Remedial Literacy

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Understanding your learner

When starting to teach a learner (of any age) with literacy difficulties, it is important to understand the reasons for those difficulties. A learner is likely to fit into one (or more) of the categories below:

- **Specific Learning Disability (dyslexia)**
- **Global Learning Difficulty (low ability)**
- **Environmental effects (school disruption, health issues, etc)**

Sometimes it is obvious which category a learner fits into. A bright, articulate learner with good verbal abilities clearly does not belong in the global learning difficulty category. It is also unlikely that environmental effects alone will have caused a major literacy problem. It is therefore easy to conclude that dyslexia is a possibility.

On the other hand, a learner who appears to be in the global learning difficulty category can be much more complex. Bear in mind that there are many factors which affect how a learner is able to process information. Expressive language (and verbal fluency) can be affected by verbal dyspraxia or other language difficulties. It is crucial to be able to get an accurate idea of intellectual potential.
Assessment

When starting to work with a learner, it is necessary to have some basic assessment information. There are a number of options for specific tests. Bear in mind that P.A.T. tests often look more at functionality, rather than accuracy and levels therefore are generally higher than those obtained through internationally standardized tests. Recommendations for specific tests are given below:

- **Reading accuracy**: Neale Analysis
- **Reading comprehension**: Neale Analysis
- **Listening comprehension**: Neale Analysis. Comprehension questions can be used as a general guideline, but are not accurately normed for listening comprehension.
- **Spelling**: Schonell or Peters

Specialized Assessment Information

This can include specialist SLD assessments (SPELD, Seabrook McKenzie, etc), which contain a considerable amount of detail about individual processing skills. These include intellectual ability, which needs to be assessed in some form for a formal diagnosis of dyslexia to be made.

Diagnostic Software Programmes

There are a number of computerized assessment programmes which are designed for school use. These include:

- **Lucid Cops (Cognitive profiling system)**: Age 4 – 8
- **LASS Junior**: Ages 7 – 12
- **LASS Secondary**: Ages 11 – 16

Intellectual Assessment

It is important to get an accurate idea of the intellectual ability of the learner, particularly if there appear to be processing difficulties.

Formal assessment reports from psychologists or specialist centres use an IQ test, such as the WISC, Stanford Binet or Woodcock Johnson. These have to be administered by a psychologist or qualified tester.

School-based intellectual assessments are:

- **Ravens Matrices**: Written test of non-verbal IQ (can be administered by an appropriately trained specialist teacher)
- **Lucid Ability range**: Computerized software programmes assessing verbal and non-verbal IQ. Ages 4 – 8, 7 – 12, 11 – 16 and adult
## Skills and knowledge needed for spelling

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<td>segmentation</td>
<td>orthographic knowledge</td>
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<td>blending</td>
<td>word structure</td>
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<td>morphology (forms of language)</td>
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<td>discrimination</td>
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## What is spelling?

“The ability to spell is a highly complex and active intellectual accomplishment and not, as has historically been viewed, a low-order memory task.”

Hodges (1981)

## Terminology

- **phonology**: The sounds of a language
- **phoneme**: A single sound
- **grapheme**: A single letter
- **consonant digraph**: Two letters making one sound (sh, th, ch)
- **blend**: Two or three letters making separate sounds (br, tr, str)
- **vowel digraph**: Two vowels making one sound (ou, ai, ea, ee)
- **r’ modified vowel**: Vowel + r (ar, er, ir, or, ur)
- **schwa**: Indeterminate sound in a word (letter, about)
### Sounds (Phonemes)

There are 44 sounds in the English language

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel phonemes</th>
<th>Consonant phonemes</th>
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<tr>
<td>a (hat)</td>
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<td>w (watch)</td>
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### Schonell Spelling Test

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<td>institution</td>
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<td>equally</td>
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<td>merely</td>
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<td>source</td>
<td>immediate</td>
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<td>sufficient</td>
<td>broach</td>
<td>customary</td>
<td>especially</td>
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<td>cemetery</td>
<td>leisure</td>
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<td>surmount</td>
<td>politician</td>
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<td>mortgage</td>
<td>equipped</td>
<td>exaggerate</td>
<td>amateur</td>
<td>committee</td>
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**Spelling Age = \frac{\text{no. of correctly spelt words} + 5}{10}**

For example: \( SA = \frac{25 + 5}{10} = 7.5 \text{ years} \)
Administering the test

Sit the pupil at a desk or table in a quiet space.

Provide a piece of lined paper and get him to put his name and the date at the top.

Choose what you believe will be an appropriate point to start the test. (See below for guidance)

Dictate each word in turn, saying the word individually, then putting it into a sentence and finally repeating the word.

e.g.  time       Can you tell me the time?       time

Dictate slowly and clearly. Never hurry the pupil and repeat the word as often as is needed.

Continue until the pupil has made at least 5 consecutive errors.

Score as explained in the scoring instructions.

Deciding where to start

If you know that the pupil can spell words like ‘sight’, ‘mouth’, etc, then there is no point starting right at the beginning. You will just waste time and energy. If you are testing a group of pupils together, you may have to, however.

Choose a starting point where you believe the pupil will be able to cope with the words. Dictate the first line of five words. If there were no problems with that line, just continue. When scoring, you credit all the words before that line.

If there were problems with that line, complete the line and then work backwards until he gets a line with no errors. Credit all spellings until that point.

Retesting

Strictly speaking, you should not re-test within a year of the previous test.
Three phases of early literacy development
(Frith)

Logographic phase
Basic sight vocabulary – high frequency words, or words with special significance
Words recognised holistically – from overall shape
Similar looking words confused
No understanding of sound/letter correspondence

Alphabetic Phase
Recognition of sound/letter correspondence
Decoding and encoding take place
Phonic knowledge used
Pupil can spell simple, regular words
Errors are phonetic (coff/cough)
Lack of sophisticated knowledge of word structure
Reading slow and laboured – limited fluency

Orthographic Phase
Rapid whole word recognition – holistic
Words become sight vocabulary
Understands sophisticated spelling patterns
Reading fluency achieved – recognises words holistically
**Key elements in all literacy teaching**

There are many different methods and materials which can successfully be used to teach basic literacy skills (reading, spelling and written work). An experienced and/or thoughtful teacher will use a range, to suit his/her own teaching style and the needs of particular pupils.

However, there are some key elements which **must** be included in some form or other when teaching pupils with dyslexia/SLD or other processing difficulties. These are:

1. **Check retention of the previous lesson**
   Every lesson should begin with a quick check that the previous lesson’s content has been remembered. This can be in the form of a quick dictation, reading the word family or writing selected words. It may be only 2-3 minutes, but it is **VITAL**!

2. **Check last few weeks/months’ learning**
   Periodically go back over previous word families or individual spelling words, re-teaching where necessary. Current sentence dictations should incorporate previous word families/spelling words. The pupil should also have a card for every rime family or phonic sound taught. This should have the sound or rime on one side (e.g. at) and a trigger word chosen by the child + picture on the other side (cat). These should be checked every lesson in the early stages and periodically (every 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} lesson thereafter).

3. **Use every word family/individual spelling word in context**
   This means that the word should be read as part of a story or sentence **and** it should be used in a dictation. Obviously, when teaching a word family, it is not usually possible or necessary to put every word into a dictation, but 2-3 can be chosen and others used as part of subsequent checks to learning (see item 2).

4. **Teach spelling using different modalities**
   Different methods **must** be used to teach spelling. Using the phonological/phonic approach (decoding and encoding) is obviously critical, but does not build automatic whole word recognition when used alone. Word families do need to be taught using the phonic/phonological approach (preferably onset + rime). However, this is not suitable for irregular words, many of which are high-frequency and therefore need to be taught at an early stage. These need to be taught through the LOOK, COVER, VISUALIZE, SPELL, WRITE approach (auditory and visual).
5. **Always link spelling and reading**
   Don’t assume that a pupil can read a word you have taught him to spell! All words spelled must be read individually and in context. All word families or individual spelling words then need to be incorporated into a speed reading exercise to develop automatic whole word recognition.

6. **Reinforce through different modalities**
   See above (items 4 and 5). Also include examples from word families into the Word Race system. When going through ‘Word Race’ words, actively develop analogical transfer:

   *Child has been taught ‘could’ as an individual spelling word (often because it comes up or the child has wanted to be able to write that word before you wanted to teach the word family as such).*

   *Check ‘Word Race’l words. Pupil writes ‘could’ correctly:*

   “Well done. Now, if you can write ‘could’, then you can write ‘would’. Try it. Now try ‘should’.”

   This is not necessary every time you go through the ‘Word Race’ words and would take up too much time. However, it is very useful every now and then to develop the realisation that the pupil can use their knowledge of one word to help them work out a new word.

7. **Develop transfer**
   Transfer is the ability to apply knowledge gained in one context to another context.

   i.e. to be able to read a word you can spell (not always automatic!)
   to be able to read/write a word in context
   to be able to recognise a word visually when it has been taught phonologically

   This is what you have been doing by following the steps laid out in items 3-6. However, you need to develop this on. Transfer is a major weakness in pupils with SLD because they cannot generalise. You may find that information you have taught in your lessons is retained and used in lessons, but the pupil reverts to previous errors in their schoolwork. Check schoolbooks and develop the child’s awareness of the relevance of your lessons to their schoolwork. It may seem obvious to you, but it is not always obvious to your pupil!
Incorporating the above principles means that every lesson should usually include:

* Check previous learning
* Check previous sight vocabulary words (‘Word Race’ words)
* Go through sound cards
* Contextual reading (may be incidental)
* Speed reading
* Sentence dictations
  
  Reading practice
  Reading games

(∗ = essential in every lesson)
METHOD FOR TEACHING A WORD FAMILY

1. Present a word family of between eight and fifteen words in list form, using words that are appropriate to the age, needs and ability of each pupil.

2. Draw attention to the common element in the family by using colour for the common factor.

3. Read, together if necessary.

4. Remove words from sight and construct words by physically manipulating plastic/wooden letters (lower levels of literacy only).

5. Dictate words singly into a word family notebook. At every stage it is important to anticipate errors by sitting at right angles to the pupil and anticipate hesitancies. Success breeds success.

6. If possible, use pencil. Then if an error should occur, the whole word can be rubbed out. Altering does not invoke as much memorisation of the whole word. Copying plays no part at any stage.

7. Student repeats the word after the teacher and also vocalises as he writes.

8. Student goes over the common factor with colour to highlight it, saying the letters out loud.

9. Choose a trigger word to remember the sound or rime in the word family being taught. Write the sound in red on one side of a small piece of card (e.g. at) On the other side, write the whole word and get the pupil to draw a small picture (cat). This is then put in a small envelope inside the back cover of the word family book. The sounds or rimes learned can then be regularly practised by rote until they are automatically recalled for reading and spelling.

10. The child is encouraged to make up a sentence using as many words from the word family as possible. Any words not known by the student are inserted by the teacher. “Silly” sentences improve memorisation. e.g. Teachers eat peaches and cream for tea. (for the ‘ea’ family). Encourage accuracy – remind the pupil of the need for a capital letter and full stop. Once the sentence has been written, it can be cut up and be re-sequenced. A picture may help visual memory.

11. Homework or class exercise for that week should be:
   a. Read aloud the word family every day. Do not sound out, or spell – just read.
   b. Read the sentence(s) aloud.
12. First activity of the next lesson should be to dictate the word family and a sentence using the words taught. Depending on the ability of the child, other sentences may be dictated. Each time, give the whole sentence, which the child repeats and then writes.

13. The pupil reads the sentence and proof-reads for sense and then for accuracy. He then underlines the words he is unsure of and then looks back at the word family list to see if he can correct his own mistakes. Praise for finding errors, even if the pupil is unsure how to correct.

14. In making up dictations, ensure:
   a. You do not ask the student to write anything you have not specifically taught him.
   b. You are cumulative. Once a word family is known, incorporate words from it periodically in subsequent dictations.
   c. That the dictation is not just a list of spellings in continuous prose form. I.e. incorporate familiar words to give a feeling of success when writing.

15. Build constant revision and overlearning into your teaching through a variety of activities. Follow-up word during the week could include worksheets, games, tracking, wordsearch, cloze, etc.

16. Only teach one word family per week, keeping confusable sounds or chunks a few weeks apart.

17. Be prepared to re-teach a word family if you find that problems recur.
METHOD FOR TEACHING INDIVIDUAL WORDS

This method is part of the overall STEP BY STEP method described in more detail in the Steps to Literacy Teacher Manual.

Follow these steps:

1. Ask the pupil to have a go at the word. Encourage him to be aware of the sounds and try to work it out.

2. Write the correct version by his version clearly and in fairly large letters (always lower case). Using colour can sometimes help. Be careful to praise all the correct letters and point out when his attempt is phonically logical, even if it wasn’t correct – it shows he is developing the right skills.

3. Discuss what he finds the ‘difficult bit’ of the word. If possible, find a mnemonic to help him remember that bit.

```
ROUTE     ROUTE
“We go out in the ute”
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It can be as silly as you like:

```
because

Big elephants can always upset small elephants
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4. Now cover up his version and only look at yours. The reason for this and for writing the word in lower case letters is that you are building a visual memory of the word and you want it to be the right one!

   *Concentrating on the correct version of the word is the first step in building a visual memory of that word.*

5. Get the pupil to spell the word out loud while looking at the letters – pointing if necessary. Do this until he has done it correctly three times.

   *Spelling the word out loud builds an auditory memory for the spelling. There is also an element of kinaesthetic memory (memory for movement), because there is*
movement involved in articulating the sounds. He is, of course, also still looking at the word which reinforces visual memory.

6. Cover the word and ask him to spell it to you again, this time without looking. If there is any problem, go back a stage and look at the word. Do not go on until he has spelled the word correctly three times without looking.

He is still building auditory and kinaesthetic memories for the word. Although he cannot see it, he is having to visualize the word, which is still reinforcing visual memory.

7. Let him look at the word again. Ask him to visualize the word in his mind. You can ask him to ‘take a picture with your mind’. Then get him to close his eyes and see if he can still see it. It doesn’t matter too much if he can or not (although this skill can be developed). It’s the process that’s the most important thing.

This aspect is crucial in reinforcing visual memory, but also helps to develop the skill of visualization, which is usually very weak in pupils with literacy difficulties. This skill can be developed separately as well.

8. Cover the word again and ask him to write it, saying the letters out loud as he does it. Do this until he has done it three times correctly. If necessary go back to previous steps and repeat them.

This final stage reinforces all three aspects of memory. Kinaesthetic memory is strengthened by practicing the movement involved in writing the word, as well as by saying the letters.

For obvious reasons, this method is sometimes known as the ‘3, 3, 3’ method!

Incidentally, it is always important to explain to the pupil why they are doing things in a particular way (or at all, for that matter!). This method could sound babyish to a ‘sophisticated’ teenager or an adult, but I always explain why it is so effective and add that I also use it with university students!

There is a 3, 3, 3 method checklist for pupil use later in this manual.

Note: There should never be any copying involved. The pupil always writes the word from memory.

Make sure that the pupil always spells the word aloud while writing it. It may help with longer words if the pupil practises dividing the word into syllables first and writes each chunk.
'WORD RACE'

Teaching the word is actually only the first stage. Specialist teachers have long known about the importance of phonological awareness when teaching literacy. However, the relevance of visual memory is becoming more and more widely recognised. Unless a pupil can develop ‘rapid whole-word recognition’, he will never be a fluent reader. If he never becomes a fluent reader, he won’t read because it’s too much like hard work! You also can’t follow the content effectively when you are having to decode words.

Developing ‘rapid whole-word recognition’ depends very largely on having a visual memory for words. Research has shown that pupils with no literacy difficulties typically need between 4-10 exposures to a word to fix it in their long-term memories. However, pupils with literacy difficulties, particularly Specific Learning Disability (dyslexia), can need 300-400 exposures to words before they become fixed in long-term memory. Most remedial methods and materials fail with these pupils because they provide nothing like enough reinforcement (exposures).

The WORD RACE sheet is a light-hearted but extremely effective method for providing reinforcement for the irregular/high-frequency words taught by the 3, 3, 3 method.

USING THE ‘WORD RACE’ SHEET

When the word has been taught using the above method, the pupil writes it into the first box on the left hand side of the Word Race sheet. He should be able to write it independently, with no copying, by this stage. If not, re-teach it!

Any other words taught at the same time should be entered into the left-hand column in the same way.

The next time you work with the pupil, you will test all the words on the ‘Jail’ sheet without him having seen them first.

If the word is written correctly (on rough paper), it can be entered into the next column along.

If there was a mistake, you go through the 3, 3, 3 process again.

The pupil only writes words he got correct into the next column.

Once the word reaches the final column of the page, it is ‘at the finishing line’ – and should now have been learned! You don’t need to test that word regularly any more, although it is a good idea to go back occasionally and just check previous words. You will always find one or two that have been forgotten.

Just go through the whole process (including 3, 3, 3) again and enter it into ‘Word Race’ again. That’s quite natural. Some words stick better than others.
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