Catch them young! Strategies for identifying and supporting potentially dyslexic children in the Early Years

Title

Catch them young

Strategies for identifying and supporting potentially dyslexic children in the early years.

Screen 02

I am going to speak about how important it is to identify children who may be dyslexic as early as possible. First we will look at the traits of Dyslexia that the child may have:

- Short term auditory memory problems, where they find it hard to remember things they are told.
- Short term visual memory, where they find it difficult to keep things in their visual memory.
- They may be easily distracted from the task in hand.
- They may reverse letters and numbers when writing or reading them.
- They may have had delayed language development, being late to talk and have problems finding particular words.
- They may have difficulties organising themselves and their work
- They have issues with either gross and/or fine motor skills
- It may be difficult for them to cope with patterns and relationships of items

Having looked at these we should now consider the traits of extreme youth:

- Short term memory (auditory)
- Short term memory (visual)
- Easily distracted
- Reverses letters and numbers
- Language / word finding
- Organization of self / work
- Gross/ fine motor skills
- Patterns and relationships
Screen 03

So what is the difference?

There are several factors that should be considered. Many parents who have had to wait until the child is 9 or older to get the necessary help, say that they always knew there was something not right, even in Reception. There is often a history of dyslexia in the family, with several older relatives who may or may not have had any help, with consequent frustration and underachievement.

Another indicator is an apparently clever child who is not making the progress, that would be expected from his or her obvious intellect.

These children often love stories, being read to, watching films and dvds, but are slow or making little or no progress in reading.

There is often a great reluctance to write even though they may be good at drawing and can tell a good tale.

Screen 04

Why intervene?

In the past, psychologists have been reluctant to test children under the age of 8 or 9, as younger children were not able to stay on task long enough to complete a valid test.

If there is any suspicion that child might have dyslexic tendencies, even if they are due to immaturity and may be grown out of, it is important that suitable interventions are put in place, as these will help any child progress, so no harm can be done.

Early help is vital to reduce the risk of failure, losing confidence and low self esteem, that dogs the older dyslexic children when they realise they cannot keep up with their peers.

Dyslexia is never ‘cured’, but strategies can be learned that will become lifelong tools for bypassing issues and the earlier they are in place, the better.

Frustration at underachievement can often lead to a child becoming an attention seeker and a naughty problem.

Screen 05

What can be done?

Although conventional psychological testing is not appropriate for very young children, there are dyslexia screening programs that can be used to find out the child's cognitive strengths and weaknesses.
Having established these, the teacher can plan materials that use the strengths to support weaker areas.

Dyslexic children learn best in a multi-sensory learning environment, which is the normal way of working in the early years, but a few extra tweaks can make all the difference e.g.:

by providing dyslexia friendly materials, such as cream paper, pencil grips, picture/word prompt cards;

getting the child to repeat any oral instructions given, before starting the task;

where possible, provide visual prompts;

**Screen 06**

Screenshots of Lucid CoPS, showing some of the test games, graphs and response records.

**Screen 07**

**Multi-sensory environment**

The normal learning tools in the early years include frequent contact with sand, water, paint, play dough etc., which allow the child to explore different ways of interacting with information.

Singing games are a fun way to learn words, and improve memory and learn pitch, as a precursor to reading. Children who cannot sing in tune are often poor readers, but when they taken through a pitch teaching programme, their singing improves and so does their reading.

Sequencing games help to improve auditory memory. They are also good in-car entertainment and easy for parents to instigate.

Playing with letters and numbers in various formats, such as drawing, writing, painting, using letters made from sandpaper, dough, wood, magnets, air writing, finger writing on child’s back are different ways of reinforcing letter and number acquisition.

Pelmanism or *pairs*, is an old children’s game that very young children are good at and the skill declines with age. Using playing cards, picture cards or computer games are all an excellent way of developing visuo-spatial memory and young children can usually beat their grandparents without any help!

**Screen 08**

Using I.C.T. So how can I.C.T help?

Firstly, as an initial screening tool to find out the child’s cognitive strengths and weaknesses.

Then it is one of many methods of providing multi-sensory support for learning and over-learning new skills and information.

It has a big role in producing colourful, personalised and professional looking support materials.

It is important in providing a range of programs that can be used for developing coping strategies for encouraging language development and the groundwork for acquiring literacy and numeracy skills and learning how to organise work and everyday life.

**Screen 09**

Spoken language development

Using programs with the class on an interactive whiteboard, followed up by small group or individual use is a good incentive for developing individual spoken language:

Screenshots from: Choose and Cook, Choose and Tell: nursery rhymes, Leaps and Bounds, Rainbow stories, Podd

**Screen 10**

Screenshots for developing early number skills from: Counting songs, ChooseIT Readymades: Numeracy, Fizzy’s First Numbers

**Screen 11**

Screenshots for singing and rhythm from: Drumkit, Rainbow stories, Counting songs

**Screen 12**

Early phonics screenshots from: Clicker phonics and Smart phonics

**Screen 13**

Early writing screen shots from Clicker6, Communicate: SymWriter

Using a wordprocessor with onscreen word and picture grids as in Clicker, or with rebus support, as in the Communicate programs, allows the child to generate stories more independently.

**Screen 14**

Early literacy: screenshots from ChooseIT Readymades:: literacy, Tizzy’s Toy box, Identification skills, First keys 3, Vowel sounds

In the UK children are encouraged to develop mark-making into writing at a very young age, which can be a problem for children with poor fine motor control. In some Swedish schools they teach the children to use a keyboard before they learn to handwrite, as they consider that most children’s fingers are not strong enough to produce writing. First Keys3 is a keyboard training program developed for

young children to learn the keyboard layout, at the same time as they learn wordbuilding, from provided wordlists, or ones created by the teacher.

**Screen 15**

Matching : Sequencing: Sorting:

Screenshots from programs that provide activities in these areas:

Communicate: By Choice, Identification skills, Tizzy's toy box

**Screen 16**

Apps are miniprograms for iPads / iPhone /iPod touch technologies. There are new ones being created everyday and provide a very mobile and accessible means of learning, often in an amusing format. For early years learning you need to be aware that many of the free apps come from the USA, where they use upper case letters for teaching the alphabet and some phonics apps. Many are free or very cheap.

screenshots of apps:

Hairy letters, Letters school, Things that go together, Abby preschool, ABC phonics, Doodle buddy, 1 2 3 Tracer, Aunty Maggie’s recipe, Five sharks swimming, Inclusive Smarty Pants, See, touch learn.

**Screen 17**

Hardware

Obviously, you can use any PC or Apple desktop, laptop or touchpad to run the programs I have suggested. However you might like to consider the Inclusive One Touch or Inclusive Learnpad for your very young children. They both have a touch interface and run My Zone, a special front end program that can be set up for individual or groups of children to get straight into the activities the teacher has selected for them.

**Screen 18**

For a really child-friendly, but rather expensive solution, you may like to consider Inclusive Technology’s Tilt and Touch combined computer and screen that can be angled to suit the needs of any child.

Inclusive tilt and touch LCD, inclusive tilt and touch plasma

**Screen 19**

Peripherals

Little fingers are not very good at handling a normal mouse, but special small ones like bugs or ladybirds are more suitable. Some children find it conceptually difficult to handle a mouse, but can manage a
trackerball, as it stays in one place with ball and buttons on top and can be manipulated with two hands or even switches. iPads and touchpads can be somewhat vulnerable in the hands of small children, but there are frames that can be used to angle them and stop them slipping. The Franklin Literacy Wordbank is a useful classroom tool where advanced children can look up the spelling of words they need without having to wait in a queue with their wordbooks. Dyslexic children will come to use them a bit later, but they have the mental picture that clever people used them, so they are a more acceptable tool.

Big track, big grips frame for iPads, Franklin literacy word bank

**Screen 20**

Keyboards

There are a range of keyboards available for young children. Some have lower case letters, others have fewer, larger keys and some are wireless. You can also purchase stick-on lower case letters to customise an existing keyboard and plastic covers to prevent water or sand getting into the keyboard.

A selection of keyboards: Clevy keyboard, IT keys wireless, Jumbo XL keyboard, Early learning keyboard

And to finish I would like to share with you a success story: T is 8 years old now and has just written her first play for her Stage-coach teacher. She took her six page handwritten opus, complete with idiosyncratic spelling, to him and he said he was sorry he could not quite read it. Totally unphased, she said never mind, she would do it on the computer for him, which she later did. This totally self confident little girl is now reading books on her own and this term, won the Lower KS 2 Trophy at her school for her creative writing. She was identified at her school, as having a problem with phonics and auditory memory, when she was barely five and was immediately given small group support, which is continuing still, as the school has recognised that she still has some memory and organisational issues. I would suggest that this is an excellent example of what can be achieved by catching them young!

**Screen 21**

Useful websites

[www.inclusive.co.uk](http://www.inclusive.co.uk) for software and hardware.

[www.dyslexic.com](http://www.dyslexic.com) for software and hardware.

[www.thedyslexiashop.co.uk](http://www.thedyslexiashop.co.uk) for dyslexia friendly supplies.

[www.bdatech.org](http://www.bdatech.org) for advice on software, hardware and good practice.

[www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk) for general advice on dyslexia.

[www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk) for general advice on dyslexia and teaching.

Screening
Lucid CoPS

Spoken language development
Choose and cook
Choose and tell: Nursery Rhymes
Leaps and bounds
Rainbow Stories

Early Number
Counting Songs
ChooseIT Readymades: Numeracy
Fizzys First Numbers

Singing and Rhythm
Drumkit
Counting Songs
Rainbow Stories

Early Phonics
Clicker Phonics
Smart Phonics

Early Writing
Clicker6
Communicate: SymWriter

Early Literacy
ChooseIT Readymades: Literacy
Tizzys Toybox
Identification Skills
Vowel Sounds
First Keys 3

Matching : Sequencing : Sorting
Identification Skills
Communicate: By Choice
Tizzys Toybox

Apps
iPhone iPad touch iPad
Hairy Letters / Letter School /Things that go together

iPhone iPad touch
Abby Preschool /ABC Phonics/ Doodle Buddy
/123 Tracer

iPad
Aunty Maggie’s Pantry/ Five sharks swimming/
Inclusive Smarty Pants/ See,Touch,Learn

Hardware
Inclusive One-Touch
Inclusive LearnPad™ Tablet
Tilt and Touch
Inclusive Tilt and Touch LCD
Inclusive Tilt and Touch Plasma

Peripherals
BIGtrack
Big Grips Frame for iPads
Franklin Literacy Word Bank

Keyboards
Clevy Keyboard
It-Keys (wireless)
Jumbo XL Keyboard
Early Learning Keyboard

Useful websites
All the software and hardware can be viewed on line and purchased from:

www.inclusive.co.uk
www.dyslexic.com
www.thedyslexiashop.co.uk

These sites are useful for information related to dyslexia:

www.bdatech.org
www.bdadyslexia.org.uk
www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk

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