briefs explain the advantages and disadvantages of different courses of action to a specific audience (i.e., your client) and which one you think they should take” (para 4).

Taking the time to plan your policy brief is crucial to its success. Careful consideration of the aim of your policy brief will streamline your research. According to Ffrench (2014), “the aim of a policy brief can range from changing policy to raising awareness of an issue” (p.6). She goes further to state that “figuring out who to target will shape everything from your choice of language to whether or not you present preferred policy options” (p.6).

A crucial component of the planning process is gaining an understanding of your audience. According to Harris (2016), “the policy brief is geared towards readers who have a limited amount of time to make a practical decision” (para 5). An understanding of what policy actors want to accomplish with the information in the policy brief is another aspect of understanding audience. Ffrench-Constant (2014), suggests “evidence-informed solutions” to problems that target a specific actor’s interests as best practice. She explains that these solutions should be “realistic, feasible within the current political climate and cost-effective” (p.6).

In conclusion, the selection of theory, when developing a policy paper, may depend on the experience of the writer, the nature of the problem and the audience to whom the paper is to be presented. For the purpose of this master’s project, I have opted to present the findings in the form of a policy brief. As the audience is a highly informed and busy group within the education system, a large body of work may be redundant and impractical. The policy brief is the simplest medium to synthesize the current research into a functional document.
Chapter 4
Conclusions and Reflections

Summary: The research presented throughout this paper supports the theory that students with learning disabilities benefit greatly from access to academic accommodations and support services. The research identified higher GPA and program completion rates as major outcomes. Other significant findings in the literature suggest a systemic value to education involving improvements in health, finances, housing, and interpersonal skills. These findings are in keeping with organizations such as World Health, UNESCO, OEDC.

In responding to the question “Why is there no funding for psychoeducational assessments for ABE students with learning disabilities?” Although the exact reason remains unclear, the research points to a lack of communication between the multitude of agencies involved in the governance of education policies, resulting in an oversight. Research suggests that without insider knowledge of the former political party’s personal agenda, this quarry can only be surmised through careful analysis of previous studies, documents released to the public, attending meetings with stakeholders and direct interviews with officials who have had a vested interested in the policies imposed on education by the government. Moreover, an investigation into the scope of the problem reveals that this is a global phenomenon which may be suggestive of a cohesive “group think” and may require a paradigm shift before a new policy can be considered.

The project is concluded with a policy brief which presents a synthesis of the research around the benefits of academic accommodations for students with learning disabilities as well as a demonstration of current programs and solutions that have been developed to date. The brief offers recommendations based on findings from a web-based search of colleges and universities with successful initiatives in offering students’ psychoeducational assessments.
Implications to the Field

Benefits of presenting a policy brief to support funding for students in ABE to acquire a psychoeducational assessment impacts the field of Education and various stakeholders as well as aid the individual student. On the personal level, students benefit academically which in turn influences other areas of their lives including health and lifestyle. Subsequently, individuals are better equipped to participate in society and make informed decisions involving political and global circumstances.

Awareness of social justice issues within the field of education has evolved greatly over the past few decades. The education system has maintained an upward trajectory in integration and inclusion policies for students with diverse abilities and currently places great emphasis on equity for all students. There is a potential for this policy brief to instill greater social justice for ABE upgrading students at the post-secondary level.

The position of an educator is often political. The work of Benjamin Levin challenges educators to find their voice within the political area. Offering both a descriptive explanation of political practices in education and suggestions of how to proceed, he creates a pathway for educators to effectively and ethically advocate on behalf of the student. Engaging in research, publishing findings, reports and engaging with other stakeholders is key to maintaining awareness of the issues. The presentation of this policy brief will hopefully serve to rally others to join the conversation.

The overall agenda of the policy brief is to initiate change. A change in policy at the provincial level would potentially lead to financial support of psychoeducational assessments and support services to ABE students. A change in provincial policy would impact institutional policies, again, allowing greater support for ABE students.

Limitations

As an independent, non-funded research study, this project was limited in its ability to meet with
government officials and organizations involved in decision making involving policy in post-secondary education. This project was limited by the lack of access to statistical data of students attached to disability services. It is recommended that future research include the collection of primary data of students accessing disability services in addition to secondary data. In addition, direct access to students to formulate anecdotal evidence presented in the form of case studies has proven to strengthen statistical data and provide greater understanding to potential funders.

Moreover, as much of the support for academic accommodations hinges on student outcomes, a longitudinal study may generate a greater understanding of the statistical evidence. The combination of statistical evidence and case studies may also provide greater rigor.

**Reflections**

Having had a large percentage of my career involve services to individuals with developmental disabilities, cognitive deficits and/or neurological disorders I have an awareness of the social injustice within our society. Conversely, I have been privileged to witness the heights that individuals with a disability can reach when given the opportunity and appropriate tools.

This project allowed me to draw upon my personal experience as a student with learning disabilities with social justice concerns and channel them through the experiences of those with greater limitations and perhaps less practice in voicing their needs. However, one of the complications when conducting research on a project which reflects one’s personal history is the potential to overidentify with the subject matter. Throughout the process of conducting this project, I frequently found my memory flooded with negative memories associated with school performance and learning challenges. The project benefited from my allowing for breaks to refocus my direction and intent.

Making the “personal political” has been a concept throughout my career as a social service worker. However, opportunities are limited in the front-line service sector to participate in the political arena.
Having the opportunity to participate in this project has provided me with the opportunity to explore various measures of communication and research tools that I will utilize in my career in student services.

Education as a global concept it both exciting and concerning. As the world has become smaller through such things as access to computers, international student opportunities and the global market, it is exciting to think that we as a species can share our resources and concerns and seek to solve problems through leadership and experiences of experts in other countries. However, the shadow side of this opportunity is that it appears to have created a state of competition in education that has a negative impact on students with learning challenges. It is evident that some students accessing upgrading do not have the freedom of choice in course selection as do some of their peers. It has been the policy of the Liberal government to support individuals in accessing the labor market in the shortest and most cost-effective manner and to streamline these options to complement the labor market. This practice has impacted both the nature of courses provided by colleges and universities as well as how programs are packaged. The pigeonholing of these individuals into this narrow selection of educational opportunities is further supported through policy involving government services such as income assistance and Unemployment.

By restricting the duration and level of participation individuals are permitted to participate in educational endeavors the system is better able to recruit individuals into short-term, targeted programs that support labor market trends. With limited education, these workers still often earn wages close to the poverty line and are not guaranteed full-time employment or employee benefits.

Another apparent consideration for not supporting ABE students to obtain a psychoeducational assessment is cost. According to the literature, learning disabilities are the most common form of disability service by disability services in colleges and universities. At some point, the Learning
Disabilities Association made the suggestion that clear guidelines around credentials of people conducting the assessments be determined. Although there are many layers and variables involved in determining specific learning disabilities, the cost for a psychologist to conduct the tests is steep. Providing funding for large numbers of students would be costly and potentially decrease the number of students who could access the funding.

There appears to be incongruence between the universal goal of all citizens having access to upgrading and lifelong learning and the practical application of the program. One might think that with all the effort put into allocating resources and promoting this ideology that perhaps the lack of funding for psychoeducational assessments for ABE students with potential learning disabilities is an oversight.

**Conclusion**

The literature supports the theory that academic accommodations and support services benefit students with learning disabilities. As many as 25% of students in adult upgrading have a documented learning disability and it is suspected that many students remain unidentified. Learning disabilities impact a student’s education and have systemic implications involving health, social status, and economic stability. Current policies through Student Aide BC deem students enrolled in ABE curriculum ineligible to apply for the learning disability assessment bursary. Reasons for this policy remain unclear, however, the impact has created a significant social injustice. Findings through this literature review have concluded in a policy brief recommending a pilot project and further research to support the educational and systemic benefits of providing a psychoeducational assessment to ABE students.
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Psychoeducational Assessments in Post-Secondary Education

A Case for Social Justice for Students in Adult Basic Education

Donna Browning

Summary

Current policies involving academic accommodation and the Learning Disability assessment bursary through Student Aid BC, creates barriers for students attending adult basic education (ABE) programs in BC. This policy brief recommends that the Ministry of Advanced Education consider the implications for these students as well as the overall impact on society as a whole.

Education policies for primary and secondary education level students are enforced through the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Human Rights Code of British Columbia and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Post-secondary policies around academic accommodations are presented as being in alignment with these documents, however, selective wording creates social injustice for ABE students.

Limited financial support granted to these students through the Adult Upgrading Grant (AUG) is insufficient and limiting through a financial needs assessment. Given the global concern around literacy and the knowledge economy it would make sense to provide these students an equitable access to education.

In order to provide further support for additional funding for psychoeducational assessment bursaries, this brief recommends a project involving select universities. The creation of a program geared to engage professionals with proper credentials to perform such assessments combined with training opportunities for students involved in studies around psychoeducational assessment to generate future funding opportunities has proven to have merit.

Introduction

Adult Upgrading involves three streams including Adult Basic Education, English Language Learners and Adult Special Education (ABE). Success in one or more of these programs offer students the opportunity to further their education or enter the labor market and enhance their overall quality of life.

Canada is presently facing a shortage of qualified individuals to replace the volume of baby-boomers set to leave the labor market. It is anticipated that 78% of these jobs will require some form of secondary education and or training. Without the minimum of an adult high school certificate, individuals are at a disadvantage when competing for jobs “In demand” of the labor market such as retail, general office work and the food industry. Furthermore, they fall behind their peers with a college diploma, bachelor’s degree or specialized training, in their ability to move up into management positions.

Research supports the theory that with academic support and opportunity for flow of studies, that most students who attend ABE are successful.
Moreover, that these students enter the labor market and or plan to engage in upper education and join the labor market following post-secondary completion.

Students in ABE represent a pocket of our most vulnerable citizens. They include low to non-income wage earners, people on income assistance and or disability benefits, and single parents. Many of these students have failed to secure a high school certificate and or required coursework/GPA necessary to gain access to academic programs at the post-secondary level.

Learning disability is the most reported disability among adults involved in upgrading. They represent anywhere from 25% to 50% of students in ABE programs. Additionally, individuals with learning disabilities have the most challenges in staying attached to education and the labor market. Research supports the theory that accommodation and academic support for these students enhance positive outcomes with implications reaching beyond education into employment security and life satisfaction.

Literacy and Numeracy are of concern on a global level. Research suggests that 40% of Canadians are not reading past a functional level. According to research “many Canadians have difficulty reading a newspaper, filling out a work application form, reading a map or understanding a lease” As an active member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Canada has signed an agreement to enhance literacy by the year 2030 in support of the Global Agenda for Sustainable Development.

One might assume that given the state of concern for literacy, that students in ABE would be given every opportunity to succeed. However, government policy around eligibility for the Learning Disability Assessment Bursary makes it difficult if not impossible for some students to be successful.

CURRENT SITUATION

Adult Upgrading is administered and governed by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training. Each program has detailed eligibility and entitlements as laid out in the Adult Upgrading Grant (AUG) Policy and Procedures Manual. While low-income students enrolled in the ABE program are provided financial support for child care, tuition, books and supplies, and transportation fees, they are ineligible to apply for access to the Learning Disability Assessment Bursary.

Student Aid BC, a section of the Ministry of Advanced Education holds the responsibility of administering student loans and bursaries. Under the guidelines, the policy very clearly states that:

“This grant program is available to full-time students attending B.C. public post-secondary institutions, studying at the post-secondary level, and demonstrate eligibility for Student Aid BC funding”

Furthermore, “Students who are only enrolled in ABE, ESL or ASE courses or programs are not eligible for post-secondary level funding through Student Aid BC. These developmental courses are not post-secondary level courses”
These policies create barriers to accommodation for students in ABE. Moreover, they create an environment of social injustice and inequality for these students. Without support, the attrition rate among these students is high. Without proper support, these students are at risk of non-completion. The cost to these individuals is personal but there are societal implications as well. Individuals with limited education are forced to work in low paying jobs and or to be reliant on income assistance. They and their families generally have more health issues and higher rates of involvement with drugs and alcohol. It is estimated that (33%) of youth in the justice system have a diagnosed learning disability.

Although it may appear that students in ABE are getting an amazing opportunity, not all of these students are eligible for AUG funding. Under the guidelines students on income assistance and or involved in unemployment, programs are often barred from participating in ABE due to policies embedded in their perspective funding agencies. Of those remaining students they must pass a needs assessment to qualify for the AUG funding.

There is a substantial amount of research supporting the positive impact of academic support and accommodations for students with learning disabilities. With the plethora of research on interventions strategies such as Universal Design (UDL), Response to Intervention (RTI) and inclusion practices, one would surmise that the problem is not at the institutional level, but rather an oversight of the provincial government.

The Former Minister of Advanced Education, Skills & Training, expressed interest in supporting targeted groups in accessing education and the labor market. They have committed, through to the Accessibility 2024 Action Plan, to making BC the leading province in providing a barrier-free lifestyle for people with disabilities. However, their actions have proved beneficial for students. Funding for ABE has experienced many setbacks over the past several years including the shift away from targeted funding to block funding, the implementation and later removal of tuition fees, the introduction of the AUG fund. Given the volatile nature of the ABE programs recommendations should be based on both long-term and short-term goals.

**Examples of Achieving a Psychoeducational Assessment**

There are limited examples of programs demonstrating creativity in providing psychoeducational assessments to students in ABE suspected of having a learning disability.

1. The University of British Columbia: UBC has established a Psychoeducational Research and Training Centre where students engage in research and clinical training within the Faculty of Education. The program offers psychoeducational assessments and consultation to students and adults in educational settings. The program is funded through a grant from the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund.

2. The North Island College: The North Island College has a registered School Psychologist on staff. The staff member is available to conduct psychoeducational assessments for students within her institution.

3. Vancouver Island University. ABE instructors at VIU have indicated that they refer students to resources in the community. Agencies such as GT Hiring provide a psychoeducational assessment to clients suspected of having a learning disability as it pertains to accessing the labor market. Students must qualify for services under the agency guidelines.

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**33% of youth in the justice system have a diagnosed learning disability**

*Literature Review, 2017 p. 3*
RECOMMENDATIONS

Short Term

Establish a pilot project involving an onsite member with Level B assessment credentials with access to a registered school psychologist or another professional with supervisory status to support the program and conduct portions of the assessment that require a psychologist. Engaging students from the MA of Special Education program would create a teaching opportunity and may attract options for funding. The cost of $1800.00 will be greatly reduced to the hourly wage for the psychologist to conduct the sections of the test outside of the student’s capacity. Alternative sources such as the emergency bursary funding through select universities such as VIU, currently used to cover financial shortfalls including monthly housing costs, could potentially cover the cost of the test packages.

Long Term

It is recommended that statistical evidence captured through offering the psychoeducational assessment to students involved in the pilot project be presented through a longitudinal study in support of a request for policy change through the Ministry of Advanced Education.

Conclusion

It has been found that current policies around academic accommodation create barriers for students engaged in adult upgrading. Moreover, funding supports available to this select group of students create further social injustice on a systemic level.

On the basis of these findings, I recommend the creation of a pilot project which has the potential to track student outcomes and generate statistical data in support of necessary policy change.
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