

Dyslexia - a trouble-shooting guide for the bewildered

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Is one of your pupils not making the progress expected of him despite being deemed as ready to begin the reading process, presented with suitable reading materials, intuitive support and good support materials? Well, the chances are that he has dyslexia, Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) - in other words, a specific problem with literacy.

If the child has problems with spelling, he probably has Dysgraphia which is not covered here. It may be that a child has both dyslexia and dysgraphia and some of the following may be of use to these children.

Signs to look out for

- 1 Avoidance tactics
- 2 Getting around to sharing a book
- 3 How does he read? What skills does he use?
- 4 Does he have access to some of the prerequisites of reading?

Avoidance tactics

When asked to read, does he
decide to tell you some news?
admire your clothes?
say that the book is boring?
get stroppy, say that he is missing out on something better in class?

Getting around to sharing a book

If you try to help him with his reading, is he able to
follow your instruction/advice?
follow the story line?
predict an outcome?
show signs of interacting with the print?
enjoy stories but hate reading?
Is he clearly out of his depths with a fairly straightforward text which should be within his capabilities?
Is he in the habit of copying from, or discussing any texts with a friend?

How does he read? What skills does he use?

Does he know his phonic names?
Does he know his phonic sounds?
How is his sound/symbol correspondence? (ie does he appreciate the constancy of sounds and certain letter combinations?)
Can he syllabify (chunk) unknown words?
Is he able to recognise smaller words within larger ones (scan for root words)?
Do polysyllabic words confuse him?
If he uses a whole word approach, is he unable to decode relatively simple words?
Does he have to learn modified words from scratch when he already recognises the root word?
Does he search for meaning when he is reading, being able to give an accurate gist of the story while not being able to read every word of the text?
Does he study the picture before beginning to read from a page?
Can he appreciate the rhythm and rhyme of poetry (visual and aural)?
Is his vocabulary age-equivalent greater than his age-equivalent for accuracy?
Is his comprehension age-equivalent greater than his age equivalent for accuracy?
If he does read are his reading errors (miscues) mainly substitutions or mispronunciations?
Does he give up easily - is he always looking for your approval and guidance?
Does he have low self-esteem?
Is he disruptive during a quiet reading session?

Does he have access to some of the following prerequisites of reading?

a basic vocabulary, sufficient to sustain an initial interest in print and reading
a basic knowledge of nursery rhymes and jingles
an awareness of environmental print
a working sight vocabulary, sufficient to support simple text (could be customised to suit individual needs, vocabulary, experiences etc)
an awareness of sound-symbol correspondence
an ability to synthesise these sounds for word-building purposes
early book-sharing experience
access to suitable text (culturally as well as at cognitive level)
opportunities to develop a multi-sensory awareness of text and stories.

Diagnostic Materials

The results from some, or all of the following will help to provide a profile of skills and approaches.

The **British Picture Vocabulary Scales BPVS**

- provides an up-to-date vocabulary age-equivalent.

The **Bangor Dyslexia Test** (nb some of this is also in the Aston Index).

The **Word Recognition and Phonics Skills test**

(Clifford Caver) (WRAPS) to assess whether the child is using their visual sequential memory (l-r scanning) when reading.

The **New Neale Analysis of Reading** provides a miscue analysis of reading, giving age-equivalents for accuracy, time and comprehension. Also provides additional subtests of discrimination of initial and final sounds; phonics - names and sounds; graded spelling test; auditory discrimination and blending.

The Aston Index. This gives a comprehensive profile, although it is not necessary to do all of the subtests, some of which may be duplications of the above.

Useful information may be gleaned from the **Goodenough Draw-a-Man test** for cognitive age equivalent as well as grapheme/phoneme correspondence, visual discrimination, laterality, visual sequential memory (pictorial as well as symbolic), auditory sequential memory, sound blending and sound discrimination.

Analysing the data

Points to look out for (in no particular order):

a good cognitive age but poor reading/spelling ages

the use of refusals, substitutions and mispronunciations as miscues

a good oral vocabulary but a poor sight vocabulary

a good oral vocabulary but a poor reading age. cross laterality

poor auditory sequencing (has problems with rote learning, days of week, months of year, etc)

poor visual sequential memory - will have problems processing text l-r, with compound words and syllabification in general misses out letters in multiple letter strings - see WRAPS for this

has not established a firm grasp of grapho-phonetic correspondence

does not appreciate the consistency of phonics and certain letter clusters; b/d, l/i, m/w, n/u confusion

knows sounds but unable to synthesise/blend them into words.

English is a crazy language

There is no egg in eggplant, nor ham in hamburger; neither apple nor pine in pineapple; English muffins were not invented in England or french fries in France

FAQs - if these are not Frequently Asked Questions, they should be!

Q Using the look-and-say method, did he make a flying start but quickly ran out of steam?

A Perhaps he is unable to retain a larger sight vocabulary and now needs to use phonics for decoding unfamiliar words.

Q Does he have difficulties retaining any sight vocabulary over a period of time?

A Perhaps the words themselves do not mean anything to him. Choose words which he is likely to want to read and present them with a picture initially. Encourage him to say it also. Play snap and pairs with new vocabulary, returning also to some which have been learned.

Q Does he know his sounds? Does he know his sound names?

A Do not teach them both at the same time. Start with the sounds, using a rebus approach as an initial crutch (Reason and Boot's Quick Flip cards). Present these picture side up initially always saying the object first thus 'a' becomes known as 'apple a', quickly helping him to form a useful sound-symbol correspondence. You will find that when you present them letter side up that he will continue to refer to 'apple a' for quite a while afterwards, even when he cannot see the apple!

Q Does he see patterns in words? Can he recognise simple rhymes, see matching word-endings?

A Make simple c-v-c books, initially choosing an ending which is already a word. 'At', 'an' or 'and' books are

usually a good start. The child is able to physically build each word with wooden or foam letters, prefixing the original word (eg, hat, bat, cat, mat, etc).. Have the list of words at the front. Fold an A3 sheet so that it makes eight pages. A word and picture, drawn by the child, can then go on each page. The child can then build up a small library of these sound books.

Q Can the child recognise the separate words in compound words?

A Make simple word searches with a list of the matching words to be found.

Q Can the child syllabify?

A An initial awareness of the function of vowels is essential. Using a finger-spelling format, encourage the child to use their fingers as mnemonics as they say, look and feel the sounds. The use of little finger puppets illustrated like the 'quick-flip' cards can also consolidate the above.

Q Does the child realise that there is usually at least one vowel in each word, one vowel per syllable?

A Do a vowel search of a piece of text, underlining the vowels in different colours. Make a note of where they occur (texts with two syllables words are useful for this, eg garden, carpet).

Q How can I help the child syllabify?

A Play clapping games with names of friends and staff (remembering that Mrs gets two claps!).