While many are simply learned language patterns, some may indicate learning disabilities. If you observe the following, please make a note on your checklist since they can indicate learning disabilities:

- Difficulty pronouncing multisyllabic words: leaving out a syllable, mixing up the order of syllables (e.g., vin-ge-nar for vinegar, cat-i-pal for capital).

- Difficulty getting a thought into spoken language. Frustration and a few key phrases may be a tip off: “Oh, you know—I mean.—Oh, I can’t explain it!”

**Note regarding students whose native language is not English: ESOL students.**

It is especially difficult to determine if an ESOL student also has learning disabilities. Please see the Bibliography for resources concerning this complex area.

**Other Factors that Can Affect Learning**

If behaviors in attention, organization, or social interactions are observed over a period of time, they may be indicators of learning disabilities or related conditions. As a teacher, you are making observations that can support a referral for diagnostic evaluation. If an adult learner makes the decision to do that, this kind of documentation can provide helpful information.

**Variations on the Use of Observational Screening: The Tennessee Teachers’ Experiences**

The teacher participants in the LD Action Research Project tried a number of approaches to observational screening. Those shared below are all variations on the four components. Some of the teachers focus on one component, such as Learner Input, while others use a combination.

**Example One: Glenda Turner’s One-to-One Intake Interview Approach**

“When I get a new student in my Families First class, I plan for about 30 minutes of uninterrupted time (if at all possible) with this student. I try to do this away from the other students, permitting us to have a private conversation. I want the student to feel comfortable with me and to have the opportunity to ask questions. I have each student complete an interest inventory and “Analyzing My Learning.” I explain that, if some of the questions are too personal, it is not necessary to answer them. I ask questions about their children, hobbies, jobs they have had, what they
liked about school, and what was hard about school. Questions about school help me determine if there might be a learning disability.

After discussing the inventory, I go over test scores. This is when I go over the bonus system and explain how they can earn money with good attendance, good attitude, and good progress. The next step is choosing books to use. I usually give the student three or four different books. I explain that some are easier, some have more pictures, and so forth. I leave them to look at the books and make their choices. This is just one step in taking charge of their education.

I talk with each student about the importance of organizing her materials. I give each student a folder for each subject. I watch the student for several days, and, if organization continues to be a problem, we discuss ways to be better organized. I provide a notebook with dividers, a small zippered pouch that can be fastened in the notebook. The pouch contains pencils, a small sharpener, and a highlighter. They choose the color and choosing a pleasant color can make a difference. I encourage them to make a calendar on the computer to keep in the notebook. Many learning disabled students have difficulties with organization and this method seems to help.

Giving a new student some of your time on the first day can help. If she leaves with the feeling—‘This teacher cares, I am involved with making choices, the teacher understands me, and I have an opportunity to earn bonus money if I do my part,’ the student will usually return and return with a positive attitude about the program.”

The first part of the student’s self-report/analysis is critically important, yet often difficult for adults who are more familiar with their struggles than their strengths. Carol Clamon could do this part at any time with her students, as part of the “Analyzing My Learning: Strengths and Struggles” or as a separate activity.

Example Two: Carol Clamon’s Approach – Using Writing to Help Students Recognize Their Strengths

“I read Chicken Soup at Work to the class. I read out loud, and then we would discuss. They did a lot of journal writing where I gave them a sentence stem and they completed it. Here are some of the ones I used:

- The hardest thing I ever did ___________.
- The best thing I ever did ___________.
- My best work experience ___________.
- The things I do best ___________.

- I am very proud of ___________.
- I am most creative ___________.
- I am most effective when ___________.
- My uniqueness is ___________.
- What I like most about myself is ___________.
- A good example of my common sense is ___________.
- What I like most about myself is ___________.

Example Two: Carol Clamon’s Approach – Using Writing to Help Students Recognize Their Strengths