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You Cannot Afford Not to Understand Me: ADHD as Difference, Not Disability

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You Cannot Afford Not to Understand Me: ADHD as Difference, Not Disability

Abstract

Support for children with ADHD/ADD has grown in recent years in an effort to help them become more planful, organized and focused, like their logical-sequential peers. Personal experiences are shared to challenge this as a goal worth pursuing and to illustrate the harm that results from attempts to replace perceived weaknesses and disability with socially-constructed strengths. Ways to celebrate and nurture all minds are shared.

As a result of this presentation, participants will:

1. Identify the characteristics of students who are labeled as ADHD/ADD; the characteristics of logical-sequential processing; and explain that the value placed on one set of these characteristics over another is a social construction.
2. Critique expectations for students to possess logical-sequential abilities (be organized, planful, focused at all times) in order to be successful students or in order to be 'normal.'
3. Explain how attempts to replace perceived weaknesses of students with ADHD/ADD labels with perceived strengths devalues and disrespects these students, and deprives them of the opportunity and the human right to think in diverse ways.
4. Challenge the idea that ADHD/ADD is actually a disorder or disability, rather than a diverse way of thinking and processing.
5. Discuss alternative ways to approach teaching and learning so that all minds, abilities and strengths are respected and celebrated, because this diversity benefits everyone.

Keywords

fsc2015

Disciplines

Education

Comments

Presented at the TASH Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. on December 5, 2014.

You cannot afford not to understand me: ADHD as a difference, not a disability

Dr. Lucia Guarino
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December 5, 2014



Session Objectives

- Discuss the value placed on logical-sequential processing (versus characteristics of students with ADHD/ADD labels) as a social construction.
- Critique expectations for students to possess logical-sequential in order to be successful or to be 'normal.'
- Illustrate the impact of devaluing perceived weaknesses of students with ADHD/ADD labels and the resulting infringement on human rights.
- Challenge the idea that ADHD/ADD is actually a disorder or disability, rather than a diverse way of thinking and processing.
- Discuss alternative ways to approach teaching and learning so that all minds, abilities and strengths are respected and celebrated, because this diversity benefits everyone.



Introduction

- Our case examples focus on attention deficit; need for movement; difficulty with executive functioning.
- We acknowledge that ADHD does not mean all of these characteristics all of the time.



Etiology of Presentation

- Conversations about Sam, Steve, Lucia, our college students.
- The kicker: IEP = legal document needed so student can be himself



U.S. population and ADHD

- Selective for risk-taking
- Creep of expectations
- Social construction shaped desired characteristics over time



Current Expectations

- School and workplace
- Success = organization, linear processing, test performance, detail (v. conceptual) orientation, standard-base
- Less room for creativity and exploration
- Square pegs in round holes.



Activity

- Purpose
- Impact on students



Why this focus?

- Push for responsibility, independence, success in future settings
- Need to redefine these
- Task does not equal concept

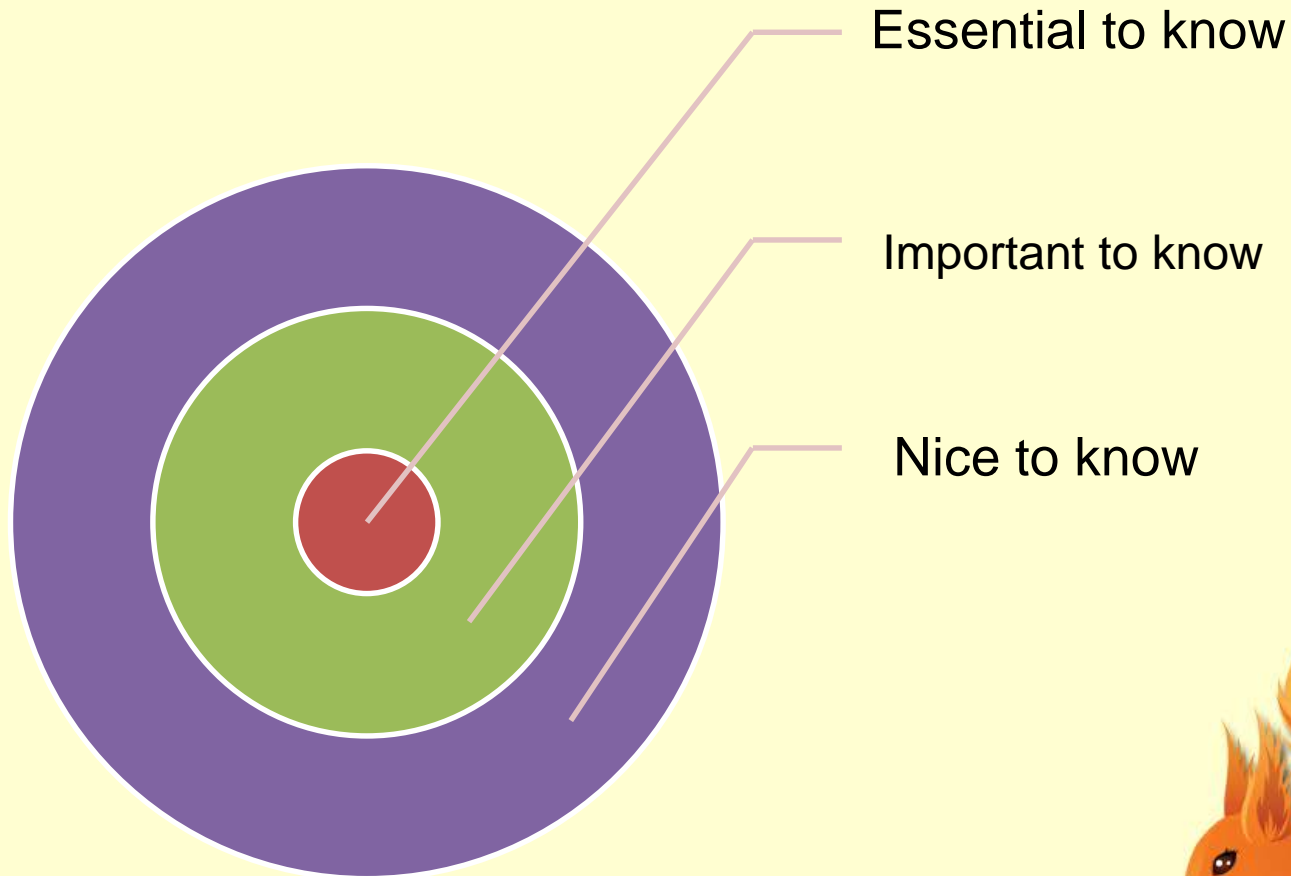


What is important?

- Keeping appointments
- Some forms
- Deadlines
- Following contracts



Support without Blame or Shame



Quotes

- “Cui bono?” ~Alfie Kohn
- "The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise - - with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthral ourselves, and then we shall save our country." ~ Abraham Lincoln
- We need to get out of our own way. ~ Lucia

