

Introduction

City Literacy and Numeracy Project (CLAN) City Centre and Leith, has commissioned this document to update the findings of an earlier report “Don’t Forget Dyslexic Adults” presented by the author to Senior Community Education Workers in May 2000. The report outlined the importance of screening potentially dyslexic adults so that appropriate learning programmes could be developed for individual learners. The report also specifically recommended software that was appropriate for using with adults with Dyslexia.

This document:

- places dyslexia within a field of other related Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) and offers recent profiles of SPLD.
- offers a rationale for the screening of adults who present with possible SpLD
- outlines principles that can be applied to adults with Specific Learning Difficulties within the context of Adult Education (CLAN/CBAL Edinburgh)
- concludes with a list detailing why IT solutions regarding assessment of learning difficulty and styles and teaching and learning practise should be a priority for Adult Education providers (CLAN/CBAL Edinburgh)

Attached to the document are recommendations of software that is currently available for use by and with adults with SpLDs in the context of City Literacy and Numeracy and Community Based Adult Learning.

Also attached is a comprehensive list of websites concerned with the subject of adult learners with SpLDs.

Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs)

Dyslexia is described as often as a gift, as a disability its key indicator, a peaking and troughing chart of strengths and weaknesses. It has been constantly defined and redefined throughout the last 100 years. Once, Dyslexia was synonymous with SpLD but recent definitions of Specific Learning Difficulties that encompass Dyslexia amongst a range of other difficulties make the task of understanding it more manageable.

Jan Poustie, a specialist in SpLDs offers a Specific Learning Difficulties Profile¹ which includes Attention Deficits (ADD, ADHD, Behaviour Inhibition Disorder), Autistic Spectrum Disorder (associated are Aspergers Syndrome and Tourettes Syndrome), Central Auditory Processing Disorder, Dyscalculia (also called Developmental Dyscalculia), Dyslexia (also called Developmental Dyslexia), Specific Language Impairment (also known as Dysphasia) and Dyspraxia.

Selikowitz (1993) offered the following definition:

Specific Learning Difficulty – an unexpected and unexplained condition, occurring in a child of average or above average intelligence, characterised by a significant delay in one or more areas of learning.²

D Harry Chasty's definition is "Specific learning difficulties/dyslexia are organising or learning difficulties which restrict the student's competencies in information processing, in fine motor control and working memory, so causing limitations in some or all of speech, reading, spelling, writing, essay writing, numeracy, and behavior." The group representing all Member States, which met as 'Action for Dyslexia' at the European Parliament in 1994 accepted this definition as "an appropriate base for further research and development."

Principle Educational Psychologist Ian McNab offered this explanation in 1998. "Properly speaking, a Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) is literally that: a difficulty that is specific to a particular area, or that affects a particular process (as distinct from a general learning difficulty, which affects the learning of many different skills).

¹ Next Generation – The Conditions;

<http://freespace.virgin.net/adrian.pam/inf/spldprofile.htm>

² <http://www.dundee.ac.uk/disabilitysupport/leaflets/dyslexiadeft.htm>

A specific learning difficulty often affects the learning of specific skills so dyslexia is associated with the use of words (viz., reading them, spelling them, and - by extension with organising and producing written material). Dyspraxia, on the other hand, is a specific learning difficulty that affects learning gross or fine motor movement (including the movement of the speech organs).

Some (people) are affected by specific learning difficulties that do not have special names; we all know (people) who seem bright in many areas, but whose learning of some things is disrupted by very poor memory, chaotic attention control, or subtly disorganised interpretation or use of language.”³

SPELD NSW, a charitable organisation in NSW offers this useful profile of SpLD on the home page of its website.⁴ SpLDs:

- are intrinsic to the individual
- are not linked to intellectual impairment (except incidentally)
- may coincidentally exist with problems in self-regulatory behaviours, social perception and social interaction
- are life-long
- result in difficulty being successful at school unless identified early and appropriate educational adjustments are provided to prevent failure.

³ <http://search.ngfl.gov.uk/senco-forum//senco-forum.archive.1998/msg00700.html>

⁴ www.user.bigpond.com

CLAN Statement of Priority Work⁵

We prioritise work with:

- people with limited initial education, particularly young adults, including 15-year olds no longer in school
- unemployed people
- People with English as a Second or Additional Language
- People who live in disadvantaged areas
- workers in low skill jobs
- people on low incomes
- people with a health problem or disability affecting learning, speech, sight or hearing

⁵ www.abe.edin.org/clan/index.html

Statistics concerning priority groups of potential learners

The following statistics and comments all relate to CLAN's prioritised groups of learners and demonstrate the likelihood that a significant number of CLAN learners will be adults with undiagnosed SpLDs.

“Dyslexia Affects 10% of the adult population, and 4% severely. This figure is far higher amongst those lacking in basic skills...”⁶ The Freedom to Learn report, welcomed by the government, is critical of the quality of basic skills literacy provision to adults with SpLDs perceiving it to be uneven and inadequate. The report goes on to say:

“very few basic skills courses are appropriate for dyslexic learners. Basic skills managers and tutors lack knowledge about dyslexia... Current forms of accreditation in basic skills are generally inappropriate for dyslexic learners and sometimes act as an additional barrier... Recently produced, high-quality learning materials which include voice activated software, reading machines and CD ROM, are not readily available.”

Another report by Lesley Pidgeon on young people not in education or training in Milton Keynes says:

“It is thought there may be as many as 217,000+ young people (16-18) in Britain who are unemployed and not in education or training (NEET).“

Lesley Pidgeon's research in Milton Keynes reported that 35% of her sample had diagnosed SpLDs (50% had no qualifications)⁷

In 1998 the TES reported

“Half of London's prison population is dyslexic, according to research by the London Offenders Study, which discovered 52% of a random sample of 150 prisoners were Dyslexic. The research was carried out by the Dyspel project, and in a conference announcing the findings delegates were told that re-offending rates can be cut by 25% by tackling Dyslexia problems among prisoners.

‘In many cases there is a strong connection between dyslexia, school failure and crime. Giving educational support to dyslexic offenders increases their chances of leading a law abiding life,’ said a NACRO representative.”⁸

⁶ Section 2/52 Report, Freedom to Learn

www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/freedomtolearn/rep08.htm

⁷ Pidgeon, L, Unfulfilled Educational Aspirations www.getting-on.co.uk/toolkit/cont.htm

⁸ www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/dysupdate.html

In 2000 the Dyslexia Institute announced in a news release called “Don’t Forget Dyslexic Adults”

“Research suggests that undiagnosed dyslexic adults are over represented amongst the unemployed, the homeless and amongst those who are in prison or on probation.”

Over the last ten years or so momentum has been gathering for assessing the learning styles of children in schools and identifying children with specific learning difficulties. At one time however due to funding constraints only the most disruptive children were referred for intervention. Private schools generally had a better record of intervention. This meant that many children failed by educational establishment are now presenting for Adult Education provision with undiagnosed learning difficulties.

The above evidence would suggest that there must be a correspondingly high number of adults with undiagnosed Specific Learning Difficulties including dyslexia amongst CLAN learners and potential learners. While the cost of diagnosis remains prohibitive for many individuals and while assessment is only freely available to learners in FE/HE institutions there is a gap through which CLAN/CBAL students are falling.

Best Principles: Assessment, Teaching and Learning, Using Technology

Adult education already has seven established principles on which its learning and organisation guidelines are founded. These affect all learners but how are these put into practise when working with students with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs)? At the moment there is no system for screening adults for SpLDs through Adult Education nor is there any systematic awareness training for managers and tutors working with students who are suspected of presenting with a condition of Specific Learning Difficulty.

Assessment of SpLD – A Contentious Issue?

The assessment of SpLDs by agencies such as CLAN or CBAL is a contentious issue. It has been said that learners unhappy about being labelled “disabled” could view positive diagnosis negatively or that it might give rise to their having heightened expectations of remediation or even “cure” or “recovery”. When specially trained advisers with guidance and counselling available conduct diagnostic assessment within an Adult Education environment, diagnosis of SpLD is likely to be viewed positively. The focus is not therefore on labelling the learner but “to ensure that the learning that occurs is valued and validated. Locating specific strengths and weaknesses within their context creates new possibilities.”⁹

Another reason for contention is because some managers are reluctant to label learners with a medical /clinical condition, thus giving the impression they accept a medical model of disability rather than the social model upon which inclusive practise in adult education is founded. But the point of assessing and potentially diagnosing learners with SpLD within the context of Adult Education is very different. It is directly in accord with the Learning Programme Guidelines and much of the Organisation Guidelines set out within The Good Practice Framework Literacy and Numeracy.¹⁰

Assessment and diagnosis are also valued and promoted by key organisations and individuals working with adults with SpLDs in this country and abroad. The British Dyslexia Association, Helen Arkell Dyslexia Centre, The Dyslexia Institute, SPELD NSW, FE/HE institutions, academics such as Gavin Reid (Senior lecturer) and Jane Kirk (both at the Faculty of Education, University of Edinburgh)¹¹ and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment are just a few of those concerned with promoting good practice in relation to assessment and support for those whose prospects are impaired by SpLDs.

⁹ Cooper, R.Dr., Diagnosing Dyslexia, The Case for an Inclusive Learning Approach www.getting-on.co.uk/toolkit/mp_diagnosing_dyslexia.html

¹⁰ See appendix for copy of The Good Practice Framework Literacy and Numeracy

¹¹ www.getting-on.co.uk/toolkit/jkirk.html

An American paper, written by P. K. Hardman Ph.D. (Dyslexia Research Institute, Tallahassee, Florida)¹² focussed on the successes of properly identifying and providing literacy intervention to adults with SpLD:

“When the systems complain that it is too expensive to provide the necessary one-to-one academic therapy required to properly address this learning difference they should consider the cost to continue addressing it inappropriately. They should consider the return to the taxpayer and to the individual when instruction matches the different learning style of the dyslexic”

Local Authorities now have a duty under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (post 16 education) not to discriminate against disabled students. In some cases adjustments are supposed to be made to accommodate the particular needs of individuals so there is a responsibility on education providers to do what they can to find out what these needs are. If reasonable attempts are made to find out what these needs are then the provider will not be liable for failure to make specific adjustments.¹³

¹² Paper by Hardman, P.K. Ph.D. “Removing the Literacy Barriers to Training and Employment for Dyslexic/ADD/SLD/Disabled Adults,” Dyslexia Research Institute, Tallahassee, Florida (1999)

¹³ Further reading: www.skill.org.uk/news/sendasp

Eight Reasons For Diagnostic Assessment of Learners for SpLDs by Adult Education providers:

- The diagnostic assessment process is empowering and enabling rather than labelling.
- Entitlement to support and resources often rests on proven diagnosis of SpLD
- Diagnostic assessment helps learners understand their SpLD and compensate for their weaknesses by utilising their strengths
- Diagnostic Assessment validates the learner's strengths and promotes their self esteem
- Diagnostic Assessment helps the learner (and any support worker/tutor who might be working with them) to understand their individual learning style so their learning can be more effective
- Diagnostic Assessment explains past failure. The learner can avoid compounding failure by developing appropriate compensatory strategies.
- There is an economic rationale for diagnostic assessment of SpLD
- Diagnostic Assessment is in accord with the responsibility to anticipate disability in learners and make reasonable adjustment detailed in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (post 16) May 2001 – effective since September 2002.

Best Principles: Assessment of SpLD Adults

Previously, assessments of SpLDs were made based on tests designed to eliminate low intelligence from the identification process. The theory that dyslexia is a discrepancy between intelligence and literacy has lost ground in favour of models based on a more detailed and researched understanding of the range of sub skills required in the development of literacy.

“Typically, the SpLD student will present with an irregular profile of ability, showing areas of strength and areas of weakness, and there will usually be a discrepancy between his expected levels of attainment and his actual levels of attainment. Therefore, something is preventing him from achieving his potential.”¹⁴

Awareness of Learning Difficulty

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| AWARENESS OF DIFFICULTY | - ASSESSMENT - Learning Difficulties - Learning Styles | -REPORT -By trained adviser | -ACTION -Student -Tutor |
|------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|

The above box shows the progression from the student becoming aware that persistent difficulty with learning is likely to have an identifiable cause for which there may be specific learning strategies. The cause could be a specific (for example dyslexia, dyspraxia, dysgraphia, ADD) or general learning difficulty (stroke-induced aphasia or emotional or social factors) or inappropriate teaching which failed to address the student's learning style. A trained tutor can offer necessary guidance and counselling to students at this early stage preparing them for the next stage; assessment. Both learning difficulties and learning styles can be assessed in various ways and at various levels. Currently there are three accepted levels of assessment of SpLD.

1. Informal Interview, a first step. Tutors should have basic SpLD awareness training.

Tutor/student

Observation – noticing discrepancy between underlying ability and performance (levels in literacy and numeracy)

Informal discussion – nothing to indicate health/social/economic obstacles to learning (but SpLD could be obscured by overlying health/social/economic obstacles; these do not exclude the possibility of SpLD)

¹⁴ www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk/articles/prin_ass.htm

Using British Dyslexia Association (BDA) 20 Questions, a pre-screening questionnaire which indicates strong possibility of dyslexia or SpLD and would suggest need for in-depth assessment

2. Student with specially trained adviser who can interpret results and provide reports acceptable as evidence of SpLD/dyslexia

SpLD screening tests can be used to highlight indicators of dyslexia or other learning difficulties. Some can be self-administered using a computer but training is needed to evaluate the results and present a report. IQ tests are no longer considered relevant.

- ♣ Dyslexic Adult Screening Test (DAST)¹⁵ designed for use in FE and workplace. Avoids use of IQ tests
Approx. 30minutes to administer
- ♣ QuickScan¹⁶ indicates learning support needs and identifies SpLD may recommend further assessment by StudyScan. Approx. 15 minutes to administer
StudyScan (sometimes acceptable as evidence of SpLD) Approx. 3-4 hours to administer.

None of the above is available through adult literacy agencies such as CLAN, CBAL in Edinburgh...

3. Student with Educational or Occupational Psychologist who:

Conducts a battery of tests to diagnose dyslexia; sometimes the only acceptable confirmation of dyslexia. This is expensive but can be arranged for free through FE/HE establishments and some employers.

This service is not available through adult literacy agencies such as CLAN, CBAL in Edinburgh...

No assessment is adequate without offering the SpLD adult the opportunity to discuss the findings and fully understand the assessment and its implications. Counselling and Guidance can help someone recently diagnosed as having SpLD to understand his or her condition and move forward. This should be available.

¹⁵ Fawcett, Dr AJ; DAST, Psychological Corporation, Harcourt Brace & Co

¹⁶ StudyScan Suite; Pico Educational Systems Ltd, www.Studyscan.com

Best Principles for Supporting Adult Learners with SpLDs

The Good Practice Framework Literacy and Numeracy states:

“Approaches [to learning and teaching] are relevant to learners’ chosen contexts and goals. Preferred learning styles are identified and respected. Interaction and dialogue between learners are actively promoted and purposeful.”¹⁷

The book, *Demystifying Dyslexia*,¹⁸ offers the following principles which although proposed for use with Dyslexic learners would equally apply to all learners.

To be successful, a learning programme for dyslexic young people and adults should be based on the following principles:

- That diagnostic assessment is essential in helping students to understand previous learning failure, ‘unpack’ the disability, identify strengths as well as weaknesses and thus shift self-perceptions and expose learning ‘myths’
- that approaches to teaching and support should be ‘diagnostic’ in helping students explore and identify personal learning strategies which suit their individual learning style, and thus encourage autonomy in learning
- that support is an enabling rather than remedial process, which should be seen as a way of matching the total learning environment to the learner’s individual needs and goals and so involving in its delivery all staff with whom the student is in contact

¹⁷ The Learning Programme Guidelines; The Good Practice Framework, Literacy and Numeracy

¹⁸ Klein, C & Krupka, M *Demystifying Dyslexia* (Language & Literacy Unit) Southwark College 1995

Barbara Weston; ACCESS Centre, Banstead Place¹⁹ also points out the distinction between remediation and what she terms compensation strategy:

“I am aware of the need to draw a firm line between remediation and compensation strategies, particularly when we are dealing with post 16s. There seem to be a number of teachers and tutors who are ‘flogging a dead horse’ in battling on with teaching designed to remedy problems, rather than produce solutions. This is a great pity, given that the problem will probably persist. There is a place for both strategies, I know, but I think that the point should be made.”

Jane Kirk, Faculty of Education University of Edinburgh says in a paper commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment²⁰,

“The nature of difficulties associated with dyslexia can be situational and the dyslexic person therefore may often benefit more from advice or guidance than a practical or lengthy support programme. For adults with dyslexia, needs can be met with compensatory strategies in the workplace or life skills, not remedial programmes in basic literacy skills.

In the words of P. K. Hardman Ph.D. (Dyslexia Research Institute, Tallahassee, Florida):

“When taught properly, dyslexic adults make exceptional gains in academic skills. Those gains lead to higher salaries, better employment and more self-sufficiency. The failure to learn is not the fault of the dyslexic student, who can and will learn when taught using scientifically proven methods of instruction which match their learning style. The fault lies with educators who are ignorant of the proper methods to be used in instruction for a dyslexic who has a different learning style.”²¹

¹⁹ IT for Adults with Dyslexia, NCET 1994

²⁰ Kirk, J & Reid, G. Assessment and Support for Adults with Dyslexia – implications for practice

²¹ Paper by Hardman, P.K. Ph.D. “Removing the Literacy Barriers to Training and Employment for Dyslexic/ADD/SLD/Disabled Adults,” Dyslexia Research Institute, Tallahassee, Florida (1999)

“If someone has evident difficulty with rote learning (a characteristic of some SpLDs) they need to be taught so that information is meaningful, not just remembered.”²²

All of the above statements refer to the importance of enabling strategies based on an understanding of the learners strengths and weaknesses and preferred learning styles, however these must be established first.

²² Anderson, B. IT and Dyslexia at 16+ (PATOSS) info sheet 3
www.greenwold.freeserve.co.uk/3it.htm

Understanding and Identifying Preferred Learning Styles

Information about Learning Styles and Multiple Intelligences is helpful for all learners and their tutors. A learning style is “a student’s consistent way of responding to and using stimuli in the context of learning”,²³. Multiple Intelligence theory is credited to Howard Gardener²⁴ who isolated eight types of intelligence (others have since been identified and included).

“Although they are not necessarily dependent on each other these intelligences seldom operate in isolation. Every normal individual possesses varying degrees of each of these intelligences, but the ways in which intelligences combine and blend are as varied as the faces and the personalities of individuals.” (Howard Gardner)

When a learner’s “learning style” has been identified, coping strategies that capitalize on their strengths and diminish their weaknesses by building on their strengths can be developed.

Free interactive assessments of dominant intelligence or preferred learning style along with numerous practical tips are easily accessible on the LD Pride website, www.ldpride.net/learningstyles.MI.htm.

“QuickScan”, a computerised diagnostic programme, suitable for use on computer networks or solo machines takes between 10 and 20 minutes to complete after which a full report is generated. The report will identify the learner’s learning style, need for study support and whether there are sufficient indications of a SpLD to warrant further assessment. It should only be used under the supervision of an adviser trained to interpret findings and who can offer counselling and guidance following assessment should it be necessary.

²³ file://A\kolb.htm

²⁴ Gardner, H; Multiple Intelligences, Basic Books, 1993

So, in the words of the Dyslexia Institute, “If students can’t learn the way we teach, we must teach in the way that they can learn and extend their abilities.” This rings true once again for all learners. Teaching must target individual learners weaknesses by utilising their strengths. It must be multisensory, structured, thorough, active and relevant.²⁵ It must focus on compensatory strategies for overcoming difficulties rather than on remediation. SpLD students need to learn organisation of themselves, their work, their individual skills of literacy, strategies for successful learning and they need to develop confidence in themselves as independent learners. For these reasons, IT solutions are gaining increasing credibility in the realm of SpLD.

IT solutions are constantly being developed, modified and updated so any list of recommendations is only ever going to be a snapshot of what is available at the time recommendations are made. This means it is important to examine the best principles for using IT solutions.

²⁵ www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk/articles/prin_teach.htm

Best Principles: Selecting IT Solutions for Adult Learners with SpLDs and Tutors

“Technology and electronic devices are an integral part of our daily lives. It is not a question of whether or not educators should be using technology to help dyslexics learn. The main issues are what to use, how to use it and what are the best principles for its use?”
Philomena Ott (1997)²⁶

When choosing IT it is important to have a clear idea of the user’s needs and an understanding of how IT will help. This will ensure that the equipment chosen is appropriate and useful. Some IT solutions are difficult to master in their own right and will initially require that the learner has additional support. This must be built into their learning programme. Tutors need adequate training to use specific applications.

Apart from a computer (Pentium or higher) or a laptop; a printer and a scanner, two types of software are advisable²⁷ as part of a general toolkit for adults with SpLDs from which individual needs can be addressed. For solo, learner/tutor or small group work teaching/drill programmes are available for instance Marion Walker’s CD Resource Pack for Tutors of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties recommended by Fife College Learning Support Unit or the Dyslexia Institute’s “Units of Sounds.” Touch-typing programmes are available to teach typing skills.

The other type of software such as word-processors, desktop publishing, spreadsheets and databases are generally regarded as applications. These can come “bundled” e.g. Microsoft Works. Others are specific – Inspiration or TextHELP! Read and Write Gold.

²⁶ Ott, P How to Detect and Manage Dyslexia, 1997

²⁷ Anderson, B. IT and Dyslexia at 16+ (PATOSS) info sheet 3
www.greenwold.freeserve.co.uk/3it.htm

IT is the way to go!

IT can provide solutions for learners:

IT can provide learners with solutions for diagnostic assessment of SpLDs

IT can help learners produce work that reflects ability

IT can provide solutions for learners with difficulties organising, producing and receiving text based material

IT can provide solutions for learners with difficulties practising literacy skills

IT gives learners the opportunity to learn independently

IT can provide solutions for tutors:

IT can provide tutors with solutions for diagnostic assessment of SpLDs

IT can provide solutions to tutors who need structured, cumulative, multisensory language programmes

IT can provide information (internet)

Necessary Conditions for IT use:

Certain conditions are however necessary before IT solutions can be applied effectively.

IT Hardware has to be in place (computer, computer suite or laptop)

IT software (programmes and applications) must be available (licensed for sole or multiple users)

IT Software and Hardware have to be accessible

IT Software and Hardware must be maintained regularly

IT Software and Hardware must be regularly reviewed, modified and updated

IT skills have to be learned by learners and tutors.

Conclusion

In order to fulfil its own stated objectives of prioritising, among others, learners with learning disability and to fulfil its obligations of anticipating the needs of its disabled but hitherto undiagnosed adult learners, CLAN/CBAL must be able to demonstrate a commitment to diagnostic assessment of adult learners with SpLDs.

This role is in accord with inclusive educational practise based on a social model of disability. Assessment in an educational context becomes a tool with which the learner can identify strengths in learning and use these to compensate for weaknesses. The sole purpose of the diagnosis is to enable and empower the learner, to help the learner move forward and become an effective and ultimately independent learner. Together learners and tutors will be able to develop appropriate learning programmes and guidance pathways.

A greater commitment to the provision of IT hardware and software is essential as will be a commitment to training tutors and learners how to use it.

CLAN/CBAL tutors must be trained in basic awareness of SpLDs in order to recognise, interpret and respond to signals of potential SpLD. Appropriate guidance and counselling by trained advisers should be available to learners. Tutors should be kept informed of developments in the field of SpLD.

CLAN/CBAL will be seen to be adopting good practice in the provision of education to their adult learners with SpLD (diagnosed or undiagnosed).

CLAN/CBAL will be seen to be acting in accordance with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, which will ultimately benefit all the clients in their stated priority groups.

IT Is The Way To Go!

Jay Kirkland, April 2003