



Dyslexia and Additional Academic Language Learning

Module 6

Assessing Strengths and Weaknesses

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If you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it.

Lord Kelvin 1891

Original version. Versions of this module adapted to the local contexts of partner countries can be downloaded from the relative sections (see appropriate flag symbols)

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**Lifelong
Learning
Programme**

Dyslang Module 06

Assessing strengths and weaknesses

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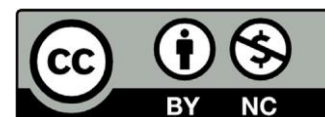
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About this module

This book forms the sixth Dyslang module for supporting the dyslexic multilingual individual, particularly in the context of learning additional languages. Although it may be used as a standalone unit, there is an assumption that the reader will have already read the preceding modules.

This module aims to empower the teacher to make informed evaluation of the skills in key areas. It is not intended to replace a full professional assessment, should that be available. There is an underlying assumption that the teacher (or other professional using this information) will have a background that will allow them to access, contextualise and utilise this information. However, there is also additional recommended reading and research papers that may offer more information.

Aims and Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information about the assessment process, the roles of teachers, parents and other professionals, the expectations of the process, and the potential outcomes. It will help you understand the issues, but should not be seen as “a guide on how to provide a full assessment”, since this should be left to qualified professionals. However, it does highlight that there is much that can be accomplished.

Please note that test use may also vary between countries. You will find further details about each of the areas referred to in the appropriate modules.

Learner outcomes

With a thorough understanding of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Understand the differences between a needs assessment and assessment for a dyslexia label.
- Appreciate the differences between normed and criterion testing.
- Identify the areas to be assessed, and how they may be evaluated using “The Assessment Guide” in a manner that informs teaching.

The assessment guide

The assessment guide is designed to inform the key areas of strengths and weaknesses that may be important in development of the Individual Education Plan for the given context. Although some guidance is given on interpretation, it is assumed that prior professional training along with the information contained within the other modules will provide information on how best to support these individuals.

Note that there is no attempt to provide tests norms, for reasons explained within the text.

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Introduction

Multilingualism and the assessment of the multilingual individual are often regarded as very complex areas, with no right answer and many conflicting opinions. The same could be said about the field of dyslexia. So assessing the strengths and weaknesses of multilingual dyslexic individuals would seem an almost impossible task. However, while academics may argue, at the classroom level the issues are fairly straightforward. The key question is not about whether or not they are dyslexic, in English or their first language, but why are they failing to learn in the language of tuition, which may include additional language learning. And it is this that is key to the identification and support of the dyslexic multilingual individual.

6.1 Purpose of assessment

Cline and Shamsi (2000) noted four key questions to ask when assessing an individual. These are:

1. What is the purpose of the assessment?
2. What information is required for that purpose?
3. What methods will provide that information?
4. How will the results be interpreted and used?

These questions may be answered in this context as follows:

1. The purpose is to understand why the pupil is failing to advance.
2. Information required includes all those cognitive strengths and weaknesses that are required to identify what may be impeding literacy development. However, there may also be other aspects in the background which will lead to certain outcomes. These include anything from having missed school, to claiming to have been taught English phonics, but it being carried out in an inappropriate way.
3. The methods should include appropriate assessment tools and cognitive questionnaire techniques, as well as wider discussions with classroom teachers and parents. With these methods it should be possible to identify the key areas of strengths and weaknesses.
4. Results will be used to develop the Individual Education Plan for the context of the assessment and allocate appropriate resources.

Much of the teaching of multilingual dyslexics is about the need to return to basics, identifying what can and cannot be done by the pupil, and working on the areas that will raise literacy skills, based on a firm foundation. There are many resources one can turn to for references, materials and training for helping dyslexic individuals, and the support of the multilingual individual is not so very different from helping the monolingual individual, and therefore this will not be discussed here. The focus of this module will be to understand those difficulties in the specific context.

6.2 Types of test

There are two principal approaches to the assessment process:

- Testing for dyslexia
- Needs analysis

6.2.1 Testing for dyslexia

Many teachers assume that in order to help the multilingual dyslexic individual, it is important firstly to confirm that they are dyslexic.

However, this needs to be challenged, since what benefit does that label provide? In some instances, where a (monolingual) dyslexic individual is provided with a label (usually in the form of a document from a professional with a recognised qualification), additional financial and human resources may be allocated to support that individual. However, while teachers may provide additional help in the classroom, without specific protocols in place it can be difficult to access additional funding to pay for resources or classroom support. Therefore, it may be argued that the only purpose of that label will be to provide a term to look up on the internet in order to find resources in English and the individual's own language that may assist.

A good definition of dyslexia should provide sufficient clarity on the symptoms and/or causes to allow unequivocal identification. Although several groups have attempted to provide a framework for the construction of a definition good enough for use as a tool for providing a label (see for example the British Psychological Society (BPS) 1999; Gersons-Wolfensberger DC and Ruijsenaars WA, 1997), close scrutiny shows that none have succeeded. Indeed, it may be easily argued that none can succeed, as will be shown below.

Dyslexia is a multivariant construct (Smythe, 2010), and therefore if one was to attempt to provide a "test for dyslexia", it would have to include a series of items that provide confirmation of the areas as given in the definition, with an appropriate weighting for each of those elements. That is, if the accepted definition says "a difficulty in the acquisition of fluent and accurate reading and writing skills", then that is all you need to prove. However, this would mean that not only must you identify assessments to measure those skills (reading and writing) but also assign the relative contributions of each in order to provide a cut-off for classification (or diagnosis). Furthermore, in order to demonstrate "difficulty in the acquisition" this must be carried out over time. Since there can be no scientifically based criteria, the only alternative is subjective opinion. There is no authoritative "governing body" to determine criteria. And even if there were, it could still only be subjective.

Various individuals have attempted to provide labels of "dyslexia" including Miles (1993), Turner (1997), and Fawcett and Nicolson (1994). Most of them claim to identify those "at risk" of dyslexia. However, at best these should be considered as potentially forming part of a first level of screening, where the validity and reliability may be questioned.

6.2.2 Needs analysis

The alternative approach to labelling is a needs analysis, and this is becoming the most widely used assessment process within the “dyslexia” field. The idea here is to ask what the child can and cannot do, and what they should be able to do. Note that the important aspect is not to say what they are failing at, but what they can do. Only by having a clear understanding of what they can do is it possible to build their skills, knowing that the foundation is firm, and will not crumble as higher skills are taught.

Within needs analysis, we need to consider two important aspects:

- Norm referenced, and
- Criteria referenced

Norm referenced testing

Norm referenced refers to what is typical in the general population. It usually refers to a published test which can be bought, and has been tried with the public in diverse conditions. It will have been used at different ages, and is useful as a guide for what to expect from pupils in key areas.

The administration of some of these tests is restricted to individuals with a certain qualification, which may be academic qualifications, professional membership, special examinations or other criteria. The tests themselves are generally easy to administer. However, since they are presented by a human, it is easy to add a subjective element into the testing. That is, if you want the child to do well, you may give extra time or additional practices. (Consider the impact of saying “Come on, you know the answer to this!” Or you may rush them to the next question before they answer, knowing that a low score may lead to a greater chance of support being offered.) If you want them to do poorly, you may not give the hints that otherwise would be given. Interpretation of the results is rarely in sufficient detail within the manual to allow it to be applied to all contexts. Therefore some knowledge of test interpretation is often required.

Terminology - “At risk of dyslexia”

Many “tests for dyslexia” for young (pre-literacy) children overcome the apparent labelling issue by suggesting that an individual is “at risk of dyslexia” rather than being “dyslexic.” However, this distinction is dubious, since it is widely agreed that dyslexia is a lifelong condition, and therefore you are born with it. “At risk” suggests that it will appear in future. It may be argued that they refer to the symptoms that will appear in future. This would be more logical. But it would seem more sensible to say that the individual is “at risk of reading and writing difficulties”, since this allows us to use the correlates of reading and writing, and make predictions. Thus using this alternative “at risk”, it allows dyslexia to exist from birth without contradiction, but suggests that unless appropriate intervention is undertaken, these individuals will have difficulties when they start to read and write.

However, there is an increasing demand for teacher-based testing since it is the teacher who sees the child on a day-to-day basis, and if the assessment and manual are written in a manner designed for teachers to deliver, then their training should be sufficient.

The problem is that norms are only relevant to the population where the test was trialled. So if it was trialled on monolingual English children aged 6 – 15 years from across the UK, it would probably be acceptable in 90% of cases.

If, for example, the child grew up in Hong Kong with Cantonese as the first language, and came to the UK when they were 12, is it reasonable to use those “norms” with that child? The answer is clearly no. Even though it may be claimed that they learned English phonics in Hong Kong from the age of five, there is no guarantee about the quality of that teaching. And what we are concerned with is a neurologically based difficulty in acquiring skills, not problems due to poor teaching. This is a key point, and if you take a snapshot of skills and abilities on any one day, you will not be able to tell if the problems are due to poor teaching or “different wiring”.

In the unlikely event that you could obtain some norms for English literacy acquisition for children in Hong Kong, it would only help those children. You would need another set for Turkish pupils, and yet another for Bulgarian. To compound it further, if the child had been in the UK for several years, not only do you have to ask their first language and age, but also how long they have been in the that language environment.

Terminology - “Difficulty in the acquisition”

In a fee-paying school, an assessment was requested for multilingual children who had been in the country for more than three years and were failing, some of whom may be considered to be dyslexic. There was an assumption by the school that these pupils had been taught English phonics in their native country since the age of five. They didn't consider the possibility that their prior phonics learning had not been at the level of the English school system. By failing to account for a lack of opportunity to learn phonics appropriately, they admitted that they had failed all Chinese kids, and immediately started a programme of identification that looked at what they could and could not do, and did not make assumptions about “opportunities to acquire” the skills.

What distinguished those the school considered to be dyslexic from those who apparently were not was that the speed with which the “dyslexic” pupils advanced was slower than the “non-dyslexic” pupils when all were taught phonics together.

The real question here is if the child is failing in a given area where others are succeeding, is it not their fundamental right to expect support in that area? Or from the teaching perspective, is there not a duty of care to ensure that every child has the opportunity to learn, and should not be subject to factors that would limit their learning potential? In a pragmatic way, if the child grows up in a monolingual community in the UK, such as the Gujarati speaking community of Leicester, where there are schools where 95% of the kids speak Gujarati, is it not reasonable to suggest that if a child has problems with rhyming skills, they should be taught rhyming skills irrespective of any label?

Criterion referenced testing

While norm referenced testing refers to how well an individual is doing compared to others, criterion referenced refers to how well an individual can do, what is their current level, and what they should be taught next. When working on a one to one basis, this is usually the starting point for teaching.

This is the key area for working with multilingual dyslexic individuals, since there can be no norms for this diverse group. This does not mean one cannot get a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. On the following pages, and at the end of this module, you will find details of how to identify strengths and weaknesses which may help develop an Individual Education Plan.

6.3 Outcomes – The Individual Education plan

An assessment should be carried out with a purpose. This purpose will depend upon the context, but in principle will be to inform the teaching process through development and implementation of an evidence based strategy designed to overcome the noted difficulties. The assessment should provide a clear indication of the child's abilities and underlying difficulties, as well as information on what teaching should be carried out. The Individual Education Plan (IEP) should be the next step in the process, to provide a structured way forward. The IEP should include:

- current level of ability in that area (baseline assessment)
- target for that ability (what is the expected learning level?)
- timescale to achieve that target (date, hours of study)
- who will do which part (tutors, parents, specialists, self-help, etc.)
- what resources will be used (human, books, computer games, etc.)
- re-assessment details.

The Individual Education Plan will usually cover all the important areas. But the most important aspect is to keep it simple, clear, and achievable, with regular reviews.

It is important to remember that the IEP should be context dependent. That is, an IEP should reflect needs. There does not need to be one for every subject. However, if the subject that you are concerned about is language learning, then your target, actions etc., should be in relation to that.

On Reflection Task 6.1

Consider what could be the possible reasons why an individual who appears to be dyslexic has not been previously diagnosed.

6. 4 The Language of Testing

Some may argue that the testing should be carried out in the first language of the child. Apart from the logistical impossibility (including lack of assessors and assessment material as well as geographic location - if there is no language-appropriate assessor nearby, then few authorities will fly one in specially!), the purpose is to identify why they are failing in the language of the school. Therefore, most assessments should be in the language of the school.

If the language of the child is so poor that an interpreter is required to assist with the assessment, then it would be impossible to say if the child was dyslexic. However, it may still be possible to say what immediate support is required (e.g. phonics or listening vocabulary).

6.5 The Cognitive Questionnaire

The cognitive interview is a procedure widely used in forensic psychology in order to improve the results of eye witness testimony (Willis, 1999). Instead of simply taking an answer at face value, the interviewer uses language that teases out the appropriate answer, using well-structured questions and, where appropriate, probing dialogue. The cognitive questionnaire may be considered as a standard dyslexia questionnaire, but used in a manner suited to the specific needs of the user. It has often been reported that it is not the final response that is useful, but how the individual arrived at their answers that provides clues as to the problems and how to support them. It is this that the cognitive questionnaire attempts to capture.

Checklists can be very useful as a way to screen for dyslexia, and are widely used for initial identification, and for raising concerns. They cannot provide “proof” that an individual is dyslexic, but they are a good indicator if somebody should be recommended for a full assessment and can provide very valuable information including an understanding of where the main difficulties may lie. They may not provide an answer that some people demand – a categorical confirmation of dyslexia – but they are very useful and can also be used in a multilingual environment, especially when the “cognitive questionnaire” approach is used.

At the end of this module is a checklist for dyslexia that can be used in diverse settings. It covers the areas that are covered by a conventional checklist, arranged in areas of main concern. Each question will relate to more than one area, but this may be considered a starting point for further discussions. It is applicable in all language contexts, and with appropriate “interview” techniques, can clearly inform the way forward.

Many of the questions and their responses will be dependent upon the language skills of the individual, and their ability to communicate in the language of the assessment (classroom language). For this reason, great care is required, and a written understanding should be given based upon these questions, before any “experts” are called in. It is also recommended that if you use any dyslexia questionnaire with multilingual dyslexic individuals, you also use the background question from Dyslang Module 2 or something similar to help identify related issues.

6.5.1 A checklist for all dyslexic individuals

Reading

- Takes longer than expected to read a book.
- Loses their place or misses out lines when reading.
- Confuses similar-looking words (“cat” and “cot”).
- Has difficulty understanding what they have read.
- Dislikes reading aloud.

Writing

- Written work is worse than verbal work.
- Takes longer than average to do written work.
- Uses poor, sometimes bizarre, spelling.
- Has difficulty understanding what they have written.
- Puts letters and numbers the wrong way round.
- Makes mistakes copying from the board or a book.
- Leaves letters out of words or puts them in the wrong order.

Phonological

- Finds it difficult to sound out words (e.g. el-e-phant).
- Mispronounces long words.
- Finds it difficult to find the right words to say.
- Confuses similar sounding words (“lampshade” and “lamp-post”).

Memory

- Finds it difficult to repeat a sentence correctly.
- Has difficulty remembering new words (e.g. in science).
- Has difficulty following instructions.
- Has difficulties remembering multiplication tables and formulae.
- Has difficulty with sequences.
- Has problems with days of the week and months of the year.
- Has difficulty telling left from right.
- Misplaces personal items (like pencil and rubber).

Motor

- Has trouble tying shoe laces (poor motor skills).
- Has difficulty clapping a simple rhythm.
- Has difficulty catching a ball (poor hand–eye coordination).
- Poor handwriting.

Other

- Has problems explaining ideas and concepts, particularly on paper.
- Has a poor sense of direction and orientation.
- Has difficulty telling the time.
- Has problems with social skills.
- Finds it difficult to organise themselves.
- Suffers from poor concentration.
- Has low self-confidence.
- Good in other ways.

Differential dyslexia

A number of researchers have noted that some individuals appear to have greater reading and writing difficulties in one language than another (Obler, 1989; Karanth, 1992; Smythe, 2002), suggesting that there may be cognitive functions within a given individual which may reflect the acknowledged different cognitive loads for different languages (Cole and Pickering, 2010; Smythe, 2012). There may be several possible causes, depending on the differences between specific languages. One possible explanation in certain circumstances is the loading on the phonological loop and visual sketch pad of working memory may differ across languages, and therefore a deficit in one area may not equally affect both languages.

Below are examples of what may be considered to be aspects of differential dyslexia:

- In research in British Columbia, Klien and Lee (1972) reported that around 5% of English/Chinese bilingual students in the research group were dyslexic in Chinese but not English, and another 5% were dyslexic in English but not Chinese.
- Obler (1989) suggested that “It is not the differential orthographies per se that are engendering the differential dyslexia pattern, but rather the different processing status of the written word morphology in Hebrew.” (For an extended discussion and possible explanation of this, see Cohen-Mimran, 2009.)
- Karanth (1992) reported cases of dyslexic bilinguals “in whom learning to read English as compared to Kannada and Hindi were differently affected” and suggests “It is possible that differential dyslexia is not rare in children; but merely investigated and reported rarely.”
- Leker and Biran (1999) described a patient with a particular acquired reading difficulty in Hebrew who showed no difficulties when reading in English. (Note that while this is a case of acquired dyslexia, in cognitive psychology while they do not indicate incidence, single cases demonstrate the existence of cognitive deficits that may also appear in developmental dyslexia.)
- In Wydell and Butterworth (1999) an English boy was identified in Japan who Wydell described as “An English-Japanese bilingual with monolingual dyslexia.” (Note that Japanese Alzheimer’s patients have shown dissociation in reading the two Japanese scripts which have been noted in individual cases of developmental dyslexia in Japanese. This dissociation may help explain this case. (See Smythe, 2012))

However, much of this research is at the single word level, and the deficits are usually more pervasive than this. For example, organisational skills will affect both languages.

While it may seem like a research curiosity, this may impact upon classroom practice if it is assumed that because they do not have dyslexia in one language when tested at the single word level, they cannot have it in another language. Remember, there could be many reasons why their dyslexia was not previously recognised. Cognitive processing is just one aspect.

On Reflection Task 6.2

Consider what could be the possible reasons why an individual who appears to be dyslexic in a second language is not showing signs of dyslexia in their first

6.6 Evaluating strengths and weaknesses

The starting point of any assessment must be the evaluation of literacy skills centred around the key areas of reading (single word and at length), writing and spelling. This will form the baseline, the reference point from which we can determine skills level and may be incorporated into the Individual Education Plan as well as used to monitor progress. Although it would be good to have a normed test, for reasons already explained, in most cases this is not possible. However, since usually the intention is simply to find out what the student needs to be taught over the next few weeks, a simple test developed by the teacher will normally inform the process.

In order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the individual it is important to have a battery of simple assessments, which may be based on “tests” or subjective evaluations. Provided the process offers enough information to develop the Individual Education Plan, and to monitor progress, it will be enough. The purpose is to put together a picture of the key areas that may require support in order to develop good reading and writing skills.

In the Dyslang project, the intention is to support the dyslexic individual in learning another language. It does not, in principle, matter what the language is (assuming it is a European language), the principles outlined below remain the same. However, the ability to test in the taught language will be more problematic if they have not learned the basic vocabulary. The approach you take will depend on whether you are a language teacher, a SENCO or other teacher, and what resources you have available.

On the following pages are a series of well-known tests that have been shown to help understand the strengths and weaknesses of the multilingual dyslexic individual. At the end of the module is a simple form that may be used to help understand the issues. Note that in the form there is room for identifying strengths and weaknesses in the three languages considered in Dyslang, namely the first language, the language of the classroom, and the additional academic language being learned.

6.7 Assessing those with reading and writing difficulties

The following pages contain a brief guide to some of the type of assessments that may be found in reports from assessors, and which, with due caution, may be used by teachers when there is no alternative. However, it should be that it is not the result that is important (assuming the test is given correctly) but the interpretation of the results.

Please note that this section refers to the assessment and not the underlying skills that are being assessed, which are presented in other modules. However, here is a brief summary of some of the findings.

6.7.1 Research findings

The phonological system may be considered to contain analysis, storage and synthesis components which are used to develop the fundamental skills necessary for literacy learning (e.g. the ability to break words into syllable, and to use rhyme units). These are involved in development of the skills necessary for literacy development. Morais, Alegria and Content (1987) showed that development of the skills to take apart language sounds, breaking them down into their basic constituents including syllables, was not developmental but was a learned process. The development of these skills in the multilingual child will depend upon the requirement in the respective languages (Porpodas, 1990; Duncan 2010), and therefore will be dependent upon educational (and social/cultural) history.

The relationship between 'phonological awareness', such as recognising rhyme and alliteration, syllable counting, letter deletion and blending, and literacy skills is well documented in English (Bryant et al, 1990; Liberman et al, 1980; Perfetti et al, 1987). Research has also identified its importance in other languages such as Dutch (Lundberg, Frost and Peterson, 1988), Swedish (Torneus, 1984), French (Alegria, Pignot and Morais, 1982), Hebrew (Bentin, Hammer and Cahan, 1991) and Chinese (Ho and Bryant, 1997). Numerous other studies will also be found on the web.

Due care and attention has to be made with tests such as digit span a traditional measure of auditory short term memory (ASTM), not only because the child may be translating but also due to the significant differences across languages. For example, Ellis and Hennelly (1980) demonstrated that digit span in Welsh is less than that in English (5.77 against 6.55). Comparisons of college students found that Cantonese speakers had an ASTM of 9.9, in contrast to 9.2 for Mandarin and 7.2 in English (Stevenson, Lee and Stigler (1986). Naveh-Benjamin and Ayres (1988) measured ASTMs in English (7.2), Spanish (6.4), Hebrew (6.5) and Arabic (5.8), finding results that reflected the number of syllables in number words and articulation rate. Also see Chen C and Stevenson HW (1988) and Daneman M and Carpenter PA (1980) for further discussions.

For an overview of the development of underlying reading skills, and how they are dependent upon the language in question, see the following, both of which are included in Brunswick, McDougall and de Mornay Davies' book "Reading and dyslexia in different orthographies."

Goswami U (2010) A psycholinguistic grain size view of reading acquisition across languages.

Duncan LG (2010) Phonological development from a cross-linguistic perspective.

Research in different languages

There are many research papers about languages other than English, many of which can be easily found on the internet. Although most are published in peer review journal, many individuals also put copies on the internet, or may provide similar information for wider access. As a consequence, a simple internet search may find many diverse papers about dyslexia in many languages.

Here are just a few:

Chinese

Becky Xi Chen-Bumgardner BX (2012) Reading Acquisition in Chinese-English Bilinguals. Literacy Encyclopaedia. University of Western Ontario. Web access: <http://literacyencyclopedia.ca/index.php?fa=section.show§ionId=287>

Wang M and Geva E (2003) Spelling performance of Chinese children using English as a second language: Lexical and visual-orthographic processes. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 24, 1-25 Web access: <http://people.tamu.edu/~jvaid/psy689/Wang%20and%20Geva%20-%20spelling%20of%20Chinese-Eng.pdf>

Polish

Piechurska-Kuciel, E. (2006). Foreign language anxiety in Polish dyslexic secondary school students. In M. Nikolov & J. Horváth (Eds.), *UPRT 2006: Empirical studies in English applied linguistics* (pp. 59-75). Pécs: Lingua Franca Csoport. Web Access: <http://www.pte.hu/uprt/1.4%20Piechurska-Kuciel.pdf>

Spanish

Voyager Pasaporte: http://www.voyagerlearning.com/info/nevada/pdf/PasaAsstOvrw_9326-4_LR.pdf

For link to other material in many languages, see www.dotr.im/internationaldyslexia

6.7.2 The Assessment guide

6.7.2.1 Phonics

Phonics refers to an instructional approach that is widely used in English, of which there are a number of different variations (see box below). It is usually seen as the building block of literacy, moving from breaking the sounds of words into small parts (analysis), storage of those components, and synthesising the results. Having developed sound manipulation skills, teaching is extended to building relationships between letters and sound, using various techniques which may be dependent upon the language in question.

In order to identify the learning needs of an individual, we only need to test in the language being taught. That is, if they are learning English, then English tests can be used as criterion tests, since they will inform us where the areas of difficulty lie (e.g. alliterations, rhyming, syllabification etc.). However, note that this refers to the language of teaching, and not of the school. Thus if one wants to know why they are failing in, say, French, then you need to consider that parts of phonics that are most important in French. Different languages require different skills.

Phonics Instructional Approaches

Analogy Phonics—Teaching students unfamiliar words by analogy to known words (e.g., recognizing that the rime segment of an unfamiliar word is identical to that of a familiar word, and then blending the known rime with the new word onset, such as reading brick by recognizing that -ick is contained in the known word kick, or reading stump by analogy to jump).

Analytic Phonics—Teaching students to analyze letter-sound relations in previously learned words to avoid pronouncing sounds in isolation.

Embedded Phonics—Teaching students phonics skills by embedding phonics instruction in text reading, a more implicit approach that relies to some extent on incidental learning.

Phonics through Spelling—Teaching students to segment words into phonemes and to select letters for those phonemes (i.e., teaching students to spell words phonemically).

Synthetic Phonics—Teaching students explicitly to convert letters into sounds (phonemes) and then blend the sounds to form recognizable words.

Source: Findings and Determinations of the National Reading Panel, 2000
<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/findings.cfm>

Please remember that the following is not intended to be an exhaustive guide to assessment, nor to tell you how to assess. It should be seen as a basic guide to the potential areas of concern to help you develop your own quick checks, and to help you understand any official assessments you may be shown. References to activities that may be used to strengthen these weaknesses will be found in other modules. Although aimed at those teaching an additional language, it may also be used as a guide for others in a more general context. Please see the Glossary for a guide to some of the terms used below.

A) Alphabetic knowledge

The Principle: The purpose is to ensure the pupil has a clear knowledge of the relationship between sounds and letters of the alphabet.

The assessment: This may be easily performed by any teacher using letter shapes, writing on paper or even a simple Powerpoint presentation! The child simply has to show that they can identify each of the letters, both in terms of identifying the sound when a letter is pointed to, and recognising the letter when a sound is made.

Comments: It is easy to make assumptions about the skills of an individual particularly with older pupils. However it is important to ensure that we have established the baseline even if at times this may end up being a little patronising. Also remember that some letters have different sounds in other languages, which could lead to a number of confusions. For example “H” in Russian is pronounced as the English “N”, while in Polish “w” is pronounced like “v”. Sometimes talking with the child about their own native language helps them understand the differences, and source of some mistakes. It may also help the teacher understand why certain errors are made!

Systematic phonics

The meta-analysis revealed that systematic phonics instruction produces significant benefits for students in kindergarten through 6th grade and for children having difficulty learning to read. The ability to read and spell words was enhanced in kindergartners who received systematic beginning phonics instruction. First graders who were taught phonics systematically were better able to decode and spell, and they showed significant improvement in their ability to comprehend text. Older children receiving phonics instruction were better able to decode and spell words and to read text orally, but their comprehension of text was not significantly improved.

Source: <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/findings.cfm>

B) Letter-sound correspondence

The Principle: This is the ability to master and automate the relationship between the spoken and written sound. It goes beyond basic letter knowledge, and includes letter clusters and digraphs (examples in English include sh, ch, br, pl as well as combinations such as -ight and -ough etc.). The frequency of specific letter combinations will be very different for each language, and unlike other skills (such as rhyming and syllabification) there will be little transference to the new language even if you are good in your first language. Hence the need to measure.

The assessment: Choose words of increasing difficulty starting with words such as shop or plan. Note that the “sh” sound is a single phoneme represented by two letters (often referred to as a digraph), while the “pl” is a blend of two letter sounds. In English, you can also look at rules such as “magic e” and letter doubling.

Comments: It is easy to make assumptions about the skills of an individual particularly with older pupils. For example, you may assume that an older child would know all their letters. But this may not be the case with the dyslexic learner. It is not unusual to find an assessor has omitted some of the more basic tests due to inappropriate assumptions. Often they play a linguistic guess game, and it is wrong. It is important to ensure that we have established the baseline even if at times this may end up being a little patronising. Also check for some apparently bizarre spellings which could be a transliteration in their own language. For example “szu” could be a reasonable spelling of the English word “shoe” using Polish letter-sound rules, or “siw” for Welsh.

C) Syllabification

The Principle: This is the ability to break words down into syllables. This is a key skill necessary to develop good literacy skills that we take for granted in languages such as English, but with some languages such as Chinese, we cannot make that assumption.

The assessment: Standardised tests are not required. A simple way is to point to words (preferably with pictures) and ask them to say how many beats in the word. A good test would be to have the child to clap to the rhythm of a song, which is the same as highlighting syllables.

Comments

If the child is struggling in the basics of learning French, German or Polish, they will often improve greatly if they have the ability to break words down into syllables. So testing their ability to do this task will help inform the teaching. Usually, if they can do the task in one language (e.g. their home language), they can do it in another. But do not make this assumption. Sometimes the child may use certain principles only in the context they have been taught. So if they have not been told to sound out syllables when learning a new language, they may not transfer that skill from their first language.

D) Rhyming

The Principle: Development of rhyming skills is (language) context dependent. In learning English it is very important in helping to develop segmentation skills, and in using analogies in reading and spelling. This is a phonological analysis or segmentation skill.

The assessment: Traditional tests use the “odd one out” technique where the child is presented with three or four words and asked to identify which one does not have the same ending. By using pictures to represent the words, there are no memory issues.

Comments: Remember that because they have this skill in one language does not automatically mean they have it in another. But it should help, since it shows the underlying ability. This test should be part of any standard test carried out by an assessor. Look for notes on the language of testing.

E) First sound (Alliteration)

The Principle: Development of the ability to isolate the first sound in a word is important in all alphabetic scripts. Put another way, if you cannot identify the first sound, and its written representation, then you cannot look it up in a dictionary. Like rhyming, this is a phonological analysis or segmentation skill.

The assessment: As with rhyming, the traditional tests use the “odd one out” technique where the child is presented with three or four words and asked to identify which one does not have the same ending.

Comments: If pictures are used to illustrate the words, fear of forgetting the words is reduced.

F) Sound blending

The Principle: This test helps identify the pupil’s ability to blend phonemes. This is a phonological synthesis or blending skill.

The assessment: There are many tests available to perform this, depending on the language in question. For a multilingual dyslexic individual there can be no norms. Therefore a teacher’s criteria based test will suffice. Try simple blends, getting more complex where successful.

Comments: As in all cases, try to compare results with those who do not have problems, both monolingual and multilingual.

A quick (video) guide to phonics (blending) screening in the UK

This page provides full background information on the UK phonics screening introduced by the UK government in 2012 and associated resources. There are many resources to be found here, including background research, information for parents and sample material.

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/assessment/keystage1/a00200415/phonics-screening-check-materials>

You may also like to review:

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/seminars/esol-learners-basic-literacy-needs-%E2%80%93-where-do-i-start>

G) Sound discrimination

The Principle: Lack of exposure to certain phonemes when an infant can limit development of sound discrimination skills in other languages.

The assessment: Although this should be part of any standard assessment, it is often omitted. Furthermore, there are few widely available tests. Norms again are problematic. However, an experienced teacher should be able to identify probable problematic sounds, and develop their own list.

Comments: Although there is plenty of research that discusses dyslexia and auditory processing deficits (see for example, Golz et al 2006, Grievink and Peters, 1997; Moore, 2008; Stein, 2001), this is simply about whether then child can perceive the difference between two sounds. That is, the underlying cause cannot be changed by the teacher, but it does help to know where difficulties lie.

Phonics - Research, Reason and Results

Below is a link to the video a recording of a webinar made by Dr Ian Smythe on 27 November 2012. It looks at some of the issues around phonics, with a focus on the national testing carried out by the UK government in June 2012. The page has links to the video and the original presentation.

Presented by Dr Ian Smythe

<http://www.doitprofiler.info/resources/webinars/past-webinars.aspx>

Reading

There are two types of words we should consider when testing an individual. These are listed here as “single words” and “non-words.”

H) Single words

The Principle: It is important to test both regular words and sight words.

Regular words are words that the child should know and which may conform to various rules such as simple sound letter correspondence, the ‘magic -e’ rule, letter doubling etc.

Sight words are words that the child will recognise as a whole unit and which may be difficult if trying to sound out using basic rules. They can be simple words such as “have”, “done” and “far” or more complex words like “chlorophyll” and “foreign”.

The assessment: It is possible to find standardised reading tests on the internet for many mainstream languages. You can use these, but always with caution. Treat them as criterion based tools which will help you understand the level at which they are working. Where possible, this can be linked to the published national curriculum.

Comments: As in all cases, try to compare results with those who do not have problems, both monolingual and multilingual. Remember that in English, the usual measure of reading is accuracy. However, if you are assessing in another language, you may also wish to consider reading speed. In this case, it is very important to know the typical reading speeds one should expect of somebody with a similar background, but who is not dyslexic.

I) Non-words

The principle: “Non-words” is the term used in assessment and in schools in the UK for words that are invented specially for this task, and therefore have no meaning but conform to the rules of English orthography. They are used to test a child’s ability to use the rules of generalisation to read words they may not have come across before, for example “pright” and “mip”. The ability to read these words is usually regarded as one of the best ways to identify an individual’s current level of reading. For a full review of the theory behind the use of non-words, see Rack, Snowling and Olson (1993).

The assessment: A non-word reading test is performed the same way as an ordinary single word reading test. This link is to a set of non-words that can be used as a template for forming your own:

www.balancedreading.com/assessment/nonwordtest.pdf

Comments: Note that “non-words” refers to invented words with no meaning. This relieves the question of whether they know the word or not.

Reading assessment

For those that want to see what a reading assessment looks like, try accessing the one at: <http://www.balancedreading.com/assessment/abecedarian.pdf>

This does not mean to suggest there is any endorsement of this free product. However, it does have a comprehensive set of tests, and is free. Unfortunately it does not include non-word reading and spelling, which are key to identification of dyslexia, and in particular difficulties with phonics. However, these are separately mentioned at: <http://www.balancedreading.com/assessment/nonwordtest.pdf>

Spelling

The principle: Spelling is seen by many as one of the most useful tools for the identification of dyslexia, being one of the principal symptoms (BPS, 1999; EDA, 2012). As with reading, by assessing the individual using regular words, sight words and non-words, it is possible to have a clear indication of the individual's capabilities, and have enough information to inform an Individual Education Plan. Due care and attention should be paid to the language of testing. This assessment has significant advantages over reading assessment since it can be more objective. Responses are written down, and less subject to interpretation. But they still rely on choosing the right test items, and having meaningful outcomes.

J) Spelling single words

The principle: Evaluation of single words will help identify the current level of spelling. However, it is dependent upon their level of practice (and correction!). That is, poor spelling may be a consequence of underlying difficulties or a lack of practice. This (or indeed other tests) will not reveal which is the actual cause. The only way to determine this is through on-going teaching and evaluation, to monitor the rate of learning, or "difficulty in the acquisition".

The assessment: A simple spelling test is required, in the language that you wish to assess. Clearly, it is useful to have norms. But the usefulness of a baseline of skill should not be ignored. Normed spelling tests usually have to be paid for. A non-normed test can be found at <http://www.balancedreading.com/assessment/abecedarian.pdf>

Comments: Look not only at spelling as an indicator of phonics skills, but also consider if their first language and lack of exposure to the target language mean their skill in distinguishing sounds in a new language is limited. Note that in a standard spelling test, you should provide the word in a contextual sentence, usually where the word is repeated three times. For example, "Cat. The cat ran across the road. Write cat."

K) Spelling non-words

The principle: As with reading, non-words can be highly indicative of where a child has reached in learning basic skills and it is often seen as the most indicative test to be used for identification of the difficulties of a dyslexic monolingual individual.

The assessment: A non-word spelling test is performed the same way as an ordinary single word spelling test. This link is to a set of non-words that can be used as a template for forming your own:
www.balancedreading.com/assessment/nonwordtest.pdf

Comments: When working with children, there is no need to say what non-words are, especially as this may lead them to try less when spelling these words. Usually the best method is to mix them with real words, putting them in real sentences as you would with a normal spelling test. Just tell the child that you do not expect them to know all of the words.

L) Vocabulary - Written

The principle: While reading and spelling are of great importance, the ability to recognise words and distinguish them from phonologically, orthographically and semantically similar words is also very important. That is the purpose of this task.

The assessment: A standard test would be to have a choice of four written words, and they choose the one that corresponds to a given picture. However, there are many variants. It is for the assessor to decide what exactly they are trying to test, and how it will inform the outcome.

Comments: Do not just try to see where is their ceiling. Also, attempt to found out where they feel secure in their knowledge.

M) Vocabulary - Spoken

The principle: It is important to understand the richness of the pupil's vocabulary in the classroom in order to separate out a difficulty of acquisition from a lack of opportunity to learn and a lack of a good spoken vocabulary.

The assessment: The standard test is of the form to be found in the British Picture Vocabulary Test, which is based on the Peabody Test. This consists of four pictures, and the child has to point to the picture that most closely corresponds to a spoken word. If normed tests are not available, search the internet, or construct one based on word frequencies or age of acquisition.

Comments: For a discussion on derivation of age of acquisition norms, you may like to look at the paper at: [http://language.psy.bris.ac.uk/norms/BristolNorms\(in%20press\).pdf](http://language.psy.bris.ac.uk/norms/BristolNorms(in%20press).pdf) and the "norms" at <http://language.psy.bris.ac.uk/norms/BristolNorms30-08-05.txt>.

N) Reading Comprehension

The principle: Reading comprehension is about putting it all together. Often the dyslexic individual reads so slowly, concentrating on each word that they run out of “cognitive processing power” to be able to decode for meaning.

The assessment: You will not find a reading comprehension task easily on the internet. However, it is important to try to establish some form of baseline upon which future teaching can be judged. Therefore a subjective statement of their ability to understand text may be the best you can expect.

Comments: While the English test usually used is the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability, the diversity of linguistic needs means norms are of little relevance in this case. Therefore, it may be worth exploring, for example, the pages for children of the BBC if you are looking at English acquisition or its equivalence in other languages.

O) Memory

The principle: It is not easy to improve memory in the same way that you can improve reading and spelling. Therefore some people suggest there is no point in attempting to assess memory skills. However it has been shown that memory difficulties may be a major cause of reading and writing difficulties in many languages (see other modules and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memory_span for further explanations). It may also be argued that if you know the individual has poor memory skills, it is possible to put greater emphasis on development of strategies to help overcome those difficulties.

The assessment: The standard test for memory is the digit span for auditory short term memory, and reverse digit span for working memory. Consult the literature (see reference above) for what should be expected.

Comments: Remember that this test needs to be in their first language to have any meaning. For a discussion of this in relation to bilinguals, see da Costa Pinto (1991).

On Reflection Task 6.3

Try to identify one of your multilingual dyslexic students who may have a memory issue, and identify the areas you think that may affect.

Other areas to understand

The following are mentioned to remind us that there are skills that at some level appear to be outside the traditional assessment approach, but at the same time are very important in understanding the pupil and how they will survive in today's classroom. As such there are no formal tests available. However, a subjective note, and development of some form of intervention to ensure they are not behind their peers, is worth considering.

P) Study skills

Some people have good organisational skills, and find ways to take notes, order and remember notes without explicit instructions. But not everybody does, and most dyslexic individuals find these skills difficult to acquire. Examination skills are also very important, as are revising, note taking and essay planning. Again the dyslexic individual requires explicit instructions to develop these skills to the level that others usually achieve without help. Time management is also very important. All these skills can be improved through appropriate support. These skills are usually assessed through a structured interview, observation and checklists, which are not usually part of the assessment process.

Q) Computer skills

Computer skills may be important in the support process. There are two main uses for the computer: (1) in the learning process, such as learning phonics; and (2) for assistive technology, such as text to speech. Many dyslexic individuals like to use a computer because the machine hides their errors and does not get cross when they make a mistake. However, memory and motor coordination problems may mean that learning typing skills may take a little longer for the dyslexic individual. It is important to understand the previous exposure to computers. We may take for granted that some skills are learned previously, a concept often masked by the ability of the pupil to easily hide a lack of skills. However, while they may have the basics, they may be short of simple and very important skills such as knowing how to use effectively spelling and grammar checkers.

On Reflection Task 6.4

On the next page is an example of an Informal Assessment. Fill in the blank for to be found on page 42 with details of a student in your class.

Example of an informal assessment

Note that the letters indicate sections in the text of this module.

Area	Skill	Skill level		
		First language	Language of the classroom	Language lesson
		Polish	English	French
Phonics	A) Alphabet knowledge	Appears to be no problem.	Slow. Some letters with Polish confusions (e.g. c, s, w)	Some problems
	B) Sound to letter	Appears to be no problem.	Confuses letter sound within words (e.g. c and s)	Some problems
	C) Syllables	Not tested as no test available.	Poor skills in this area. Needs practice.	Poor skills, as expected.
	D) Rhyming	Seems to have no problem with this.	Reasonable skills but depends on word knowledge.	Reasonable guessing!
	E) First sound	Appears to be no problem.	Appears to be no problem.	Appears to be no problem.
	F) Sound blending	Appears to be no problem.	Appears to be no problem.	Appears to be no problem.
	G) Sound discrimination	Seems to have no problem with this.	Slow. Having trouble using analogies.	Very basic, but slow advances.
Reading	H) Single words	Not tested as no test available.	Slow. Having trouble using analogies.	Can follow En sound letter correspondence.
	I) Unfamiliar words	Seems no problem with this, but difficult to check.	Limited.	Very limited.
Spelling	J) Single words	Not tested as no test available	Signs of "Polish" spelling in En. (kat/cat, szoe/shoe)	Using En spelling rules.
	K) Unfamiliar words	Not tested as no test available.	Some abilities, but limited.	Using En spelling rules, but in an inconsistent way.
Vocabulary	L) Written	Not tested as no test available.	Limited.	Poor. Uses very simple words and construction.
	M) Spoken	Not tested as no test available.	Making steady progress. But still limited.	Poor. Uses very simple works and construction.
N) Reading comprehension		Not tested as no test available.	Low on Neale Analysis. Baseline set.	No suitable test available. Monitor!
O) Memory		Not tested as no test available.	Shows signs of poor memory, such as forgetting instructions	Trouble remembering new vocabulary.
P) Study skills		Seems not to have learned study skills previously.	Limited study skills.	Not applicable.
Q) Computer skill		Not tested as no test available.	No problems!	Not applicable.

The “Intelligence” Debate

There are many practitioners (and some researchers) who still attempt to include a measure of intelligence (IQ) in a dyslexia-related assessment battery despite overwhelming evidence that it should not be included. Below are some of the basic arguments. It is for the reader to decide who is right, including the independence of any opinion given.

About the logic perspective

1. You need “intelligence” in an assessment battery to identify dyslexia

According to Siegel and Smythe (2005)

“The most recent conceptualisations of reading disability view it as a significant difficulty in the acquisition of accurate and fluent word reading skills. If this definition is the appropriate one, then the following logic is relevant:

Logic statement (3)

1. The only tests that can determine a reading disability are those that confirm the diagnosis with respect to the definition.
2. The definition states a reading disability is defined by difficulties in the acquisition of fluent and accurate reading skills.
3. An IQ test does not measure fluency and accuracy of reading.
4. Therefore, a measure of IQ is not required to determine if an individual is dyslexic.

Therefore, the IQ test should not be used in the diagnosis of a reading disability. As Stanovich (1989) noted, if IQ and reading “are related, then why do we assume that reading must be significantly lower than IQ for a child to be called reading disabled. This is one of the most illogical aspects of the discrepancy definition.”

2. There is a correlation between reading and intelligence.

Here are another two logic statements from Siegel and Smythe (2005) that show the illogic of the use of an IQ-Reading Achievement discrepancy as a part of any formal attempt to identify dyslexia.

“Most importantly, they have made certain assumptions about the value of the IQ test in measuring potential, assumptions that are untenable for a variety of reasons. We illustrate the problem with the underlying logic in the following:

Logic statement (2)

1. The IQ-reading discrepancy hypothesis assumes a difference between IQ and reading achievement that is unexpected.
2. The fact that it is unexpected is based purely on the IQ level, and suggests that the IQ should predict reading ability.
3. However, the fact that the IQ score does not always predict reading disability, since there is sometimes a discrepancy, demonstrates that IQ cannot predict reading ability, and thereby invalidates the assumption made in (2).
4. Therefore the discrepancy hypothesis is invalid.”

Note that this is the same illogical of the IDA/NICHD definition, which states “These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language *that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities*” Yet a huge part of reading research is about the independence of these components. So why do they talk about one cognitive function predicting another?

That same definition also refers to “effective classroom instruction.” But logic says that if the classroom instruction was “adequate” why are these dyslexic kids so far behind. Surely, if it was adequate, then they would not be behind. Of course we sort of know what they mean, but it does help add confusion.

Also (Smythe and Siegel, 2005):

“Investigators appear not to have realized that a reading disability exists on a continuum and there is no readily accepted cut-off score below which an individual can be considered reading disabled. However, whatever cut-off score or definition is used, it should be justified. The use of the discrepancy definition is never justified, as we will show.

We illustrate these issues with the following logic statement:

Logic statement (1)

1. To identify a problem in an individual, you need to set criteria.
2. In order to set research criteria, you need an unequivocal, widely accepted, definition.
3. There is no unequivocal definition of a reading disability.
4. Therefore, one cannot say who conforms to the criteria and has a reading disability.
5. However, whatever definition the investigator uses should make logical sense.”

3. Myth - The IQ test inform what to teach them and how.

The material that will be used to teach, say, rhyming skills, will (mostly) be the same, no matter what is the level of intelligence of the child. To say otherwise makes you question if somebody is proposing a selection process that would appear to contravene human rights.

4. Myth - We need to know they are not low intelligence.

This is the same circular argument. Why does one need to know?

From a research perspective

As a “research anomaly” consider the following:

The IQ-Reading Discrepancy Hypothesis states that there is a difference between IQ and expected reading score. Thompson (2003) identified a series of dyslexic individuals using this method, stating (p16) “a significant discrepancy between cognitive ability and attainment scores is a crucial part of diagnosis”. However, he also states (p11) that there is “no longer a discrepancy between expected and observed reading”

Since there was then no discrepancy, they could no longer be called dyslexic using their definition.

Therefore at least one of these three must be correct

- A) The students in question were cured of their dyslexia
- B) The IQ-Reading Discrepancy is wrong.
- C) They were not dyslexic in the first place.

Stanovich (2002, p60) lists the following research findings. Note that the research is all over ten years old since it became apparent that the results were conclusive, and no need to revisit the field.

Examples of correlation between Phonological Awareness (PA), Intelligence test performance (IQ) and Early Reading Ability (R)

Researchers	PA & R	IQ & R	PA & IQ
Bryant et al 1989)	0.67	0.66	0.58
Bryant et al 1989)	0.64	0.42	0.58
Juel, Griffith & Gough (1986)	0.56	0.34	0.40
Lundberg, Olofsson & Wolf (1980)	0.37	0.19	0.29
Lundberg, Olofsson & Wolf (1980)	0.34	0.15	0.29
Stanovich, Cunningham and Feeman (1984a)	0.47	0.25	0.55
Stanovich, Cunningham and Cramer (1984)	0.43	0.33	0.29
Stanovich, Cunningham and Cramer (1984)	0.44	0.34	0.07
Tornesu (1984)	0.33	0.24	0.30
Tunmer, Herriman & Nesdale (1988)	0.48	0.28	0.11
Tunmer, Herriman & Nesdale (1988)	0.41	0.10	0.13
Tunmer, Herriman & Nesdale (1988)	0.44	0.34	0.42

Consider the following (Lyon GR, Fletcher JM, Shaywitz SE, Shaywitz BA, Torgesen JK, Wood FB, Schulte A, and Olson R (2001))

“The notion of using an IQ-achievement discrepancy as a marker for unexpected underachievement was also consistent with the still prevailing, albeit inaccurate, view that IQ scores were robust predictors of an individual child’s ability to learn.”

“There are many problems with the concept of an IQ-achievement discrepancy. It not only embodies sometimes naive and erroneous assumptions about the adequacy of an IQ score as an index of learning potential, but the actual comparison of academic achievement scores with IQ scores to derive a discrepancy value is fraught with psychometric, statistical, and conceptual problems that render many comparisons useless.”

“Because achievement failure sufficient to produce a discrepancy from IQ cannot be reliably measured until a child reaches approximately nine years of age, the use of IQ-discrepancy constitutes a “wait-to-fail” model.”

“In the area of RD (reading disabilities), the issue is further complicated when some individuals score in the average range on word reading tasks but exhibit significant difficulties when reading connected text.”

As Stanovich (1989) noted, if IQ and reading “are related, then why do we assume that reading must be significantly lower than IQ for a child to be called reading disabled. This is one of the most illogical aspects of the discrepancy definition.”

6.8 Working with Parents

Parents are part of the process, and they should be provided with a copy of any evaluation and offered the opportunity to comment on it. The language of the report will depend upon the language skills of the parents, as well funding available to prepare an appropriate version in their first language. Where significant difficulties have been identified, it is important to ensure the parents understand the issues, and how to help at home. Module 10 of the Dyslang course provides guidance about how to work with parents. There is also an associated Glossary of terms.

6.9 Conclusions

The role of the assessment is to find out why the individual is having difficulties not only with literacy skills but also with other skills that may impact upon their learning, and make suggestions of how to overcome them. This is true for the mainstream classroom, as well as the additional language learning classroom.

In most cases it is possible to find strategies and alternative learning methods to overcome most of the literacy and related difficulties. A clear understanding of how the difficulties impact on all areas will allow coping strategies and support mechanisms to be found that will allow the dyslexic individual to fulfil their potential. This clear understanding starts with a good, context-sensitive, assessment of skills, needs, strengths and weaknesses.

Although emotional issues are not the subject of this chapter, the person looking at the needs of the child needs to appreciate that the reason they are being assessed is due to failure: failure in the eyes of their parents, failure in the educational system, and failure in the eyes of their peers. Even with the best parents in the world, they are still seeking answers because their child is failing to learn. And although parents try not to overburden the child with expectations, one of the fundamental expectations is to learn to read and write.

Consequently, one of the biggest problems of the dyslexic child in the assessment process is that they are constantly told they are failing. One of the roles of a good assessor is to find strengths as well, no matter how small. These can be the cornerstones of the learning process that will help the dyslexic child develop literacy skills.

Finally, just because you do not have access to a full diagnostic assessment (if such thing exists!) it does not mean that you cannot do something to help the multilingual individual struggling with learning to read and write in another language. Based on extensive research, Geva and Woolley produced a checklist (cited in Smythe and Everatt, 2004) of Do's and Dont's for those assessing these multilingual children. In it they highlighting the issues that need to be considered, which is shown on the next page.

Do's and Dont's for those assessing and supporting multilingual children

The Geva and Woolley checklist

Do

- assess as many of the areas known to be related to dyslexia as possible
- assess in English and the home language where possible
- monitor progress and learning over time
- look beyond oral language proficiency
- provide direct instruction in reading skills
- provide language enrichment opportunities
- consider the transfer of specific skills from the first language

Do not

- wait or delay assessment until oral language proficiency has reached an “appropriate” level
- assume that word recognition and word attack skills are unimportant
- assume persistent language and reading difficulties will “catch up” if ignored
- seek to establish a discrepancy in order to justify a label of reading disability
- assume that persistent difficulties across-the-board merely reflect “negative” transfer from the first language
- use test norms based on the child's first language

References

The following are cited within this Module. Where possible (seven cases), a web access for the full article is given, which will provide more in depth discussions of the particular topic.

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Language skills evaluation template

Area	Skill	Skill level		
		First language	Language of the classroom	Language lesson
Phonics	Alphabet knowledge			
	Letter to sound correspondence			
	Syllables			
	Rhyming			
	First sound			
	Sound blending			
	Sound discrimination			
Reading	Unfamiliar words			
	Comprehension			
Spelling	Single words			
	Unfamiliar words			
Vocabulary	Written			
	Spoken			
Reading comprehension				
Memory				
Study skills				
Computer skills				