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TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) AND LEARNING DIFFICULTIES (LD) IN AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL SETTING

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examined the educational professional literature pertaining to identifying learning difficulties (LD) in students of English as a Second Language (ESL) in the international school (IS) settings. By examining the literature it became evident that educators are offered any number of suggestions for each of these variables in isolation but there is limited evidence at this present time of a knowledge base which combines all three fields of this study – ESL, LD and International School population. What is required is an approach specific to this single combination ESL-LD-IS.

This dissertation argues for the development of a longitudinal student portfolio for greater understanding of international school student population.

Furthermore, an exploration that includes the practical steps necessary for standardizing such an approach is recommended highly especially given global migratory movements and the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity in all school populations.

CONTENT

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

The responsibility to identify and educate children with learning difficulties (LD) is of great social and economic importance to a modern society such as ours – one that especially depends on academic achievements and therefore on reading and writing (Burke & Cigno, 2000; Kusuma & Powell, 2001). The term "learning differences" will be used throughout this dissertation for consistency and in recognition of the U.S. orientation of the researcher's workplace. However, educational terminology is a topic of continuous debate, as their meanings can have intended and unintended consequences. Recently, in Scotland for example, there has been a move towards the use of the all-encompassing term, Additional Support Needs (ASN), rather than the use of the term learning difficulties.

Within the general present student population, increasingly more children are being identified as having learning differences. According to a government report, the number of children of the age of 3-17 in the United States with learning differences in 2003 was 4.6 million; which represented 7.5% of the children population (Summary health statistics for U.S. children, national health interview survey, 2003).

As reported in more recent literature, there has been an explosive growth in the proportion of students identified as LD in the past decade in the U.S. (Abrams, Ferguson, & Laud, 2001; Thomas & Woods, 2003). According to the Digest of Educational Statistics Tables and Figures (2003), children 3 to 21 years old served in federally LD supported programs for selected years from 1976-77 to 2001-2002 increased dramatically. The Digest recorded 796,000 such children in 1976-1977. This figure increased to 2,047,000 by 1989-1990. In the years between 1999 and 2000, the amount of LD students grew to 2,830,000. Another increase was recorded for the years 2001 – 2002. Specifically, the last recorded number for children with learning differences in the table was 2,846,000, which represented over a 300% growth as compared to the early 1976-1977 figure.

In Asia, numbers of special schools accommodating LD students has also increased dramatically over the years. The schools which have LD services consist of elementary, lower secondary, and higher education departments, while only a few also have kindergarten departments. In 1948, the number of school with LD departments in Japan was 138. This increased to 417 in 1970, to 860 in 1980, and to 968 in 1994. According to Abe (1998), the total number of students with special needs in Japan in 1995 was 1,739 at the Kindergarten level, 29,235 at the Elementary level, 20,858 at the Lower Secondary level, and 35,387 at the Higher Secondary level.

In Scotland, the Pupil Census of 2003 found that approximately 3 per cent of primary school students and 3 per cent of secondary school students had a Record of Needs (RON) or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Among

primary school pupils, 3,041 had moderate learning difficulties, 3,439 had specific learning difficulties, and 1,654 had social and emotional difficulties. For secondary school students, 2,343 had moderate learning difficulties, 2,907 had specific learning difficulties, and 1,422 had social and emotional difficulties.

In addition to learning differences, other educational factors have also been constantly shifting. Due to demographic changes and the fact the world is becoming increasingly "smaller"; the number of ESL students has also constantly risen. As a result, identification of the LD student in the ESL classroom has become difficult (Fielding-Barnsley & Murray, 2002).

The importance of identification tools for the varied learning difficulties is critical. Once identified, a respective school system can help students as they are marked for special intervention within the confines of the educational system (Haldimann & Hollington, 2004).

Kusuma-Powell &Powell (2001) define learning differences along major two dimensions. The first, as individual underachievement which reflects an ability-achievement discrepancy, while the second is underachievement due to various disadvantages such as physical and sensory conditions, emotional difficulties, environmental, cultural or economic disadvantages. Swanson, Graham, and Harris (2003) believe that although a learning difference may occur with other additional support needs (such as sensory impairment, cognitive difficulties, social and emotional difficulties), with environmental influences (such as cultural differences or insufficient and inappropriate instruction), or with

psychiatric factors, LD is not the direct result of these conditions or influences. Clearly, a distinction needs to be made between ‘medical’ and ‘social’ models.

Other researchers characterize learning differences as a generic term referring to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifest by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematics abilities which are intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be caused by central nervous system dysfunction (Burke & Cigno, 2000; Lyon et al., 2001).

Confusion has resulted from the fact that the term "learning differences" can include mentally-challenged individuals who are educable as well as those who are behaviorally disordered or mildly emotionally disturbed. It can also include children with minimal brain dysfunction (Swanson et al., 2003).

Whether these special educational categories constitute distinctly separate populations or are a subset of one population continues to be a topic for discussion (Lyon et al., 2001; Swanson, 1999).

Students with learning differences who are also in ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms, specifically in the international school setting, have an especially unique difficulty since, in addition to dealing with their learning difference challenge they are also challenged to overcome language barriers that are a result of English not being their first language. According to Ortiz (2001) and Schwarz and Burt (1995a, 1995b), it is for this reason that ESL instruction for LD students needs to be carefully and especially tailored to the needs of the individual.

Clearly, it is necessary for schools at all levels and in all countries to understand the major factors influencing learning difficulties in order to formulate a meaningful response and provide the appropriate study experience for their students. Basic understandings of the complexity of such challenges have changed considerably.

One of the major elements that is being looked at in research is the ability to read and write. The ability to read is a major key in schooling all students and especially those who might have some learning differences. Over the past decade, a number of factors have been identified regarding reading failure.

According to Ball (1993), a causal relationship has been identified between phonological skills and reading ability in young English speaking children. Other researchers agree, adding that significant predictors of the acquisition of reading skills include phonological awareness tasks such as phoneme segmentation or deletion (Badian, 1995; Goswami, 1993; Mann, 1993). Phonological awareness refers to the child's sensitivity to (or explicit awareness of) the phonological structure of the words in language. This awareness is measured by tasks that require the student to identify, isolate, or blend the individual phonemes in words.

From the findings of a study conducted by Mastropieri and Scruggs (1997) on learning differences, one of the major problems students have relates to content-area reading. In their view, LD students need assistance in content-area reading to integrate new information with their prior knowledge, to obtain important information from the text, and to remember what they have read. Thus,

content area reading instruction is an important component of all curricula. Instruction to address the problem needs to include word identification, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. Such elements are especially influential ingredients in the ESL classroom. The researchers further explain that comprehension capabilities are developed as students' progress and the curriculum changes from the learning of reading to content area curriculum. At this stage, instruction uses narrative and expository text to increase comprehension. The text includes new, more complex words that contain many syllables. Students who successfully complete this stage have developed effective strategies for approaching the reading task and for comprehending information in both LD and ESL levels. It is important to note that other factors such as cultural knowledge are also playing a crucial part in the comprehension process (For example: ESL students may need to read texts that are culturally inaccessible. The lack of comprehension may then not be related to their learning difference or the lack of language).

According to the conclusions of a study conducted by Torgesen, Wagner, & Rashotte (1994), failure in reading stems from the inability to phonologically process words. Phonological processing refers to the children's mental operations that employ phonological or sound structure of oral language when they are learning how to decode written language. They point out that the last two decades of research have produced a broad variety of evidence that at least three kinds of phonological processing skills are positively related to individual differences in the rate at which beginning reading skills are acquired. These

include phonological awareness, phonological memory, and rate of access for phonological information.

Another difficulty relates to the need for training materials for facilitators as well as participants (Simons, 1999). These and other similar types of reservations must be overcome in order to maximize LD students' integration into specifically the ESL classroom and generally into mainstream society.

However, as suggested in this study, before such difficulties or needs can be assessed, identification of the LD students within the ESL setting in international schools, must take place. The identification will be the first step followed by suggestions for ESL classroom modification.

Purpose of the Study and Significance

If international schools are growing to be an established and highly demanded service by the international community around the world, the subsequent responsibility of standing up to the high expectations will also grow. As our world continues to globalize and 'grow smaller', the international schools serve a broader community that varies culturally, socially and psychologically.

Regular flow and population change is part of the nature of international schools. Although sometimes a burden, it is the reality of such schools that children enter programs at all ages and during any time over the school year. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind; such schools have to set up a pliable program which can assist a whole range of ability levels and a wide spectrum of learning difficulties and challenges.

As commented by Kusuma-Powell &Powell (2001) since global business and industry continue to grow, a dynamic tension is created in and for international schools while families try to adapt to new environments. The international school then “becomes a focal point of interest where it may not have been at home” (Kusuma-Powell & Powell, 2001 p.13). It is the international schools’ educational responsibility to develop its resourcefulness and practice in order to better cater to such ongoing and ever changing international community.

In order to mainstream LD student population, students need to be adequately educated in the classrooms (National Institute for Learning Disabilities, 2003). This may be especially applicable for the international and multicultural population of international schools. The population of LD students in ESL classrooms needs special considerations in order to improve cognitive skills and effective perceptions so that students will be able to master the process of learning and develop their educational experiences.

The purpose of this study is to suggest ways in which LD children in the ESL classroom of international schools can be identified so that their special needs may be met, and then to suggest ways in which the ESL classroom can be modified in order to achieve this goal.

The results of this investigative study will be significant to the area of LD identification in the ESL classroom in general. Specifically, it will ascertain the improvements that can be made in the ESL classroom for identifying and teaching LD students. New understandings will emerge regarding the needs of

students with learning differences and their language learning struggles as students in ESL classrooms.

Research Questions

To achieve the purpose of the study and to resolve the study problem as described above, several questions are posed. The present investigative study is designed specifically to answer these questions. These may now be stated as follows:

1. What are the principles for identifying special needs in students with ESL?
2. What are the practical ways that LD identification can be implemented in the ESL classroom?
3. What might be the best approach to meet the needs of a combined ESL-LD intervention in international schools' setting?

Rationale and Reason for the Study

Haldimann and Hollington (2004) remind international educators that "all (accepted) students in international schools should be expected to succeed whether or not they require additional support to meet their educational needs" (p.9). This honest and straight forward statement is one of a few reminders for the urgent need to accept the ESL-LD population in international schools. One of

the first needs that will have to be looked at seems to be with regard to the identification process of LD students who are also ESL.

The diverse and rich reactions towards the topic of LD and ESL reflect the multicultural nature of the international school setting. A parental refusal for LD evaluation seems to be common in this author's experience. Explanations may vary and include the belief that school related problems should be dealt within the school itself, fear of negative stigma, shame and the likes.

It is important to realize formal testing procedures are questionable and may not always be absolutely sufficient in identifying and classifying students with learning differences. This is especially true when dealing with multicultural students who come from various educational and linguistic backgrounds and may possess limited English language skills.

Barrera (2006) pointed out that there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that many students with limited English proficiency are misdiagnosed and are placed into "special education" classes when their only problem is that they do not understand the English language. Barrera claimed that even though assessment procedures have attempted to reduce bias, this has not always been effective. In general, it has been recommended for practitioners in the field that they (a) avoid relying on standardized tests that have not been validated with students who have limited English skills and, (b) rely more on informal assessment procedures. This includes actual work samples of students from the specific curriculum that they are learning from (Barrera, 2006; Ortiz, 1997, Haldimann and Hollington, 2004).

Dynamic assessments of authentic curriculum-based learning tasks can help educators to differentiate between students who truly are LD and those who are merely limited in English language skills (For example, a qualitative and quantitative analysis of student note taking according to Barrera, 2006).

Haldimann and Hollington (2004) remind us that “a student’s previous education and emotional experiences have immense bearing on a child’s performance at an international school, as does parental influence”. It is therefore the teachers’ responsibility to be sensitive and observant to incoming students who may struggle with temporary special needs which will pass, once the student is fully integrated into the international school environment.

Although remediation practices can often aid in overcoming learning disabilities by matching development and motivation, by providing an extensive and comprehensive curriculum, and by using a hierarchical and sequential learning approach (Adelman & Taylor, 1993), student self-esteem, self-efficacy and behavior is often effected (Hinkebein, Koller, & Kunce, 1992) and should be addressed.

Teachers must strive to provide the best learning environments possible for their students. This needs to start with a clear understanding of the abilities, developmental level, motivation, aptitudes, cultural backgrounds, interests, and achievement level of each learner.

It is important for students to clearly understand their own learning styles and for teachers to provide learning options that are based on a flexible concept. Adaptation of a pliable concept of supportive classrooms will result in maximizing

students' learning potential. Since individual students differ in their cognitive development, teachers must also have a complete understanding of these cognitive differences and must match learning tasks to differing levels of cognitive development.

Teachers need to be aware of the fact that students differ in their levels of physical, social, and emotional development and adapt curriculum and instruction accordingly. In addition to possessing knowledge about the typical social and emotional development in children, educators must also consider cultural and social factors, home environment, family constructs, and the experiential backgrounds of their students as these can also have serious developmental consequences (Saskatchewan Education, 2002).

In differentiated instruction, teachers take advantage of various instructional arrangements. By using ongoing assessment, teachers are constantly aware of how to make their instruction more responsive to individual student needs. According to McAdamis (2001) teachers become much more in tune with their students. This type of instruction helps educators to recognize how they can guide students with different abilities to understand key concepts in the curriculum (McAdamis, 2001).

Deficiencies in the English language abilities can be a serious detriment to LD students. In a classroom where English is used predominately, students who do not understand English will have trouble comprehending the curriculum. Self-esteem and self-efficacy issues will likely be the consequence.

Cummins (2001a) pointed out that in order to develop the language proficiency of students in bilingual or trilingual contexts (as often the case in international schools), instruction must concentrate on comprehensible input, which refers to the processing of meaning in the target language. Students must understand the language to which they are exposed. This requires a great deal of reading in an increasing number of genre types. However, there must also be focus on the language itself so the students can understand how the language actually works, can explore the relationships between languages, and can understand how language can be used to gain power in discourses with other people. Students must be provided with ample practice, both orally and in writing, with the target language so its code can be internalized and so they can adequately express their thoughts and ideas in their new language (Cummins, 2001a).

"Meaningful change," according to Ferguson (1995), "will require nothing less than a joint effort to reinvent schools to be more accommodating to all dimensions of human diversity" (cited in Kusama & Powell, 2000, p. 18). Haldimann and Hollington (2004), agreed, further noting that "the nature of special needs is constantly changing and we as educators need to adapt to these changes. Flexibility and adjustment are part of an international school's daily life as these schools have to deal with many issues, e.g., cross-cultural differences, multitude of mother tongue languages, cultural clashes between students/parents/ staff, objective assessment and accommodation of children from many different countries…" (Haldimann and Hollington, 2004 p. 9).

The author of this dissertation is an international educator whom, at any given time of each day, functions in three languages: English, Hebrew and Japanese (Hebrew is the author's first language. English is the dominant language in the professional setting. Japanese is the author's third language. Both Hebrew and Japanese are also used by the author in the professional setting since in addition to the ESL responsibility, the author is also involved in other activities, such as teaching IB Hebrew and supporting Japanese language students. All three languages are used in the personal setting).

English is not the author's native language. As an ESL learner for life and as an active member of the international-education community the author would like to raise attention to the unique combination of ESL – LD – International Schools. The author believes learning differences are a homogenous part of our humanistic society. Lack of open acknowledgment to LD and ESL-LD at international schools, seems to also influence research and documentation which could have been a valuable resource for self-evaluation and assessments regarding possible improvements and future application.

The following description of the ESL support structure at the author's school provides readers with an authentic example as to what an ESL department context is (and how is it connected to LD services) in one international school.

This author's school is a leading private international school located in Asia. It is a well-known and popular educational institution among diplomatic circles, the international business community, and the Asian local population as a whole. About 1,000 students attend the school. Students come from almost 70 different countries. The school is divided into three levels; elementary (grade 1-6), middle school (grade 7-8), and high school (grade 9-12). The school is well established and has been serving the international community for several decades.

Although in the past most students were English speakers, this has changed. Over the last decade the number of students for whom English is not their first language has dramatically grown, though no official count or report has been done. However, at present it is estimated that English is not the native first language for at least 50 percent of the students' population. Therefore, although the school's official language of instruction is English, its population speaks in a unique mixtures of languages and has an exceptional combination of backgrounds.

According to a second grade class's teacher testimony this year (2006), only two members of her class may be considered 'pure native English speakers' (children to parents who are both native English speakers).

Logically, it seems the ESL department should play a major role in the school for negotiating and establishing the way for a common instructional language at the school. It is unfortunate that the current situation is far from this truth. Due to various hidden reasons such as political reasons, school image, economical calculations, pride and otherwise, the department is limited by its teachers' numbers (five ESL teacher for the whole school consisting of: one first grade ESL teacher, one second grade ESL teacher, one third to sixth ESL full program teacher, one third to sixth ESL pull out program teacher and one middle and high school ESL teacher) and in its power to influence (on admission policies, incorporating students into mainstream classes when level permits, program exit policies and otherwise). The average number in an ESL class is 12 students for each grade class as compared to 28 in the average non-ESL middle school classroom.

The power of the Board (being a private school) is great and policy change is restricted and up to the School Head. At present, the Student Resource Department is responsible for student support services and the ESL support.

ESL services are offered to students who are referred by the school's Principals (elementary, middle school and high school principals). Students who could not pass the Principals interview will be tested using the school's internal

language evaluation test at the elementary school level and according to the SLEP test (Secondary Level English Proficiency Test) at the middle and high school levels.

Students who are being admitted to the ESL program are usually those who were referred to this school from non-English-speaking schools, have limited English conversational skills, or low academic records.

First graders have an independent intensive and isolated program. From the second to the sixth grade, ESL students are partially integrated with other mainstream students. They are referred to an ESL special class for at least half of their school day, joining their homeroom mainstream classrooms for 'specials' such as music, swimming, physical education and fine arts. The second to sixth grade students are divided to two main courses: the Intensive and the Pull-Out programs. Students who join the Intensive Class spend most of their day in the ESL classroom. The ESL teacher may suggest completing an internal level test that, with the permission of the school Principal, may move them up to a Pull-Out program where they may join their respective classes for Science, Religion and Social Studies according to their level and class numbers and availability.

In the middle and high school ESL (seventh through ninth grade) students join the ESL classes on individual screenings basis (resulting from the principal's interview impression and the SLEP test results). The ESL program supports mainstream curriculum. ESL students share most of their classes with the mainstream students. During electives and foreign language classes, they join the ESL class for an additional support.

During their first year at the school, middle school ESL students may join up to three ESL classes a day. Middle school ESL students are encouraged to stay within the program for at least two years. At the high school level, ninth and tenth graders join the ESL support class during Foreign Language sessions only.

Additional Student Support services are limited.

The school's Student Support coordinator's official responsibility is to support teachers of students who struggle and who may not perform at grade level. The coordinator is not supposed or allowed to work with individuals. Once a teacher suspects a student may have a special learning need, a referral form will be completed and a meeting with the Student Support Services coordinator will take place. The coordinator will screen the student using various assessment tools (such as Woodcock Johnson Achievement test, Woodcock Johnson Cognitive test, TOWL Test of written language, Gray Oral Reading comprehension test, and Key Math test). The language in which all tests are performed at the school is English. The coordinator acts as a liaison between the school and the parents and has the responsibility to refer the student to official testing institutes as well as other specialty counselors for further assessments. According to school regulations, a student has to be tested by a school psychologist (a position this school does not have) in order to be officially diagnosed as an LD student. A support program for those students who were diagnosed as students with learning differences does not exist at school. The support coordinator and teachers try to find personal solutions according to individual needs and possibilities.

As stated in administrational documents it is the parents' responsibility to report to the school of any learning disabilities their child may have during the enrolment procedure. According to the previous support coordinator (2005), an average of five LD mild cases is being diagnosed each year, while faculty members reported (2006) they suspect at least 10% of their students are at risk and may have some learning difficulties.

Though the ESL and LD divisions are part of the same department, there is no official collaboration between the services. There is no official report or communication channel with faculty members. Faculty teachers usually do not know which students are or are not learning disabled. Due to the lack of official LD evaluation procedures and report structure, it is highly possible that some of the straggling ESL students are actually experiencing difficulties because of their unique individual learning needs.

Although the school web-page has long lists of various activities, levels and languages students may be engaged with, a support for learning such as ESL or LD is not being mentioned at all. This may indicate the great sensitivity regarding the ESL-LD context in this school at present.

The current oversight of the situation and the need and passion to assist this delicate and specific population have inspired the writing of this dissertation. During the author's work as an ESL teacher in an international school and her fortunate involvement in various support projects she became very interested in the experiences of her international - multicultural- multi linguistic- mixed ability

students. The author therefore sought to gain more understanding of the questions such as what is available for this unique international school population and, in what ways can educators contribute in order to better serve the international schools' population.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS LD?

Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to the area of learning disabilities. Kusuma-Powell and Powell (2001) believe that while exceptional students are no longer 'exceptions' in many international schools, there is no one agreed definition. In order to clarify what LD means, it is important to remember LD may be categorized using various criteria (such as medical, social and educational) and as mentioned by Haldimann and Hollington (Haldimann and Hollington, 2004 p.19), "it must be stressed that these definitions are not all mutually exclusive".

According to Haldimann and Hollington (2004) the nature and definition of special needs are sensitive issues not only with parents but also with teachers who might feel inadequate in providing LD services within the classroom.

What Does LD mean?

Kirk and Bateman first used the term “learning disability” in 1962. The term referred to a “discrepancy between a child’s apparent capacity to learn and his or her level of achievement” (Kirk & Bateman, 1962, p. 75). However, the definition of learning disability varies widely.

The federal government of the United States for example, defines LD in Public Law 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, as amended by Public Law 101-76, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. It does not include children who have problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, or mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (IDEA, 1997, p. 12).

Various advocacy groups have been established for people with LD. These groups tend to describe the condition in non-technical terms. For example, the Arizona Spina Bifida Association (2005) defines LD as a difference in learning that leads to underachievement in school. At Siena College (Loudonville, New York), the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities defines it as a person who learns differently than most people and an individual for whom studying is more difficult (Siena College Division of Student Affairs, 2005). The

National Health Service (NHS) Foundation of Central Manchester (U.K.) and Manchester Children's University Hospitals (2005) describes a learning disability as a condition that either prevents or hinders somebody from learning basic skills or acquiring information at the same rate as most people of the same age (NHS, 2005).

LD may also be defined in relation to educational and academic expectations; The Partnership for Reading (2005), a federal U.S. research agency that collaborates with the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), and the U.S. Department of Education, states that learning disabilities exist when there is a significant discrepancy between what is expected of students, given their general level of cognitive ability, and their actual academic achievement.

Klassen (2002) examined the definitions of LD in Canada and discovered that, among the provinces, there were a number of operational definitions being used. Some form of traditional IQ/Achievement discrepancy method was relied upon in eight of the 10 provinces. However, in British Columbia a shift in LD identification practice was occurring. In this province, low reading comprehension, word identification, and pseudo-word decoding were considered to be sufficient in identifying students as being reading disabled (Klassen, 2002).

While learning disabilities have been linked to mental retardation, the conceptualization of mental retardation has undergone substantial changes over the past 25 years.

Earlier descriptions of disabilities as clinical-medical conditions and deficiencies in intelligence gave way to a disability model in which learning disability is seen as part of the variation in the human condition (Oliver, 1990). Some believe that students with LD are, in fact, typically above-average in intelligence (Anderson, 2001; National Institute for Learning Disabilities, 2003). Perhaps this idea comes from the possibility that those students with high IQ are diagnosed with LD more often due to the more obvious discrepancy between their abilities and their achievements (Anderson, 2001).

Overall, there is a movement away from defining LD in terms of IQ-achievement discrepancy models.

According to Klassen, Neufeld, and Munro (2005) this has led to a transformation in the professional practices of psychologists in North America. These researchers made an interesting observation regarding the LD related beliefs and practices. In Australian and Canadian schools who participated in the research and where changes had already taken place, IQ-achievement discrepancy models were no longer used to define LD. From individual surveys and focus group sessions, it was discovered that psychologists spent less time on psychometric assessment and more time on counseling and consultation.

Sams, Collins, and Reynolds (2006) made an interesting finding that involved LD, IQ, and emotions: these U.K. researchers assessed 59 people with LD on the Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI), on the British Picture Vocabulary Scale-II (BPVS-II), and on other tests requiring participants to discriminate among thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Through these

assessments, they found that among people with LD, those with higher IQ's and good receptive vocabularies were more able to discriminate among feelings, thoughts, and behaviours and were better able to identify different emotions.

This has pedagogical significance because cognition and motivation are not the only characteristics that affect learning. Emotions such as interest, anxiety and other wise are also significant and vital for the student.

It is thus crucial to use teaching techniques that enhance emotions and achievement (Gläser-Zikuda, Fuss, Laukenmann, Metz, & Randler, 2005).

In Scotland, the idea of learning disabilities has been extended to a broader "Additional Support for Learning" after the Scottish Education (Additional Support for Learning) Act 2004 was approved by the Scottish parliament in 2004.

The goal of this legislation is to improve and modernize the system for identifying and addressing the needs of those students and young people who need additional support due to learning barriers. There are many reasons why this additional support may be required, such as students being bullied or being especially gifted, bereavement issues, irregular school attendance, mental health problems, behavioral or learning difficulties, and particular disabilities such as blindness or deafness. For this reason, the legislation goes beyond education, to include professionals from social work, health, and other agencies.

Scottish education authorities are required to establish procedures to identify and fulfill the additional support needs that are required by every child who is under their educational responsibility. The needs are kept under review and other agencies are required to assist the education authorities to fulfill their

duties. These agencies potentially include a local authority's social work services, as well as any health board or any local authority or agency specified by Scottish Ministers (such as further education colleges or Careers Scotland). Education authorities are responsible for providing mediation services and for having arrangements in place to resolve disputes. If parents, or the authority, feel that their children are in need of additional support, they are able to request assessments. Support will be provided for children or young people with enduring, multiple or complex learning barriers through a new Coordinated Support Plan (CSP) (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006).

The literature review reveals three main tendencies in defining LD; while some authorities tend to consider the significance of the health and medical characteristics of LD, others focus on its social and educational distinctiveness.

International schools' conception of LD is exclusive since, as Gatley (cited in Haldimann and Hollington, 2004 p.7) stresses, unlike national schools international schools are usually isolated from their hosting national systems and may find it difficult to come to terms with what they should be doing in their schools regarding local agencies and collaborating with them. The growing recognition of setting support system in international schools is therefore a struggle of one institution, which makes it extremely difficult to operate in the right direction.

Categories and Descriptions of LD

Among the more common cognitive or global disabilities are dyslexia, speech and language disorders, processing deficits, Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and developmental difficulties (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2005).

Typical LD can be put into basic categories that include the following (National Institute for Learning Disabilities, 2005):

- Visual or Auditory Perception (perceiving differences in sights or sounds)
- Visual or Auditory Memory (this may refer to either short-term or long-term memory)
- Visual / Auditory Sequencing (putting what is seen or heard in the correct order)
- Visual-Motor Coordination
- Spatial Relations (sense of space, such as above-below, between, inside-outside)
- Temporal Relations (Sense of time)
- Abstract / Logical Thinking (National Institute for Learning Disabilities, 2005).

ADHD, the most commonly diagnosed behavioral disorder of childhood (Barkley, 1997), manifests itself by developmentally inappropriate levels of

attention, concentration, activity, and distractibility (Javorksy, 1996). Some children who are classified as having ADHD exhibit high levels of inattention only, or hyperactivity only. Most however, evidence both types of problems (Brown, 2000). In addition to poor attention and/or hyperactivity, the child is usually impulsive and has difficulty stopping to think about the consequences of their behavior (Barkley, 1997). The ADHD child is typically described as easily bored, disinterested, and satiated by material. The ADHD child is also typically unable to control his/her behavior according to the rules of the situation, the rules of his/her parents' house, the classroom, or the social rules of the peers with whom the child is playing. Therefore, children with ADHD usually have functional impairments across multiple settings including home, school, and peer relationships (Brown, 2000).

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's definition gives three important guidelines specifically for considering language difficulties: (1) the components of language that might be impaired, (2) the modalities that might be impaired and, (3) the processes that might be impaired (The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association 2005).

Processing difficulties interfere with information taken in through the senses. Individuals with processing difficulties may have difficulty with auditory or visual sequencing and memory (e.g., reversing letters, losing the place while reading, and forgetting instructions). These difficulties overlap with speech and language difficulties and other learning difficulties like dyslexia (Mathews, Pracek, & Olson, 2000).

There are a number of theories about the causes of LD; most involve medical definitions (internal neurobiological factors) rather than social and educational (external environmental) factors (Lyon et al., 2001). The most commonly cited causes are:

- differences in the structure and functioning of the brain (Lyon et al., 2001).
- premature birth and accompanying medical conditions, such as diabetes, meningitis, and so on (Swanson et al., 2003).
- drug or alcohol use during pregnancy. Research shows that a mother's use of cigarettes, alcohol, or other drugs during pregnancy may have damaging effects on the unborn child because these drugs pass directly to the fetus (Swanson et al., 2003).
- genetics LD tend to run in families, suggesting a genetic link (Cramer & Ellis, 1996) However, researchers have found that it is unlikely that a specific learning disability is inherited; rather, it is more like that a subtle brain dysfunction is inherited that leads to a LD (Swanson et al., 2003).
- lack of parental involvement during early development stages in the infant. So-called environmental factors like cultural deprivation or parenting and teaching styles may increase the effect of a neurological deficit, but they are not considered the cause of LD (National Institute for Learning Disabilities, 2003).

Barrera (2006) claimed that learning difficulties must not be identified by environmental factors but rather by extreme school underachievement, by a large discrepancy between academic achievement and the development of competence in cognitive skill, and by difficulties in cognitive skill competencies (such as the use of poor learning strategies and poor memory or attention) resulting from dysfunctions in the central nervous system.

However, it is important to note that environmental factors can produce learning difficulties. For example, Diperna (2000) conducted a study in which he focused on student variables including prior achievement, interpersonal skills, motivation, study skills, problem behaviors, and participation. Of these variables, prior achievement and motivation had significant effects on the current academic achievement of the student. Participation and study skills produced small effects, while problem behaviors and interpersonal skills produced negligible effects.

Cummins (2001b) observed that environmental factors can lead to school failure for minority students and how previous educational reform attempts such as bilingual education and compensatory education have failed. Cummins claimed that these attempts have failed largely because they have not significantly changed the relationships between minority students and educators and between minority communities and schools. Further, he pointed out that by redefining the roles within the classroom, community, and society in general, the empowerment of students would be promoted and this would help them to overcome their learning problems and succeed in school (Cummins, 2001b).

Cline (1998) supported the importance of examining the environment when children are encountering learning difficulties. Cline claimed that in order to improve the learning of students with special needs, it is important to examine multiple perspectives on the student's learning environment and to examine his or her response to it. Cline suggested that in order to gain a full understanding of the immediate learning environment of the child, the following factors must be considered: Where does the learning occur? Whom does the child associate with while learning? When do learning opportunities occur and when is teaching scheduled? What curriculum material is taught? What are the materials and methods that are used for teaching and communicating? (Cline, 1998).

LD can be diagnosed both formally and informally.

According to Burke, Cigno and Swanson, LD may be informally diagnosed by parent and teacher observation of significant delays in the child's skill development. A two-year delay in the primary grades is usually considered significant (Burke & Cigno, 2000; Swanson et al., 2003). For older students, such a delay is not as significant; therefore, LD is not suspected unless there is more than a two-year delay (Swanson, 1999).

According to Swanson, school psychologists usually make a formal diagnosis of LD by using a psycho-educational series of formal and informal tests such as suggested by the National Institute for Learning Disabilities (National Institute for Learning Disabilities, 2003). Standardized tests that compare the child's level of ability to what is considered normal development for a person of that age and intelligence are used (Swanson, 1999).

How Common Is LD?

Learning disability is effects 1 to 2.5% of the general population in the Western world (Swillen, Devriendt, Ghesquiere, & Fryns, 2001).

The Council for Exceptional Children (2005) estimated that anywhere from 0.5% to 30% of people experience a learning difficulty. Up to 10% of school-aged children have problems with educational achievement or behavior in school (Weinberg, Harper, & Brumback, 1995). According to Levine (1995), up to 15%-30% of children may experience school failure because of learning difficulties that result from subtle problems with neurological development or mild brain dysfunctions.

However, Lyon et al. (2001) pointed out that the reported frequency of LD varies substantially across studies, often due to differences in the definitions of LD and the populations to which the definitions are applied, instruments used, and study designs.

According to Hasselbring and Williams-Glaser (2000), students with LD account for nearly 60% of all children receiving additional support in US schools alone, and their numbers are said to be rising.

Each year, the U.S. Department of Education reports the number and percentage of school-age children receiving federal support for LD. For 2003-2004, 6% of U.S. students who were 3 to 21 years old were identified as having LD (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). This is more than 2.8 million youth.

Studies looking at adults in adult education programs, social services programs, and employment programs suggest that 40-80% of these adults may have LD. These research reports demonstrate the serious life-long effects that LD can have in preventing people from achieving academic and employment success in their lives (National Institute for Literacy, 2005). However, no such statistics exist for adult ESL learners (Simons, 1999).

Specific studies regarding LD commonalities in international schools are limited.

In a sample survey conducted in three international schools, Haldimann and Hollington (2004, p.11) found that high numbers ranging from 20 to 50 percent of international school students with special learning needs were found in regular classes including ESL students with special additional learning needs.

Chapter Summary

As viewed throughout the chapter, LD seems to be everywhere around us.

Due to the nature of international schools and its wide range and ever changing mixed ability level students' community, it is important to fully understand the complexity of LD. The various medical, social and educational definitions mentioned in this chapter are essential information all educators can benefit from on their journey of improving present available services at international schools and beyond.

CHAPTER 3

LD IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to narrow the Learning Differences in specific relation to the ESL classroom setting.

By exploring the research findings, the reader will hopefully better understand that although LD and ESL share some very unique similarities, they are far from being one and the same. Understanding the complexity of the relationship between LD and ESL shall serve as a stepping stone towards evaluation and future improvements. The readers will be presented with the difficulty in identifying learning differences in ESL students and especially within the international school community.

LD Common in the ESL Classroom

Root (1994) suggests it is probably fair to assume that the percentage of students found to be learning disabled in the United States is probably similar in other countries as well. Swanson (1999) agrees and adds it is probably also true that some types of LD will only be apparent with certain language styles or structures (such as alphabet versus symbolic, phonetic or other wise).

If so, what learning disabilities might be more common in the English as a Second Language classes? Are there any learning disabilities that are more common among ESL students?

Simons (1999) like Kusuma-Powell and Powell (2001) believe that in a situation very specific to ESL education, a student may show a learning disability while being taught English, that was not apparent in his/her native language. It is possible that a learning disability is so slight in the first language that an individual is able to compensate, for instance, by gleaning information from the overall context when specific words are not well understood. These coping strategies may not exist in the new language (Ganschow & Sparks, 1993).

Furthermore, a learning disability might not be apparent in a learner's first language due to the native language's systematic structure or transparency versus the English (Schwarz & Terrill, 2000). According to Root (1994), weaknesses in language skills will become more apparent for ESL students, especially those with LD, because the students are trying to learn not only language, but also a new language.

The interference of a student's native language to the process of learning English as a second language is particularly interesting and challenging in international schools.

According to Schwarz and Burt (1995b) for example, a student who is familiar with a non-Roman alphabet will be slowed by having to learn a new alphabet and an Arab student's hesitant reading might be explained by the change of direction in reading (right to left). Schwarz and Terrill (2000) add the assumption a reading disability may be more pronounced in English than in Spanish, for instance, where the sound-symbol correspondence system is more predictable.

The Learning Disabilities Association (2004), notes that ESL learners may have particular trouble in learning vowel sounds and vowel combinations. This may be due to native language knowledge. For example, some languages like Hebrew and Arabic require the reader to determine the vowel sounds based on context.

On the other hand, since the international schools community is so rich in nationalities, cultures and backgrounds, McNamara's observation (1998) that difficulties with oral language skills (such as listening and speaking) and auditory processing (such as remembering what was said) may be less common in an ESL setting if the students come from cultures that have traditions of oral history, story-telling, or are generally less reliant on written communication, is invaluable for better understanding our international schools' students with LD and ESL.

The different time periods usually required by ESL students in international schools to acquire conversational fluency and academic proficiency is another important component; Cummins (1979), distinguished between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) abilities. According to Cummins's findings bilingual students often acquire BICS to a functional level in two years. On the other hand, in order to reach a native speaker's academic level, bilingual students may require at least five years of language study. Although there is no cross-disciplinary consensus regarding the relationship of academic achievement and language proficiency, Cummins believes the distinction between BICS and CALP prevents possible misunderstanding regarding the cause of academic difficulties among bilingual students. With a vast majority of students with varying levels of English proficiency this information is invaluable for the ESL-LD concept in International Schools.

Major Characteristics of ESL Students with LD

According to Abrams, Ferguson and Laud (2001)a team of ESL and special education teachers and to Simons (1999) ESL students who have learning disabilities will show characteristics that are quite similar to those of non-ESL students who have learning disabilities. According to their findings, an inconsistent classroom performance and the lack of ability to advance at expected rates are common obstacles in most ESL and LD cases (Abrams, Ferguson, & Laud, 2001; Simons, 1999).

Most current research has mainly explored the adult ESL LD population. According to the American National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center (NALLD) an ESL adult student may show any one or more of the following characteristics of LD (NALLD, 1996):

- Reading difficulties, including problems with word decoding, comprehension, rate, fluency, or vocabulary;
- Difficulties in written language, such as problems with organizing thoughts, writing stories, spelling, and handwriting;
- Difficulties with oral language, including listening, speaking, vocabulary, and word finding;
- Irregularities in social behavior—for example, problems with family and social relationships, social perception, or emotions;
- Disorders in attention and concentration, seen as being overactive, impulsive, or distractible or having difficulty staying on-task;
- Problems in organization, planning, and managing time;
- Auditory processing problems, such as being unable to distinguish similar sounding words and letters, difficulty in remembering what was said, and mispronouncing words or common sayings
- Visual processing problems; reversing letters, being unable to follow a line on a page, and poor visual memory (NALLD, 1996)

Root's guide to LD for the ESL Classroom Practitioner (1994) suggests dividing the LD characteristics into four categories of difficulty. Although originally designed to describe native speakers, Root believes these can provide helpful

insights to all teachers including ESL professionals. The four categories of difficulty include classroom behaviors associated with word-retrieval difficulties, behaviors associated with selective attention immaturities, behaviors associated with visual and association confusion and behaviors associated with limited concept manipulation and inner language skills (Root, 1994).

Holt (1995) agrees an instructor can evaluate learning problems in an ESL classroom primary by using the technique of observation. According to Holt, LD individuals can be better identified especially when they are together in a group. The teacher notes the interaction within the classroom and according to individual behaviors, as simple as how students hold their pencils (Do they seem to be awkward? Are they holding the pencil too tightly? Are their books being held upside down?); how their eyes move to follow words (very slowly or fast); how they write (Do they hesitate or do they start writing right away? Do they take time over each individual letter?), and how they interact in groups (Holt, 1995). Also, one needs to ask about stress and learning (to be discussed later).

Difficulties in Identifying LD in ESL Students

The identification of LD in ESL students is challenging. As mentioned earlier, ESL students with LD demonstrate similar characteristics as non-ESL students with LD. At the same time, according to the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center (NALLD, 1996) some of the problems of learning disabled ESL learners are similar to *all* students who are learning a second language.

Root (Root, 1994) agrees it is not easy to differentiate between learning disability language problems and normal second language problems in ESL students.

However, leading professionals in the field of ESL LD and international education such as Simons (1999) and Kusuma-Powell and Powell (2001) agree that unlike the normal ESL student, for the learning disabled ESL student, language related difficulties do not lessen over time.

Schwarz and Terrill (2000) remind educators that there are reasons for slow academic progress in ESL classes that have nothing to do with LD. This point should not be forgotten during the identification process. They list reasons such as: Poor academic skills and study habits due to limited previous education in the learner's native language; a cultural mismatch between the instructor's teaching style and the learner's expectations; stress or trauma that refugees might have experienced, causing difficulty in concentration and memory dysfunction; socio-cultural variables such as age, physical health, social identity, and diet, among others; personal problems with health and family; sporadic attendance and lack of English practice outside the classroom(Schwarz and Terrill, 2000).

The diversity of influences on ESL students challenges LD identification. However, Schwartz and Terrill (2000) believe one clue to the identification problem is that the issues (mentioned above) will likely affect all areas of learning for a student, whereas a learning difficulty usually affects only one or a few components of the learning.

According to Kusuma-Powell and Powell (2001),and in specific regards to international education, the best indicator of a difference between LD and ESL learners can be found by observing the student's writing skills and abilities. In their view, the tracking and monitoring of student writing is superior to any diagnostic instruments that currently exist. While slow learners and learning disabled students appear to have the same types of poor writing skills at the start of the school year, differences in a few months become very noticeable. Specifically, students who are slow learners will continue to develop content and complexity in their writing while those who have learning differences will continue evidencing the same poor skills as they did at the start of the school year. The main indicators will then be such as writing with very little content and using repetitive sentence structure (Kusuma-Powell & Powell, 2001).

A further difficulty in identifying LD in an ESL student is the general lack of appropriate assessment tools. The standard tests used to diagnose LD are mainly designed for native English speakers and therefore cannot be considered reliable for use with ESL students (Haldimann & Hollington, 2004; Kusuma-Powell & Powell, 2001; NALLD, 1996; Schwarz & Burt, 1995a; Schwarz &Terrill, 2000). Some authorities recommend giving the tests in the student's native language (NALLD, 1996). However, according to others such as Schwarz and Burt (1995a), the concepts and language being tested may have no direct translations in the language and culture it is being translated to. Culture-specificity impacts the validity of the assessment instrument.

The literature offers LD ESL educators to use various specific assessment tools in order to assist the identification process. For example: Schwarz and Burt (1995a) recommend to consider using the Block Design and Picture Completion subtests of the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence-Revised while assessing nonverbal intelligence. For phonological processing, an adaptation of Rosner's Auditory Analysis Test (Rosner & Simon, 1971) has been suggested. This Auditory Analysis Test measures both phonological awareness and rapid naming and can be used with younger children as well older students. In other words, it provides phonological awareness tasks while measuring syllable/phoneme deletion. To complete this task, students are required to delete a syllable or a phoneme of a word and then say the remaining sound sequence.

Due to the difficulty of differentiating normal problems with learning English as a second language from ESL students with LD, Schwarz and Terrill (2000) attempted to narrow the primary step of the identification process. In order to simplify the process they suggested the ESL teacher should consider four main questions: Has the problem continued over time? ; Has the problem continued despite normal instruction? ; Does the learner show a pattern of strengths and weaknesses inside and outside of class? ; Does the problem interfere significantly with learning? (Schwarz & Terrill, 2000).

According to the authors if the responses to these questions are yes, it is more likely to conclude that a learning disability exists. It is then that the observation subsequently justifies the administration of further diagnostic tests to confirm LD.

Importance and Effect of LD in Relation to ESL

According to the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center (NALLD, 1996) any learning disability can impact social adjustment, self-esteem, and the ability to complete daily tasks. Schwarz and Terrill (2000) believe that in the long term, LD can reduce opportunities to find and keep a job. Yet, in the case of an ESL learner, these effects of LD can be magnified if the students fails to acquire the language of their new country.

Schwarz and Terrill believe that although a learning disability does not usually affect all areas of learning, if the learning disability prevents an ESL student from becoming skilled in the English language, it may have a significant impact on all aspects of the student's educational and community life (Schwarz & Terrill, 2000).

A learning difficulty in a new language, such as in an ESL classroom, may lead to frustration, emotional problems, additional difficulties in adjusting to a new culture, and finally giving up any attempt to learn English. Additionally, the stigma of being labelled with a learning disability may be devastating in some cultures (Schwarz & Burt, 1995b; Schwarz & Terrill, 2000).

According to Kusuma-Powell and Powell (2001), their rich experience in working with international schools shows that in many societies, the LD label is being interpreted as "stupid" or "lazy". McNamara (1998) adds that for those

traditions in which “saving face” is important, a learning disability classification may even breed more problems than it might help to solve.

Educators such as Almanza, Singleton and Terrill (1996) have decided that it is not helpful to LD ESL students to spend time and resources defining who has a learning disability because of the obvious disadvantages the process might have. Rather, educators such as Holt (1995) conclude that teaching methods which are beneficial for all ESL students, particularly “low-level” learners, appear to be valuable in helping LD students as well.

Obstacles for ESL Teachers with LD Students

One of the more significant obstacles mentioned in the literature regarding LD in the ESL classroom and specifically with regards to international schools around the world, is the lack of professional training (Haldimann & Hollington, 2004 Kusuma-Powell and Powell, 2001).

The unique needs and structure of international schools expand the challenge of the system; teachers’ international experience is a necessity. In his commentary to *Effective Learning Support in International Schools* by Haldimann and Hollington (2004) Gatley, highlights not only the lack of trained LD ESL teachers but also the value of experienced special needs teachers who work in these unique international communities. Gatley reminds the readers that “in order to be aware of the practicalities of how to offer good support we rely on a special needs teacher coming from one background or another; very few have long experience in international schools” (Haldimann & Hollington, 2004 pp.7).

According to Schwarz and Terrill (1995b) ESL teachers in general have little experience with LD and usually have no access to learning disability resources.

Holt (1995) adds that even only the needs assessment process itself, which usually falls to the hand of the ESL teachers, can be difficult for them to handle.

According to Schwarz and Terrill (2000), there has not been enough research on the dual subjects of LD and ESL, and therefore there are only a few instructional models available for the ESL teacher to use with LD students.

Not surprisingly, the additional economical and budget obstacle. According to Almanza et al. (1996) it is not unusual that there is only often very little "learning disabilities" funds are not always readily available at schools.

The Learning Disabilities Association (2004) documented for example, ESL students with a learning disability who progress the most when learning disability specialists and ESL teachers collaborated on individualized educational plans that are multisensory, phonics-based, and delivered in an environment where the student is comfortable. Time and resources required for such individualized instruction are usually unavailable at schools.

Chapter Summary

In the preface to their excellent guide to *Effective Learning Support in International Schools* Haldimann and Hollington (2004 p.9) write: “It is not acceptable for international schools to state that they will not enroll children with special needs, since by definition all international children have Special Needs”.

This chapter has established a link between the background problems associated with LD and ESL. Although at times the similarities between ESL and LD seem to overlap, it is important that teachers will realize they are two distinct problems. By learning about the commonalities and while studying the difficulties in identifying these similarities, it will be easier to comprehend the challenge and responsibility of ESL teachers around the world and especially at international schools.

CHAPTER 4

WAYS TO IDENTIFY LD IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

Introduction

The amount of information, theories and available diagnostic tools in the LD field is overwhelming. The goal of this chapter is to narrow the information regarding the identification process for LD students who may be referred to an ESL classroom, and to explore ways to recognize existing LD difficulties in ESL students who are already part of an ESL program.

Each LD ESL student is unique. Obviously, no one ESL classroom can be similar to another since the diversity of the group and its needs will always be unique. The population in any given international school, even more so. Nevertheless, ESL teachers around the world should investigate and strive to find interwoven similarities that will hopefully help them reduce frustration and increase their ability to guide and educate the students under their responsibility.

Identification and Solutions for LD in the ESL Context

The ECIS (European Council of International School), and CIS (Council of International Schools) are not-for-profit organizations dedicated to the advancement of international education. Their *Effective International School Series* and specifically *The Effective Learning Support in International Schools* guide written by Haldimann and Hollington (2004), offer reliable guidelines based on research and proven examples for an ongoing service improvement of international schools.

According to Haldimann and Hollington screening is a key step to a school's learning support program. "The assessment and identification process is multi-disciplined, and requires information from many sources in order to make the correct identification" (Haldimann and Hollington, 2004 p.65) and therefore they recommend that the first step to identifying LD students in the ESL classroom be the educational screening process. This process should not rely only on a checklist or test for diagnostic purposes but shall be a multi level and an ongoing process.

In addition, the researchers recommended progress sheets on which to place student scores and document progress over time. Screening should take place by classroom teachers and the assistance by learning support staff members. Educational screening and testing actually occurs in five distinctive phases. Screening for placement represents only the first phase. The second phase consists of administering a standardized testing program – one that has been developed to measure student abilities and achievement over time. In the

view of the European Council of International Schools, the Educational Records Bureau Comprehensive Testing Program is said to be most suitable for this particular purpose (Haldimann & Hollington, 2004, p. 66).

The second phase of the testing should include regular ESL students and would serve to provide baseline data for the rest of the class. Many secondary international schools also recommend the Secondary Level English Proficiency Test. Haldimann and Hollington (2004) also indicated that the CTY Spatial Test Battery could be used as an additional diagnostic tool.

During the third phase, a Student Referral Form should be completed and submitted to the student support team. Through this form, students would be referred to the LRC (Learning Resource Center) for individual screening. The fourth phase requires the administration of in-dept testing by an educational psychologist. It has been recommended that the Wechsler Intelligence tests should be included.

"Accountability is achieved through successful execution and evaluation of IEP (Individual Educational Plan) and requesting the entire staff to evaluate the special learning needs program…" (Haldimann and Hollington, 2004 p. 68). According to Haldimann and Hollington's recommendations, this process should be ongoing and formally evaluated at the end of each school year. A student cumulative checklist will ensure the safety and reliability of pertinent information in a portfolio. This should be cumulative throughout.

In 1994, Root (1994) has researched the problems associated with LD children in ESL classrooms. Although Root's report mainly deals with LD ESL

populations in the United States, the author commented regarding the international LD population and concluded that: “it is possible that many of the ESL students whom we view as poor language learners are struggling because they too have a learning disability. In many countries, learning disabilities are not recognized or, in some cases, they are recognized but not addressed (Root, 1994 p. 1).

According to Root, students with learning disabilities show certain classroom characteristics that are not evident in those who are not with LD. To assist the teacher with such identification, Root has adopted Hoffman’s recommendations to divide the manifestations of LD problems into four difficulty categories (Root, 1994). The recommendations (mentioned earlier in chapter 3 and to be discussed later) include classroom behaviors (a) associated with word-retrieval difficulties; (b) associated with selective attention immaturities; (c) associated with visual, association confusions; and (d) associated with limited concept manipulation, inner language skills. Root has warned caution must be taken when using this list for identification purposes because “…some are more applicable than others to second language learners and that it is not always easy to distinguish between permanent language-learning problems and normal second language problems…” (Root, 1994 p. 2).

According to Root typical classroom behavior is noticeable in each category:

(a). Classroom behaviors associated with word-retrieval difficulties:

- an appearance of persistent verbal reticence.

- diminishing of verbal spontaneity.

- tendency to raise ones hand presumably with the correct answer, but ending up not knowing why when actually called upon.

- tendency to express the wrong answer (associative naming error).

- increase in difficulty re: verbal organization (story telling, verbal explanations, verbal questions) as the content becomes more complex

- tendency to appear forgetful as the consequence of possible inadequate retrieval to actually well-stored information

- increase in difficulty getting started, both verbally and graphically (in terms of expressions and organization)

- inordinate amount of difficulty with phonics acquisition/application

- inordinate amount of difficulty with arithmetic calculations (rapid response to flash cards, swift adding of columned numerals)

(b) Classroom behaviors associated with selective attention immaturities:

- inconsistent levels of task-attentiveness

- diminishing levels of concentration vigilance and maintenance

- variable levels of performance accuracy (changing with increased group size and increased ambient noise levels)

- inconsistent levels of task-completeness

- appearance of being forgetful, when in fact the information was never really received or processed

- appearance of disorientation or confusion due to misperception of the linguistic signal (speech) presented under adverse listening conditions

- response delays as the student attempts to sort out verbal confusions

(c) Classroom behaviors associated with visual association confusions:

- higher-level difficulties with if-then and causal relationships
- higher-level difficulties with inferential reasoning/reading between lines
- excessive struggling to perform higher-level mathematic tasks (problem solving exercises) which require increased visual-spatial organization
- irregularities regarding perception of the elements contained in the whole of a concept or idea (also called gestalt).
- excessive attention to non-salient/irrelevant details
- attracted to salient details to the exclusion of other associated events

(d) Behaviors associated with limited concept manipulation, inner language skills:

- limited self-generation and use of strategies
- reduced analogous and associative reasoning skills
- compromised memory styles
- reduced efficiency/accuracy in information organization/re-organization
- compromised summarization/paraphrasing competencies
- restricted inferential reasoning skills
- tendency to be concrete; inordinate difficulties with abstract events
- questionable appreciation and use of humor
- restricted competencies for reading between the lines
- limited appreciation of “if-then” relationships
- limited skill generalization from one event to another
- limited skill for offering alternatives and generating hypotheses

- compromised competencies re: predicting consequences

- impaired reading comprehension skills re: recognizing main themes, discriminating main ideas from lesser ideas, recognizing and anticipating sequences of events, remembering the story line, etc.

- restricted mathematic problem solving skills

Barrera (2006) reaffirmed it is often difficult to differentiate between those students who have permanent language learning problems and those who have normal second language problems, and pointed out that many students who merely have trouble understanding the English language may actually be misdiagnosed and placed into special education classes when this is not necessary.

Both Barrera (2006) and Ortiz (1997) agree that attempts to reduce bias in formal assessment procedures have not always proven effective. For this reason, both authors believe some practitioners in the field should avoid relying on standardized tests that have not been validated with students that have limited English skills. Barrera and Ortiz agree evaluators should rely more on informal assessment procedures and actual work samples of students from the curriculum from which they are learning (Barrera, 2006; Ortiz, 1997). It was recommended by Barrera that by performing dynamic assessments of authentic curriculum-based learning tasks, educators will more easily be able differentiate between students that truly are LD and those that are merely limited in English language skills. A qualitative and quantitative analysis of student note taking can be an example in assisting such diagnosis process (Barrera, 2006).

Litt (2005) suggests that before evaluation of an ESL student can take place, it is necessary to discard the traditional testing model. Instead, data should be collected in a portfolio. Data should include assessment of all four skill areas, including speaking, reading, listening, and writing. In addition, data related to visual deficits, learning style, auditory processing, and auditory memory should be collected and entered into the portfolio as well. Litt (2005) believes that one of the greatest importances in assessing the student's portfolio information is the determination of the following:

1. Does the difficulty that the student is exhibiting exist in both languages or just in one language?
2. Is there a discrepancy between performance and IQ (this could be due to cultural bias of the IQ test)?
3. Are there socio-emotional problems (could be due to cultural differences)?

Litt (2005) also provided questions that the ESL teacher can ask in order to determine whether or not the student's difficulty is due to learning or language problems. Specifically, the author presented five important questions and noted how responses differ for those with and without learning problems: (a) Has the child's problem persisted over time? (If a language problem, it will improve over time; those with learning problems do not improve over time), (b) Has the problem resisted normal classroom instruction? (Those who do not improve after receiving explicit

instruction in the problem area probably have a learning problem), (c) Does the problem interfere with the child's academic progress? (d) Does the child show a clear pattern of strengths and weaknesses (e.g., have good oral skills but poor written skills)? And (e) Is there an irregular pattern of success? (Child appears to improve on one day and not on the next).

Fuchs, Fuchs, and Hamlett (1994) pointed out that the diagnostic-prescriptive approach (DP) has psychometric and efficacy problems. Therefore, an inductive assessment methodology (IA) is used as an alternative and has become increasingly more popular since it indexes student growth validly and reliably.

With this approach, the program is designed by the teacher who (a) initiates instruction with a validated practice, (b) on a regular basis, assesses the performance of students as a consequence of this instruction, and (c) uses the resulting data to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and, over time, make improvements to it for the individual student. Fuchs, Fuchs, and Hamlett (1994) believe that with inductive assessment methodologies, practitioners are able to develop more effective and responsive differentiated programs for students (*Gush* would readably apply here). Greater improvements in learning outcomes often result they add, with IA method rather than with a DP approach (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Hamlett, 1994).

According to Fuchs, Fuchs, and Hamlett, a signature feature for special education is the fact that it focuses on individual students as its unit when instructional planning is being carried out. Ultimately, the needs of an individual

student direct and drive the goals and the methods of special education. No matter how the program is implemented (large group, small group one-to-one) or where it is delivered (resource, special class, or general education setting) the needs, goals and methods are interwoven and form the essential part an IEP structure.

In order to design these individualized instructional programs, practitioners typically use one of two basic assessment strategies—the diagnostic-prescriptive assessment strategy and inductive assessment. Fuchs, Fuchs and Hamlett (1994) suppose that in the diagnostic-prescriptive approach, teachers deductively formulate programs based on initial sets of profiles and diagnostic test results. One of these diagnostics tests is the Woodcock Johnson Achievement test which reportedly includes tests with socio-economically and racially mixed samples.

Gormley, Gayer, Phillips and Dawson (2005) from Georgetown University in the United States, examined the Woodcock Johnson Achievement test in order to use it as a tool to reduce threat of selection bias in kindergarten students. In the Letter-Word Identification subtest, pre-reading and reading skills are measured. Children are required to identify letters appearing in large type and to correctly pronounce words (without necessarily knowing the meaning of the words). Pre-writing and spelling skills are measured in the Spelling subtest. Skills such as the drawing of lines, the tracing of letters, the production of lowercase and uppercase letters and the correct spelling of words are tested. In the Applied Problems subtest, problem-solving and early math reasoning skills are

measured. The child is required to analyze and solve problems in mathematics, performing lower level calculations (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005).

Neupert (2004) also examined ways to improve assistance to LD students in ESL classrooms. This study evaluated the effectiveness of a specific reading program (My Reading Coach program) on the learning of three different groups of students: those in regular education, ESL students and LD students. Neupert's study resulted in a number of interesting findings. First, as expected, higher reading scores were obtained by students in regular education as compared to ESL and LD students. However, all three groups improved their reading scores over time when provided with more lessons. As a result of this finding, Neupert suggested that: "...one way to bridge the gap in reading performance between regular students and those who are learning disabled or bilingual would be to increase the number of lessons available to learning disabled and bilingual students, especially when considering the acceleration in performance when exposed to more lessons" (Neupert, 2004 p. 7).

Craig, Thompson, Washington and Potter (2004) recommend the Gray Oral Reading comprehension test be administered to7- to 18- year old test-takers. This instrument measures reading accuracy rate, comprehension and fluency, may be a useful addition to Neupret recommendation in measuring LD and ESL reading skills.

Ability of ESL Classroom to Serve as LD Support Program

Ideally each individual student whether he/she may be an ESL student, a learning disabled student or an ESL LD student, will receive a professionally assisted and personally tailored program. In reality, restrictions and limitations do not often allow such privileges. Therefore, many times the ESL classroom turns to be the nest for most ESL LD students.

Abrams et al. (2001) and Root (1994) report ESL programs are often combined with other programs and students are frequently enrolled in various mainstream classrooms or an immersion program.

Nevertheless, students are still grouped in accordance with their respective proficiency levels.

Learning to be proficient in English is the basic and primary goal of the ESL classroom. However, due to the similarities of the obstacles LD and ESL students have (mentioned in earlier chapters), it may be possible for the ESL classroom to also provide some support for the LD students.

In an article concerning the needed help for ESL students with LD Betancourt (2004) encourages authorities to give ESL teachers' committees the authority to make the final decision on whether or not to provide services for students since it is difficult for counselors to know the students as well as teachers do.

According to Hamayan (2000) the ESL teacher will be able to notice LD in students when a student has a learning difficulties that persist over time, the

difficulties will be intrinsic to the learner. Difficulties may not persist for an ESL learner who does not have LD, since the problems will then be extrinsic.

Fielding-Barnsley and Murray (2002) offered identification tools and ways of teaching in the ESL classroom so that it may function to assist LD students as well. In their investigative research study highlighting diagnosis and intervention for ESL students with specific reading disability, the researchers agreed that complex areas of LD are difficult to define. They also noted that LD conditions are just as widespread in non-English speaking countries as they are in English speaking ones. When ESL students show signs of reading difficulty, it is quite possible that they have a specific reading disability.

The suggestions provided by Fielding-Barnsley and Murray (2002) from the results of their study are limited in that they are based on a single case study. Nevertheless, the suggestions have merit and command attention. The researchers recommended early identification processes, adapting the learning environment accordingly, and providing the necessary learning support such as learning skills and special services (from the field of LD) needed by these students. Their findings agreed with those of an earlier study conducted by Kauffman (1993) who concluded that “Students with disabilities and learning problems often need more structured methods, a varied strategy or a different style of presentation” (Kauffman, 1993, p.14).

According to Ortiz (1997), referral, assessment, intervention processes and adaptation to better serve culturally diverse LD students, is the answer to the identification and assistance provided in the ESL classroom.

In a newsletter article centered on the signs of learning difficulties with young children learning English at international schools, Haldimann (2005) commented that "early identification and accommodation for a learning disability will help young children learning English" in light of the fact that "…there can be between 5-10% of children who will have some type of learning disability at any given International School" (p. 2). The author provided a number of recommendations on ways that the ESL classroom can change to identify these children and work with them within the ESL classroom. For example:

- Train all ESL teachers in the area of learning disabilities so that children learning English (and native English speakers) in Early Childhood programs could be screened and accommodated in their early learning stages.
- Teach the 44 phonemes of the English language during early language learning because many children with LD have deficiencies in their ability to process phonological information. Children from culturally diverse backgrounds may have particular difficulties with phonological awareness.
- The Smith Characteristics of Learning Disabilities -published in the ECIS (European Council of International Schools) Effective Learning Support in International Schools - may help in screening older children who might need additional testing for LD or difficulties with the English language.

- The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-III) profile form, from the same book, has proven very helpful in discussing results of this test with teachers, students and parents.
- In cooperation with regular classroom teachers and Special Needs personnel, ESL teachers could create their own observation/ screening form for each ESL Early Childhood student, grouping the various early warning signs of learning difficulties, which might be observed and assessed in the classroom. The form could be divided into the following categories: Language/Speech Development, Language of Mathematics, Physical Complaints, Emotional, Gross and Fine Motor Skills, Cognition, Attention, Social Behavior, Self Help, Behavior and Self-Control, among other divisions.

For those students who were already diagnosed and truly are LD in the ESL classroom, Root (1994) offered ways to provide assistance.

The following suggestions may be integrated into the regular ESL classroom instructional routine. The more important and easily applicable of these include the following:

1. Give the gift of time whenever possible. LD students may require extra time to complete in-class and homework assignments as well as tests;
2. Consider administering tests in alternative formats: orally or on computer;
3. When appropriate, present material using graphic and/or sensory media;
4. Combine auditory and visual stimuli: say it and write it on the board whenever possible;

5. Have students use a word processor when possible. Word processing makes rewriting/revising much less laborious. Its value is immeasurable for those LD students with fine-motor, sequencing, spelling and other language manipulation problems;
6. Make it easy for students to ask for repetition; bear in mind that it is important to use the same language while repeating words, and so forth; do not change the construct and defeat the purpose of the repetition;
7. Do not issue too many instructions at the same time. Break tasks down into component parts;
8. Issue the instructions for each part one at a time;
9. Allow time in advance for students to think about items to be covered in class. Provide plenty of pre-discussion, pre-writing, pre-reading lead time and other pre-teaching activities;
10. Reduce the level of distraction in the room;
11. Explicitly state the lesson topic; proceed in a structured, concrete manner; progress from the concrete to the abstract; do not jump from one topic to another;
12. Frame material by relating it to past classroom or personal experience and highlighting new material;
13. Whenever possible, cluster material so that it is organized by category;
14. Conduct frequent notebook checks of students work;
15. Look for students intra-individual balancing strengths; recognize, praise and reinforce students islands of competence;

16. Have students and teachers log together how they best learn. Have students make a chart like the one on the following page of their strengths/challenges so that they as well as the teacher, can learn from their perceptions of how well they read, write, remember, listen, etc.

Chapter Summary

The various practical suggestions on ways to identify and work with LD students in the ESL classroom may serve as a starting point for many ESL teachers and especially those who work with culturally diverse populations such as in international schools. Gunderson and Siegel (2001) believe that teachers can and should trust their own observations and instincts. This should encourage ESL teachers in their work and give confidence that though complicated and challenging, the ESL classroom can serve as an LD support program.

The ESL classroom can function effectively and assist LD students when ESL teachers are aware that the student's LD condition exists and when they have receive adequate information and hopefully ideally appropriate training to address the condition. It is important for ESL classroom teachers to remember they can play an important role and influence their classrooms' settings.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

Introduction

Educational methods and assessment evaluation instruments have been examined and discussed for decades, may one say centuries. Ultimately however, it could be argued that educators nevertheless remain with fragments of instruments and methods yet we still insist on “reinventing the wheel” by making yet another tool. Might it not be more profitable therefore, to take those effective fragments that we currently have in place and build on them to make an instrument / program that could be used with the ESL LD students in international schools? By this “combination – application” approach, we may be closer to making the so-called move from rhetoric to reality where this unique population is able to get the help that it needs.

The review of the literature is of programs’ elements that could be utilized by an ESL LD population in an international setting. These resources are invaluable since they will assist in concentrating on actions rather than trying to build up a program from scratch.

Steps towards Practical Solutions

It is evident that before any step can be taken in effort of supporting the ESL LD population in schools, the consciousness regarding the needs and the differences of both ESL and LD students needs to be raised. Haldimann and Hollington (2004) have provided one approach that appears to be quite useful specifically in international schools and could be included in a school-wide presentation when introducing a Special Needs program to teaching and support personnel:

> Most international schools provide their clientele with the school's philosophy of education which includes mission statements, aims and objectives…[To raise the consciousness level] the school policy manual could include a brief statement about Optimal Match and statements such as: to provide additional individual support and enrichment through a Learning Resource Centre and in the regular classroom… (Haldimann and Hollington, 2004 p. 38).

Haldimann and Hollington (2004) recommend that anyone making such a presentation should consider the following:

- The structure of the school should reflect flexibility that permits appropriate initiatives for Special Needs students
- Start with a small but demonstrable success and build on;
- Faculty, parents, and students should be briefed before such a presentation takes place
- Initiatives should first be advertised well and placed within the philosophy and policy of the school.

Haldimann and Hollington (2004) point to six key areas that need to be addressed before the creating a Special Needs/Learning Support program is announced. These include policies; organization, services and personnel; assessment and identification; program delivery and accountability; parent-school relationship; and evaluation. Although many more questions should be considered, two of the more important questions under each area are listed below. These will serve as examples of the types of queries that should be considered by the school before announcing program creation:

Policies:

- Are enrolment criteria clearly stated in the policies?
- What type of Special Needs student can be realistically accommodated?

Organization, Services and Personnel

- What kind of services will the school provide?
- Who will provide the services?

Assessment and Identification

- What type of assessment is needed?
- How are students referred for assessment?

Program Delivery and Accountability

- What type of program can the school deliver to children with special needs?
- How will the program be evaluated to determine whether or not it is effective?

Parent-School Relationship

- What support can the school provide to parents of children with special needs?
- How can parents participate in the school process?

Evaluation

- How will the school evaluate the overall Special Needs/ Learning Support program effectiveness?
- Who will evaluate the LRC staff and what specific criteria will be used for this purpose?

The development of a Special Needs/Learning Resource Centre, as recommended by Haldimann and Hollington (2004) would function to identify students requiring learning support through testing and administration of various types of diagnostic tools, then to recommend the type of learning support that students might receive. Students being assessed by the LRC personnel can be part of the student population referred to the LRC as per the referral committee described above.

According to Haldimann and Hollington (2004), an additional function of the LRC would be to regularly advise the classroom teacher on those ways in which the class curriculum could be adapted to meet student needs. “However,” the researchers caution, “it is important to consider all aspects of what is involved before starting up such a program and to establish staff consensus regarding Special Needs and how developing a Special Needs/Learning Support program

will impact on the regular classroom teachers" (Haldimann and Hollington 2004, p. 17).

A referral committee could be one of the first steps to bring a positive change in identifying LD students and suggesting early intervention strategies, when needed.

As noted by Ortiz (2001), "Early intervention for English learners who are having difficulty in school is first and foremost the responsibility of general education professionals" (p. 5). This will indicate to parents, teachers, and students alike that the school has a positive climate that is supportive. This type of committee could be comprised of special education teachers, principals, assessment personnel, ESL teachers and a variety of other specialists. According to Ortiz (2001), there are a number of positive outcomes after establishing such a committee. These include the following:

- Reduction in the number of students perceived to be at risk by general education teachers.
- Reduction in the number of students inaccurately identified as having a disability
- Reduction in the number of students inappropriately referred to remedial or special education
- Improvement of student outcomes in both general and special education.

As also explained by Ortiz (2001), decisions made by such a committee would be formed from collective prevention, early intervention, and referral

process data. Comprehensive individual assessments for certain students could be recommended to the Special Needs/Learning Resource Centre that was described earlier. Those would be students who were not helped by clinical teaching or by previous interventions.

Gerber and Popp (1999) reported that one strategy that is being used to provide special education services to LD students is collaborative teaching, or co-teaching. This is a form of partnership teaching in which special education teachers are teamed with general educators in an attempt to keep LD students in the regular classroom. Direct services are provided in general education classrooms through joint instructional planning and delivery. By simultaneously using their complementary skills, the general, ESL teachers and special education teachers are jointly responsible for teaching all of the students. In this arrangement, grade-level curriculum, large group instruction, and effective teaching are provided by the general educator, while the special educator provides expertise in instructional strategies, learning styles, analysis and adaptation of instruction, clinical teaching, behavior management and language support. In this way, students can be transitioned more smoothly from segregated placements and early intervention can proactively address academic or learning difficulties (Gerber & Popp, 1999).

Through focus groups, Gerber and Popp (1999) studied the perspectives of LD and non-LD students and their parents toward collaborative teaching. Overall, the students and parents were reportedly highly satisfied with this approach to education. The students' self-esteem and academic understanding

(improved grades and deeper understanding of the material) apparently improved. In general, classroom procedures, teaching, and learning were improved. Collaborative teams answered more student questions and provided more feedback to these students. However, concerns were expressed regarding poor communication of the model to parents, the need to ensure that alternative models would be provided when no student progress is made in co-taught classrooms and the lack of continuity of the model from one grade to the next. There were also reports of student frustration and confusion due to mixed signals from teachers, as well as concerns about less challenging curricula. Parents reportedly voiced their opinion that the co-teaching model had to be matched carefully to the students. Students alluded to the impact on discipline that resulted from the student makeup in the classrooms. These are the types of issues that must be addressed in effective co-teaching situations. Strong collaborative teams need to be developed through professional building opportunities for teachers, including time for teachers to share and negotiate their teaching beliefs and to establish clear joint procedures and rules (Gerber & Popp, 1999).

Teachers who participate in collaborative teaching may need support from university teacher-researchers, administrators, peers, and staff development personnel to establish mutually compatible and satisfying goals that result in improved student learning outcomes (Trent, 1998); to challenge each others' perspectives, practices, and assumptions (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 194); to gain exposure to multiple instructional models and effective research-based practices

(Kauffman, 1994); and to become part of learning communities where new teacher skills and knowledge are tried out and integrated into existing schema and where new pedagogy is created based on discussion, action, and research (Englert, Tarrant, & Rozendal, 1993).

Murawski (2006) examined LD in an inclusive environment with co-teaching for ninth-grade English in four conditions (co-teaching, general education students only, mainstreaming, and special education students only). When writing and reading assessments for students with LD were compared between these conditions, no significant differences were discovered. Murawski indicated that this may be due to the fact that teachers who are engaging in co-teaching lack common planning and the utilization of varied instructional models. These are crucial for the success for this type of teaching. It is important to note that since students no longer have access to pull-out sessions in co-teaching environments, the inability of LD students to comprehend content text severely restricts their class participation and academic performance. For this reason, co-teachers must rethink their traditional teaching roles and they must acquire new skills that will assist students in their reading comprehension (Weish, 2006).

Diagnostic Tools

Schools, committees and teachers may find the amount of available diagnostic tools overwhelming. Though extremely challenging, it is important to view and learn the methods in order to be able to better select the tools which will be most likely suitable to the needs of a specific school and a unique community such as international school are;

Abrams et al. (2001) suggest that parents, psychologists, and teachers, among other pertinent individuals be contacted to review records for information about a student experiencing difficulty with learning English. The information will be documented as individual portfolios.

A student portfolio should contain developmental history, testing information, language/cultural experience, psychological issues, and learning disability signals. Special attention will be given to LD signals that the student might experience. The more evident and crucial signals being such as: (1) Language-based, non-verbal characteristics. Non-verbal characteristic signals would include (but not be limited to) processing lag, inability to focus, memory difficulty, lack of abstract nonverbal reasoning, inability to organize time appropriately, poor work and study habits across subjects, in ability to sustain concentration levels, and avoidant behavior in the classroom.
(2) Visual and auditory processing signals which would include phonological/phonemes problems, confusion with directionality (letter order), and slowness of speed discerning subtle visual differences (Abrams et al., 2001).

(3) Language-based signals which would consist of disorganized speech/ writing and non fluent speech/writing.

One reportedly extremely useful type of student portfolio is the Primary Language Record (PLR), originally developed in the UK. This innovative system allows educators and others to observe and keep records of children's development and progress in listening and talking, writing and reading. Although not yet common in the Far East it is popular in the U.K., U.S., Australia, and Canada and has greatly aided formative assessment in literacy and helped teachers to evaluate their own teaching practices.

Two standardized forms constitute the PLR. The "official record" allows space for parent and student interviews and has sections for summaries of important student learning elements. It is meant to accompany the student from one school, grade, or classroom to another as recommended earlier. The other form is used to illustrate student processes as they progress over time.

Immediate observations of students' activities are recorded. This develops the student portfolios that are so crucial to student assessment. A section allows for the recording of reading samples using informal assessment (for use with all students), running records (for inexperienced records), or miscue analysis (for more experienced readers). Two reading scales are also included to be used with this assessment. One of these shows student progress from Dependent to Independent reader, while the other demonstrates progress from Inexperienced to Experienced reader (Primary Language Record, 1992).

Several benefits have resulted from the use of the PLR in classrooms over traditional testing situations. These include the creation of learning-centered classrooms where the students *can* do is emphasized instead of what they cannot do. Increases in student performance and positive risk taking have been observed, as well as students taking more responsibility for their own learning. This has led to positive learning gains. Student conferences, student self-reflection, and parent/guardian interviews have led to improved learning environments that foster critical thinking skills and open communication with both students and parents/guardians. Although the PLR has proven to be an effective assessment tool, many considerations must be made before this tool can be used to maximum effectiveness. These include structural and instructional issues such as teacher input; administrative support; mandatory or voluntary use; staff development; the possible use of outside consultants; possible classroom disruptions that may occur from its use; required paperwork; and funding (Primary Language Record, 1992).

Another example for a student learning portfolio contribution is available through eSCORE.com, a subsidiary of Kaplan/The Washington Post Company. This modern tool is a Web based educational services site that offers reading assessments and personalized learning plans to provide parents with recommended action steps that they can take to improve their child's learning skills or to help their child to learn to read. The reading assessments are available for every grade level and focus on needs and strengths in reading comprehension, phonics, understanding sentence structure, antonyms,

synonyms, word analysis, and so forth. Parents are provided with feedback on the specific learning needs of the child. Products, services, and activities are recommended to help improving the child's skills in reading (eSCORE.com, 2000).

Due to frequent relocation and the cosmopolitan characteristics of many international schools' parent, the World Wide Web is opening a new and fresh communication channel with both schools and students. A few years back this modern connection would sound like science fiction to many. Today, the reality is different. As international cross cultural educators it is our responsibility to keep abreast of appropriate technological advances in educational resources and consider incorporating them into our programs and services.

It is also important to note that the use of IQ-achievement discrepancy to classify poor readers has played an important role in the academic areas of reading and learning disabilities (Brown, 2000; Swanson, Graham, & Harris, 2003).

The Smith Checklist of Characteristics of Learning Disabilities would also be an excellent diagnostic tool to determine if the child has a learning disability, according to Haldimann (2005) and Haldimann and Hollington (2004). As previously noted, the Smith Checklist may help in screening older children who might need additional testing for learning disabilities or difficulties with the English language (see Appendix).

Another possible diagnostic tool could be the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-III) profile form. In the first part of this test, a child listens to

and then repeats a sequence of numbers spoken by the interviewer. In the second part, the child listens and then reports a spoken sequence of numbers in reverse order. The sequences increase in length until a child is unable to repeat the sequence correctly. According to Haldimann, (2005), this test has been proven very helpful in assessing the student and also in discussing the results of this test with teachers, students and parents.

The Woodcock-Johnson III (WJ III), is said to be based on cognitive processing theory, and is likely to set the standard for diagnostic testing (Blackwell, 2001). The WJ III's battery of two distinct co-normed tests of cognitive abilities and achievement comprehensively measure achievement and abilities across a wide range of ages (2 to 90). These batteries apparently work together to provide for either focused norm-referenced or comprehensive assessments of specific cognitive abilities, general intellectual ability, academic achievement, and oral language. More accurate results are obtained than by comparing the scores from instruments that are separately normed. The WJ III is also reportedly relatively easy to administer and score objectively. In addition, its administrative features enable it to be used with LD students and students with other needs (Blackwell, 2001).

Haldimann (2005) also recommends the use of the Test of Written Language-3 (ProEd). This is yet another diagnostic tool that can be used for assessment purposes. This test instrument consists of several subtests for testing English language. In Haldimann’s (2005) view, the Spontaneous Writing

subtests of this particular test instrument provide the fastest way of identifying ESL/LD problems. She further explains:

> This section has two different pictures for the student to choose one to write a story about the picture. I ask that the student cannot use an eraser but make brackets around any spelling mistake. This way you can see what type of mistake the student makes…phonetic awareness is usually one of the basis of LD problems… (Haldimann Personal Correspondence, 2005).

Kusuma and Powell (2001, p. 36) have provided a listing of five diagnostic tests recommended for the use of international schools around the world for better identifying LD students in the school's community. These would be useful for schools should they decide to create the Special Needs/Learning Support Centre as defined earlier. The listing is as follows:

- Mini-Battery of Achievement (Woodcook-McGrew-Werder)
- KeyMath Diagnostic Inventory of Essential Mathematics (American Guidance Service)
- Stanford Diagnostic Mathematics Test, 4th Edition, 1995 (The Psychological Corporation) and
- Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery, III. Tests of Achievement and Tests of Cognitive Ability (Riverside Publishing Company).

Schwarz and Burt (1995a) suggested that the Block Design and Picture Completion subtests of the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence-Revised are sometimes recommended to assess nonverbal intelligence (Schwarz & Burt, 1995a). An adaptation or modification of Rosner's

Auditory Analysis Test has been suggested for phonological processing because it includes phonological awareness tasks while measuring syllable/phoneme deletion. The Word Identification and Word Attack subtests of the WRMT-R have been suggested for assessing word recognition skills.

Also, the Passage Comprehension subtest of the WRMT-R and the comprehension component of the Gray Oral Reading Test-3 could be useful diagnostic tools to assess the student's reading comprehension skills and abilities. Listening abilities could be measured using a combination of receptive language measures. Such tools as the Picture Vocabulary and Grammatical Understanding subtests from the Test of Language Development-2: Primary could be used to test narration, grammar, and vocabulary skills.

When Van Noord and Prevatt (2002) used the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Third Edition (WISC-III) and the Woodcock/Johnson Tests of Achievement-Revised (W/J-R) on protocols from 110 evaluations, they found that the WISC-III, but not the W/J-R, resulted in notably more errors by inexperienced testers. In fact, these scoring errors resulted in two cases where the determination of learning disabilities would be changed. Overall, however, their findings supported previous research that interpreter reliability on most subtests of typical IQ and achievement tests is strong. Also, novice scorers are unlikely to make errors that would affect a diagnosis of LD based on IQ/achievement discrepancy measures.

It is important for the schools to remember that there are a number of factors that could affect the reliability and validity of diagnostic testing instruments.

Napoli and Raymond (2004) pointed out that diagnostic field tests are often viewed as being artificial and contrived and have little relevance to the real world. Students may thus be unmotivated to do well on these tests. They may even resent writing them. So, the reliability of the test data will be poor since non-realistic performance data is being produced. This data will be a poor indicator of curriculum learning or mastery due to erroneous conclusions of student learning. Student coursework grades and test grades, on the other hand, are more reliable and accurate.

Paris, Lawton, Turner, and Roth's (1991) studies report that the validity of test scores is often affected by the cynicism and suspiciousness that student in grades 2 to 11 feel towards testing, possibly due to the large number of achievement tests that they have been required to write. Shepard (1994) argues that during the past decade, 4-, 5-, and 6- year olds have been tested excessively and inappropriately with inappropriate paper-and-pencil tests being used to prevent entry into school by some 5-year olds. Many students, especially low achievers, are anxious about these tests and they either cheat, apply little effort, or use test-taking poor-strategies. The resulting poor test scores preserve student feelings of self-competence but undermine the validity of the tests and discourage genuine learning. Testing must be further developed to prevent these

counterproductive reactions and make educational assessment more useful (Paris et al., 1991).

Cultural, economic, political, and social influences also affect the reliability and validity of assessment tests at all levels. This is because ideological and political factors influence decisions, even about those matters that are apparently technical in nature. In addition, cultural and social influences affect how students respond to assessment and affect learning (Gipps, 1999). Solano-Flores and Nelson-Barber (2001) proposes that, for science assessment, cultural validity is a form of test validity since there is evidence that society and culture affect the mind and thinking of an individual. For this reason, assessment must take into account the sociocultural context in which students live and how it affects the way that students make sense of topics in science and the ways in which science problems are solved. This is necessary to ensure the cultural validity of these tests.

Sociocultural influences include beliefs, values, communication patterns, experiences, learning and teaching styles, epistemologies, and socio-economic conditions that constitute the cultural backgrounds of the students (Solano-Flores & Nelson-Barber, 2001). Solano-Flores and Nelson-Barber (2001) believed that student diversity in assessment is not handled very well (for example, translating or adapting tests, estimating cultural bias in tests, providing accommodations in assessment) since these methods are very limited and do not consider the sociocultural perspective. The achievement of cultural validity would appear to conflict with testing assumptions and principles, such as standardization and item

independence. For this reason, new procedures and paradigms must be adopted when assessment procedures are being developed (Solano-Flores & Nelson-Barber, 2001).

The suggestions found in the literature are essentially theory focused. It is true that, despite inherent problems, individual diagnostic tools have been assessed as to validity and reliability and their ability to assess learning disabilities has been proven. However, no specific studies were found from this researcher's search of the available literature that used a combination of some of these tests to accurately identify learning disabled children and especially those in the ESL classroom. Little was found that used the theoretical constructs and translated them into actual practice, in other words. A few studies were found that evaluated various types of reading programs, but were not focused on assessing effectiveness of LD identification methods in the ESL classroom.

Chapter Summary

An organizational self evaluation and analysis of a schools' program and its students' personal needs must take place before setting the goal of building up a support system. The review of 'steps towards practical solutions' should be carefully read in order to wisely adopt the better solution that may apply to a specific situation. Schools differ and international schools differ even more. It is evident from the resources that the preparation phase is crucial. The variety of diagnostic tools should be viewed second. It is only after a systematic program was created that there is a place to consider the specific school population's needs and the application of the available diagnostic tools.

SUMMARY

Discussion

The literature review allowed for the clarification and deeper understanding of what might be available for LD and ESL students. To reiterate, the combination of the ESL-LD-International School is a unique variable that has its own needs because LD and ESL can be difficult to distinguish. The social experiences of ESL transient students bring yet another level that needs addressing. Going beyond the simple Individualized Educational Program (IEP) towards a better match that is built on socio-psychological variables and spanning out to appropriate educational interventions appears to be the best approach for the ESL-LD in international schools' setting.

Limitations

The populations according to the literature examined were mostly that of the adult ESL population. This necessarily limits how the findings might be generalized to other populations. The literature search was driven by the research questions, one of which concerned the principles of identification of LD within ESL. While the literature at hand did in fact isolate some of those principles, one would necessarily question whether there might be outstanding, as yet to be identified, principles. The literature herein is predominantly

American. As such, there will be limitations to how these findings can be generalized to other settings.

Recommendations

Conduct a pilot study to assess how effective the practical approaches might actually be in the ESL LD population of an international school, perhaps to be followed by the relative and appropriate empirical research, accordingly. Teacher training should necessarily emphasize the difference between LD and ESL working towards better understanding of the psychological similarities but neurological differences between the two. Also, how receptive language and expressive language skills can cause the outsider to subsequently misinterpret thus leading to a momentum that perpetuates the stereotype of the ESL student.

Summarily, further research is recommended for: Expanding the design of the IEP model including practical steps for implementations in the international school setting, teacher education, and psycholinguistics for ESL teachers.

APPENDIX

Smith Checklist Of Characteristics Of Learning Disabilities

Student Name:	Date:	Birth Date:
Nationality:	Language(s):	Grade:
School:	Person Completing Checklist:	

- Do I hate to read?
- Do I get headaches when I read?
- Do I lose my place when I read?
- Do I read very slowly?
- Do I mix up *p* and *d* or *b* and *q* or *on* for *no*?
- Do I read *8* for *3* or *5* for *2*?
- Do I read *llamas* for *small* or *unclear* for *nuclear*?
- Do I hate to read out loud?
- Do I omit word endings when I read aloud, reading *row* for *rowing?*
- Do I have trouble following spoken instructions?
- Do I mix up my left side and my right?
- Do I get lost easily?
- Do I often wish people would repeat what they said?
- Do I have trouble comprehending what is said on telephone?
- Do I hate talking on the telephone?
- Do I often miss the point of jokes?

- Do I get confused by puns, plays on words, sarcasm?
- Do I have trouble remembering names?
- Do I have trouble remembering dates, telephone numbers, and zip codes?
- Do I have trouble organizing my thoughts?
- Do I forget what I was going to say?
- Do I forget words I know well?
- Do I tend to stutter?
- Do I avoid discussions?
- Am I a very visual person rather than a word person?
- Am I easily sidetracked?
- Do I have trouble sitting still?
- Am I restless, always moving my feet, my fingers, or my mouth?
- Do I have trouble waiting for things?
- Am I usually late to work or school?
- Do I have trouble reading a watch?
- Do I have trouble meeting deadlines?
- Do I skip or omit words, sentences, or paragraphs?
- Do I have to reread material to understand it?
- Do I avoid writing whenever possible?
- Do I use the telephone rather than write?
- Do I spell badly?
- Do I have trouble even writing a thank-you note?
- Am I unable to take notes?

- Am I unable to fill out forms?
- Does my writing look like chicken scratches? Is it tiny and cramped?
- Do I hate using scissors, pasting, or tying knots?
- Do I have trouble fixing things with my hands?
- Do I have great trouble with math?
- Are decimals and fractions very difficult for me?
- Is long division really difficult for me?
- Do I have problems counting change?
- Do I have trouble keeping my bankbook straight?
- Am I disorganized?
- Are my things always in a mess?
- Do I lose everything?
- Am I over organized?
- Do I have to have everything in place?
- Do I have trouble organizing myself to begin things?
- Do I have trouble paying attention?
- Am I very distractible?
- Do I have trouble staying on task?
- Do I forget to bring necessary things to class or work?
- Do I hand my work in late?
- Do I have to do one thing at a time to be successful?
- Do I have trouble doing several things at once?
- Am I inflexible?

- Do I hate surprises or changes in routine?
- Am I easily overwhelmed?
- Do I have trouble breaking things down into manageable chunks so I can begin with one thing, move on the next and then on to the next to finish?
- Do I have trouble setting priorities?
- Do I avoid making decisions?
- Do I start things and never finish them?
- Do I tend to back out of things, quit, or not show up?
- Am I easily frustrated?
- Do I tend to explode when frustrated?
- Do people tell me that I'm hard on myself?
- Do I exhaust myself from working so hard?
- Do I plunge into things without thinking them through?
- Do I concentrate on details and miss the main point?
- Do I tend to be inconsistent and erratic?

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