

SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

UNIT 11

Assessing reading

Learning objectives

Trainees will be able to

- Build a skills profile of a reader
- Understand the key aspects of reading that are included in a skills profile and how to assess them
- Be able to interpret the information gained when creating a skills profile.

ONLINE RESOURCES

The content and tasks throughout these PDFs are supported by online resources that are designed to facilitate and supplement your training experience.

Links to these are signposted where appropriate. The resources use graphics and interactive elements to:

- Highlight salient points
- Provide at-a-glance content summaries
- Introduce further points of interest
- Offer visual context
- Break down and clearly present the different stages and elements of processes, tasks, practices, and theories

The online resources offer great benefits, both for concurrent use alongside the PDFs, or as post-reading revision and planning aids.

Please note that the resources cannot be used in isolation without referencing the PDFs. Their purpose is to complement and support your training process, rather than lead it.

You should complete any learning or teaching tasks and additional reading detailed in this PDF to make full use of the Advanced training materials for autism; dyslexia; speech, language and communication; emotional, social and behavioural difficulties; moderate learning difficulties.

To find out more about the resources, how they work, and how they can enhance your training, visit the homepage at: www.education.gov.uk/lamb

The first resource for this unit can be found here:
www.education.gov.uk/lamb/spld/assessing-reading/intro

In this section trainees will use simple tools to assess the reading skills of a pupil whom they have identified. Understanding of, and skills for, reading assessment needs to be developed before considering the characteristics of dyslexia. This ensures that the key aspects of reading assessment are clear prior to discussing what any results might mean.

Gathering background information

When conducting any assessment teachers should always begin by gathering background information from all those who have been involved in the pupil's education, this includes parents and the pupil themselves.

Activity 1

Take the sheet 'skills profile' and begin to collect information.

Gather background information about a pupil with literacy difficulties

- Pupil:
 - What I find hard
 - What I find easy
 - What helps me
 - What I want help with
- Parents or carers:
 - concerns
 - first language
 - history of learning to speak
 - health (particularly glue ear, hearing and vision)
 - any others in the family who have any literacy or other learning difficulties
 - attitudes to school and learning
 - attitudes to reading
 - hobbies and interests.
- Teachers:
 - concerns
 - school attendance
 - behaviour and self esteem, attitude to learning
 - language skills
 - strengths and needs
 - attainment levels
 - identified special educational needs
 - referrals to other agencies
 - reports available.

This background knowledge will enable you to approach the assessment with a fuller understanding of the concerns that parents and school have about the pupil. It will also help you to tune in to the needs and interests that the pupil has, so as to make activities more appealing and motivating.

Teachers must assess reading both in terms of decoding and comprehension in accord with the simple view of reading. The dual route cascade model directs attention to assessment of decoding in terms of both letter sound conversion and sight vocabulary for irregular words. See unit 1 for more detail on these models.

Activity 2

Have a look at these brief pupil portraits and see if you can tell which module of the DRCM might not be functioning well. Note your decision in your learning log.

Pupil A

- Can name some lower case letters
- Can name few upper case letters
- Can write to dictation only a few lower case letters
- Decodes only a few very familiar words

Pupil B

- Reading of irregular words is normal for age
- Reading of regular words is normal for age
- Reading of non-words is poor for age

Pupil C

- Reading of regular words is normal for age
- Reading of regular non-words is normal for age
- Reading of irregular words is poor for age

See the Activity 2 answer sheet to go with this activity to find out if you are correct.

This is a useful way of considering the difficulties you may observe in learners; however do remember that learners do not fit into neat little boxes like this. They are likely to display a range or mix of difficulties, though you should be trying to work out where strengths and difficulties lie using the modular approach of the DRCM as a guide.

Assessing Decoding

Phonics and phonological awareness

Both phonics and phonological awareness can be assessed simply by checking what letter sounds are known and whether the pupil can blend these sounds to make words or segment to sounds to spell them. It is important to check blending by using non-words as this ensures that the pupil could not be using the lexical route and be recognising words on sight.

The phonic screener originally produced by the national strategy continues to be useful for key stage 1 pupils, and some older pupils with poor skills in this area. Try downloading it here:

<http://core.roehampton.ac.uk/digital/general/escreening.pdf>

This assessment is in four parts:

1. oral blending skills (phonological awareness)
2. oral segmenting skills (phonological awareness)
3. letter sound knowledge
4. decoding non-words

Most pupils will respond best to an approach from you that suggests a game rather than a test.

Activity: 3

Assessing a pupil's reading:

Assess a pupil's phonic knowledge

Make sure that you have read through the instructions carefully before you begin, and that you have all the materials and record sheets prepared and at hand. Try and ensure that you work in a quiet area with no interruptions. Write down all the responses that the pupil makes and reassure him/her that when you write things down it does not mean that they made a mistake. Be careful to be encouraging without praising particular responses, or treating other responses with silence. Perhaps choose a couple of encouraging phrases such as 'keep going, you have done a lot', 'I like the way you are thinking', or 'you are working hard, well done'. These are fairly neutral but allow some warmth into a situation that can be stressful for the pupil. Of course, do not forget to introduce yourself, smile, and ensure the pupil knows what you are doing and why.

The first task requires you to model good production of speech sounds for blending by the pupil. Make sure that you are careful not to add the extra 'uh' (sometimes called schwa) to consonants. Cat is not broken down into cuh-a-tuh, since when it is blended it becomes cuhatuh, which is not a word!

In the second task it is the pupil's turn to produce sounds from whole words. Do not worry if they tend to produce the consonant 'uh' sound; this is likely to be a reflection of what they have been taught. Do note it however, since for some pupils this extra sound can be a barrier to effective decoding through phonics. These pupils might sound out a word and then be unable to blend it as the 'uh' sound makes no sense to them. Other pupils will somehow mentally delete the 'uh' and have no difficulty blending letter sounds into words. For pupils experiencing difficulties it is always be a good idea to avoid anything that becomes an extra process in learning (such as having to mentally delete sounds).

The third task is simply to find out for which letters the pupil knows sounds to match. Organise the pack of sounds into a basic set (a-th) and a harder set (ng-ure). Present the first set, and if the pupil struggles do not present the second set. This activity can be quite dull, and if the pupil is bored or fidgety you could adapt the activity to laying five or so cards on the table and asking them to pick up the ones they know and tell you the sounds. This works well for those pupils who are nervous of the task too, though you do have to be extra vigilant about record keeping if you do it like this.

The fourth and final task is a non-word task. This is designed specifically to test the non-lexical route of the DRCM, as using non-words effectively disables the lexical route (these words cannot possibly be in anyone's printed word store!). This is a hard task for most pupils struggling with literacy and you need to be careful about breaking the task down, being encouraging, and allowing thinking time. Try presenting it as an alien reading game (this works well for 7-11 year olds), for older pupils just explain that these are nonsense words that have just been made up and they would therefore not have seen them before. Ensure that the pupil understands that the words are not English words, they are alien! So if they say anything that makes sense you should remind them quickly that it is not supposed to make sense. Often pupils will trip on 'som' and read it as 'some'. This shows me that:

- they are tending to read using their lexical route, or
- they are inaccurate, not reading carefully to the end of the word

Only present one card at a time, and as soon as you feel the pupil is struggling badly, end the test.

See online resource:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/spld/assessing-reading/phonics-knowledge

Enter your findings on the skills profile sheet.

Now analyse your findings with a colleague. Explain to your colleague how the assessment was carried out, and why assessing phonic knowledge in this way is important. Make notes on your discussion in your learning log.

Sight Vocabulary

The materials above will only test the non-lexical route of the DRCM, so now the lexical route must be tested. This is easy enough to do with an irregular word recognition test. The simplest way to do this is to gather a list of all the words that the pupil's peers recognise in class. The pupil would then just try and read out as many as they could. You would need some guidance from the pupil's regular teachers here about a good starting point; there is not much point testing recognition of words like 'achievement' if the pupil struggles to

recognise 'was'. Do make sure that all the words you test are truly irregular, since many early high frequency word lists include regular words like 'mum'.

See online resource:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/spld/assessing-reading/word-recognition

Enter your findings on the skills profile sheet.

Now analyse your findings with a colleague. Explain to your colleague how the assessment was carried out, and why assessing sight vocabulary in this way is important. Make notes on your discussion in your learning log.

Miscue analysis

A miscue analysis is just a careful record of a reader reading aloud a piece of text. You may find that in this situation the reader behaves differently and displays difficulties or strengths that were not observed in the other tests you have so far conducted, since reading continuous text makes different demands on a reader than reading single words or letters.

Activity 4

Watch the video 'Reading recovery & miscue analysis' showing a reading recovery teacher carrying out a short miscue analysis.

See this clip:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/spld/assessing-reading/reading-recovery-video

Discuss the following questions with a colleague:

1. How familiar was the text to the child?
2. What key points was the teacher particularly interested in for this child?
3. How often does this teacher carry out a miscue analysis and why?
4. What did the teacher learn from observing the child carry out this activity, and how will this influence her plans for teaching?

The process for a miscue analysis is as follows:

- Select a piece of text that the pupil has not seen before, about 100 words. Make sure it is at a level where some mistakes will be made. You will need about 20 substitutions to analyse. For young and inexperienced readers you may need to carry out this assessment a few times on different texts to collect sufficient errors to analyse.
- Photocopy or type out the text for yourself, leaving enough space above each line for your marks.
- Go to a quiet area where you will be uninterrupted.
- Ensure that you have means to audio or video-record the reader. It is almost impossible to record in sufficient detail whilst the learner is reading, unless they are really slow!

- Make some general observations about the pupil's approach to reading; are they reluctant, distracted, keen to discuss the text?
- You must remember that this is a test and you want the pupil to make mistakes. Resist the urge to help, support or otherwise act as a teacher, at this moment you are a tester! Say nothing to interrupt the flow unless the pupil needs reassurance or stops and needs encouragement to get going again. If the pupil refuses to attempt a word, you may supply it. As always explain to the pupil what you are doing and why at the start of the assessment.
- Now by yourself play back the recording with the copy of the text and a pencil (and eraser!). Mark each error that the reader made as follows:
 - Sc - self correction: the word is read incorrectly at first, and without help or request from you the mistake is corrected
 - S – substitutions: word is read incorrectly as another real or non-word
 - R - refusals: the reader stops and does/will not read the word
 - O - omissions: the reader misses out the word
 - I - insertions: the reader adds another word
- Self corrections are a good sign as they show that the reader is monitoring their reading to ensure it makes sense.
- Now look carefully at all the substitutions made by the reader, and ask yourself why that particular substitution was made:
 - Was the pupil trying to decode using letter sound conversion and being unsuccessful?
 - Was the pupil responding with a word that looks similar to the word in the text?
 - Was the pupil choosing a word that made sense within the passage, even if it wouldn't look anything like the word in the text?
- Consider now which type of error the reader made most frequently. This will make it clear if the reader is relying heavily on letters and sounds to read without considering if it makes sense, or if the reader is prepared to ignore letter sound cues in the search for meaning. What you are hoping for is a reader who is trying to combine meaning and letter sound based cues.
- This analysis will guide you when deciding on how to help the reader develop more effective reading strategies. For example:
 - If a reader makes lots of inaccurate attempts at using letter sound cues, they are likely to need support to improve the accuracy of letter sound conversion. If they do this without considering how their attempt makes sense in the text, a focus on developing comprehension is also necessary.

- If a reader tries hard to make the text make sense, but in the process sacrifices any match to letters and sounds, they will need a strong focus on phonic decoding.

See online resource:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/spld/assessing-reading/miscue-analysis

In order that you might practise recoding a miscue analysis in this way an audio file of a child reading a piece of text has been provided with this resource – ‘A miscue analysis example’.

Listen to this clip:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/spld/assessing-reading/miscue-analysis-audio

Take the sheet provided entitled ‘Lexi’s Miscue Analysis’, then while listening to her read in the audio clip, mark the text as suggested above. After doing the analysis discuss with your colleagues what you think her learning priorities for reading should be.

Now try this activity out with your selected pupil who you feel is struggling with literacy. Enter your findings on the skills profile sheet.

Now analyse your findings with a colleague. Explain to your colleague how the assessment was carried out, and why assessing passage reading in this way is important. Make notes on your discussion in your learning log.

Haywood and Lidz (2007) describe a process of ‘dynamic assessment’. Dynamic assessment is essentially a process by which the teacher assesses the pupil’s ability to learn. It is a supplement to the usual assessment processes and most often administered in a pre-test, intervention, post-test format. This approach is focussed on identifying what intervention strategies effect learning in the pupil, and provides a conceptual ‘bridge’ between assessment and intervention. Dynamic assessment is especially useful when:

- Scores on standardised normative tests are low, and especially when they do not accord with information from other sources
- Learning appears to be constrained by emotional factors or specific disabilities
- There are language problems
- There are marked cultural differences between the pupil’s culture and the dominant culture
- The need to inform planning is important.

Using the pupil on whom you conducted a miscue analysis design a dynamic instruction task. Consider the following factors:

- 'Focus on relevant aspects of task
- Clarify instructions and expectations
- Provide minimal feedback
- Encourage task involvement (motivation)
- Give information (e.g. vocabulary definitions)
- Provide elaborated feedback
- Pose guiding questions
- Regulate examinee's behaviour
- Teach concepts, metacognitive principles, promote self regulation
- Suggest or elicit application of concepts, principles, and rules.'

(Haywood and Lidz 2007 pp12)

The process will begin with the miscue analysis, followed by a session addressing the key aspects of learning revealed in the analysis, followed by a rereading of the passage with further miscue analysis. Key aspects of learning you may need to address might be: particular decoding strategies that are under or overused, encouraging attention to whole words, learning to recognise particular irregular words, or phonic patterns, improving motivation or concentration, or self monitoring. The intervention phase is aimed at finding out what minimum support is required for the maximum benefit. At post-test you will be observing the pupil's ability to apply learning from the intervention phase when working independently.

Now with your colleague discuss what you have discovered about the learning of the pupil on whom you have focussed. What approaches and strategies work well for them? How does what the pupils could achieve given the ideal support in the dynamic assessment process differ from what they can do independently? How might this inform any intervention or classroom planning?

Assessing Comprehension

Pupils with comprehension difficulties present with some of the following observable features (Oakhill and Yuill 2002):

- Difficulty using the past tense when telling a story
- Difficulty varying the tense when telling story
- Difficulty identifying the main point of a story
- Difficulty understanding the purpose of a story title
- Difficulty detecting errors, and contradictions in a passage

Using this knowledge you can observe and question the pupil you are assessing to determine their level of comprehension.

Activity 5

Select a text that makes some demands on comprehension that you feel peers in the pupil's class would have few difficulties with. This establishes a rough idea of what is normal for the age of your pupil. Use an entire text but avoid anything very long.

1. Prepare some literal and inferential questions relating to the text.
2. Tell the pupil the title of the story and ask them what they think the story might be about. Note the response.
3. Read the text to the pupil, allowing them to see text and pictures if present. This is to avoid creating additional difficulties by asking them to decode and comprehend at the same time.
4. Keep the text in front of you and the pupil to allow them to refer to it if they need to. Make sure they know that they can refer to it if they need to, and that it is fine if they do. This is to ensure that the assessment is of comprehension rather than memory.
5. Ask your literal and inferential questions and note down the pupil's answers. In addition note down whether or not they choose to refer to the text when they make their answers.
6. Ask the pupil to tell you the main point to the story; was there a moral message, or a main event that was important?
7. Ask the pupil to retell the story, and write down or record exactly what they say. You can then analyse their retelling for use of tenses and connectives.

Enter your findings on the skills profile sheet.

Now analyse your findings with a colleague. Explain to your colleague how the assessment was carried out, and why assessing language comprehension in this way is important. Make notes on your discussion in your learning log.

Activity 6

Analysing strengths and difficulties

With your colleague consider your knowledge of the pupil so far, including background information and all your reading assessments. Make a summary of the pupil's strengths and difficulties. Even in the weakest reader strengths might include: enjoys being read to, interest in a particular subject or hobby, ability to recognise own name, effort, age appropriate comprehension and so on. Difficulties might include for example incomplete phonic knowledge, unsure of many letter names, inaccurate sounding out, small sight vocabulary, and difficulty with inference. Now together with your colleague recommend appropriate teaching approaches.

Using standardised tests

Many schools make use of reading tests which are standardised. This means that the test has been trialled with many pupils of the ages covered by the test

and the researchers worked out what sort of performance on the test was in the average, above average and below average ranges for each age group. Tests of single word reading, passage reading, reading speed and reading comprehension are available. These tests vary, some are designed to be administered to groups as a screen for those who may need further assessment and support, and some are designed for administering in a one-to-one situation and will give much more diagnostic information. If you are using any standardised tests make sure you take note of the following key points:

- The test should not be an old edition (for instance do not use edition 3 if it has been superseded by edition 4). Avoid using a test which is more than 10-15 years old.
- If you use a standardised test always follow the administration instructions in full and with great care. Do not make any adaptations to the test to make it easier for the pupil.
- Note that for most tests a standardised score of below 85 is indicative of a probable difficulty in that area. The range 85 -115 should be interpreted as being in the average range. Any scores above 115 are considered to be in the above average range.
- Giving results as standardised scores is preferable to giving them as percentiles or age equivalents, since these measures tend to exaggerate normal differences between pupils.
- Tests should not normally be repeated within 6 months to one year of the last administration, as this can cause problems with coaching effects and produces inaccurate results. Some tests have parallel forms which get around this problem.

Assessing working memory

Gathercole and Alloway (2008) suggest a number of characteristics of a pupil with working memory difficulties, these include:

- Poor academic progress
- Classroom difficulties
 - Failure to follow instructions
 - Problems with activities that combine storage and processing
 - Place keeping difficulties
- Attention difficulties

If you wish to judge which learners are experiencing difficulties with working memory it is useful to consider these observable behaviours of the pupil.

The Turner and Risedale backward digit span test and the Gathercole and Baddeley non-word test are freely available on the internet and can serve as an additional source of information regard working memory.

Activity 7

1. Using the information gathered about a pupil in activities 1, 3, 4 and 5 above to compile a case study to present to colleagues. When presenting the case study ensure that you explain how all assessments were carried out and their purpose.
2. Share the assessment resources with the same colleagues and show them how to carry out a reading assessment on a pupil they work with. Ask each of your colleagues to assess a pupil's reading using the methods you have shown them.
3. As a group consider the strengths and weaknesses identified for each pupil assessed, and discuss possible interventions (for more details see unit 6).
4. With your colleagues consider how these assessment approaches could be used in your school/department and how results might be shared effectively with parents and other professionals.

Useful websites

The phonic screener originally contained in progression in phonics and playing with sounds, both produced originally by the national strategies, continues to be widely used and available in other places, try here: <http://core.roehampton.ac.uk/digital/general/escreening.pdf>

For the Turner and Risedale digit span memory test: <http://www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk/pdf/Digit.pdf>

For the Gathercole and Baddley test
<http://www.york.ac.uk/res/wml/test%20of%20WM.html>

Regarding dynamic assessment
<http://www.dynamicassessment.com/>

Reading List

Backhouse G Morris K (eds) 2005 Dyslexia? Assessing and reporting. The Patoss Guide Hodder Murray London

For a good guide to miscue analysis and gathering background information see chapter 13

For an introduction to using standardised tests see chapter 11.

Gathercole S and Alloway TP (2008) *Working memory and Learning* Sage London, see chapter 4 for details of the observable characteristics of pupils with poor working memory.

Haywood H and Lidz C (2007) *Dynamic assessment in practice*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

Herbert S (2011) *The Inclusion Toolkit*. Sage, London. See chapter 1 for a useful checklist regarding memory. See Chapter 2 for more information regarding working memory and how to offer support in the classroom.

Oakhill J and Yuill N (2002) *Learning to understand written language*. In Wearmouth J, Soler J and Reid G. *Addressing difficulties in literacy development*. London: Routledge Falmer.