

Topic 3 - How do we identify a SLD?

Chapter 1 - Questionnaire

Page 1 - Questionnaire

The following is the first part of a questionnaire used by SPELD NSW to allow people to ascertain the possibility of a learning difficulty. The questions suggest observations that teachers may make.

Answer 'yes' for typical behaviour.

Question	Yes	No
Do you have difficulty with reading?		
Do you have difficulty with spelling?		
Do you have to think about the concept of right and left? (was this a problem for you beyond age 8?)		
Do you have difficulty saying long or difficult words correctly?		
In maths, is subtraction more difficult than other operations?		
Did you have difficulty learning your times tables?		
Did you find it difficult to remember the months of the year in correct order?		
Have you had difficulty remembering telephone numbers?		
Do you still sometimes confuse b and d or 6 and 9 (beyond age 8)?		
Were you considered clumsy as a child?		
Does anyone in the family have reading and spelling difficulties?		

If the total of yes answers is 4 or more, and Questions 1 or 2 are positive, **then a Specific Learning Difficulty *may* exist** and it would be advisable to follow this up with further observation and/or assessment.

Further observation questions are available on the SPELD NSW website. For members, SPELD provides a review of the replies with advice about appropriate courses of action. (www.speldnsw.org.au)

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Chapter 2 - Identification of an SLD

Page 1 - General Comments

Recognising that a student has a Specific Learning Difficulty is **essential to their future achievement as a learner in school**. Without this knowledge a teacher cannot satisfactorily decide what and how the child needs to learn.

Screening and identification provide the basis for programming, support needs and realistic learning outcomes for a student with SLD. **Early identification will assist** in blocking the cycle of failure and the loss of confidence and self esteem that result when children are not supported by an appropriate learning program.

Successful learning firstly depends upon *efficient information processing*.

Successful teaching firstly depends upon *knowing the strengths and weaknesses of students' information processing abilities and skills* as well as relevant external factors

Page 2 - General Comments

Warning signs are evident in **performance discrepancies** in various basic skill areas.

- Some children experience barriers which interfere with their learning because they have difficulty in processing certain kinds of information. These include **auditory, visual and motor processing**.
- Some children may be **great conversationalists and artists, and good mathematicians**, and still have great problems learning to read.
- Some children may be **excellent at sport** and yet be overwhelmed by numeracy.
- Some children experience **problems learning to speak clearly or learning through listening**.
- Some children have excellent spoken language, yet **when they are asked to read they find the task daunting**.
- Some children learn to speak, listen and read without difficulty, yet **putting their thoughts on paper** may be very difficult.

This is why their problems are referred to as **Specific Learning Difficulties** - the difficulties only exist in some areas.

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Chapter 3 - More Information

Page 1 - Observation

Students with learning difficulties will show some of the following characteristics in the classroom. They will **not necessarily be having difficulties in all areas**.

Page 2 - Talking / Listening Speaking

- gets **tongue tied** saying some words eg hospital (for hospital), par cark (for car park) (articulation difficulties)
- has trouble giving **clear messages**
- puts words in wrong sequence
- may use incorrect grammar - verb tense, lack of descriptive words
- may use words inappropriately for the (social) context

Vocabulary

- has problems **finding the right word**, (often uses inappropriate words)
- uses **'made up'** words
- says **'you know'** or **'um'** a lot
- talks in circles, talks for ages to get to the point, too many details

Listening

- has or has had **ear problems** such as glue ear
- trouble with **discriminating sounds** in words eg poor sense of rhyme
- asks for things to be **repeated** a lot
- can't remember what s/he has to do i.e. **follow a series of instructions**
- difficulty understanding, remembering or recalling **words and sounds**
- takes things **very literally**

Page 3 - Reading

Oral Reading

- may read **slowly**, word by word
- may ignore **punctuation**
- may miss or change **small words**

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- may miss or change **endings** on words eg 'ed', 'ing'
- may **skip entire lines of text**
- **loses place** or uses finger as pointer (tracking problems)
- may read a word then **fail to recognise** it further down the page

Decoding

- has **difficulty segmenting** sounds and syllables in words
- may not recognise or remember **letters and common words**
- has trouble learning and remembering the sounds associated with **letters and groups of letters**

Comprehension

- needs to **reread** a few times to get the meaning
- may **miss the whole idea** or main idea of the text
- may **miss details** and not be able to locate information in texts
- has difficulty understanding **inference** or some subject specific vocabulary
- difficulties **summarising** information
- has trouble understanding **test questions**
- does not use visual information such as **illustrations and diagrams**
- tends to be **very literal** and lacks a sense of humour

Page 4 - Writing

Spelling

- may not be able to **'hear' the individual sounds** in words
- may spell **phonetically** eg lerning (learning)
- may have problems with **smaller common words** eg thay (they)
- may have right letters but in **wrong order** eg nhigt (night)
- may spell the same word **several different ways** within the same text

Handwriting

- slow and often has an **awkward pencil grip**
- **often messy** with poor letter formation eg write some letters in pieces
- may **reverse** some letters - eg b/d
- poor **spatial organization** of work on the page
- problems writing in **straight lines** or even columns
- poor **spacing** of words

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Page 5 - Writing (continued)

Structure

- may be longwinded and circular and **not get to the point**
- may be very succinct but **not able to develop ideas**
- punctuation, sentence and paragraph **structure may not exist**
- **tenses may be mixed up**, poor grammar
- **sequencing** and ordering ideas may be undeveloped
- may express orally what they know but can't put it on paper

Note taking

- has trouble **copying off board**
- always the **last to finish**
- cannot take notes **while listening**

Page 6 - Mathematics

- has difficulty with **mental problem solving**
- has to write things down or **use fingers**
- can **not visualise**
- slow and **often inaccurate** calculation skills (+,-,x,/)
- may **confuse signs**
- **forget basic number** facts
- may **reverse numbers** eg 25 for 52
- has difficulty with **rote learning eg tables**
- difficulty learning to **tell the time**
- does not understand **temporal** concepts
- forgets the meaning of **maths words** eg share, multiply
- has difficulty with recognising, interpreting and **recalling numbers** and the values they represent
- has difficulty recognising, understanding and **recalling the patterns** that can be applied to numbers
- has difficulty understanding and **applying the concepts** and sequences underlying number, space and measurement problems
- problems with distinguishing **left and right**

Page 7 - Motor Development

- has difficulty with **motor organization** eg getting dressed, using pencils or painting, throwing/catching a ball

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- difficulty with **sequencing of tasks** eg putting clothes on in right order
- problems **with laterality and direction** eg puts shoes on wrong foot, mixes left and right
- **late establishment of handedness** eg can't decide which hand to eat with or pick up pencil
- **fine manipulation** problems eg doing up buttons, threading beads, using Lego, tying shoelaces
- difficulty with **balance and control** of larger movements eg clumsiness, can't skip or hop

Page 8 - Behaviour

Dreamer

- misses **important information** in class
- **forgets** to bring books etc to class
- doesn't hand in homework because '**didn't know**'
- sits at back of room, **doesn't contribute**, always step behind

Ratbag

- **class clown**
- may be **disruptive**
- **fidgets**, restless, drops things
- looking around at visual and/or **noise distractions**
- can **only concentrate for a short while**

Organisation

- **late** to class
- needs to be **prodded to finish** things
- no pencils, paper; materials **badly organised**
- may be **clumsy**, breaks things, trips over, runs into things

Page 9 - Behaviour (continued)

Social skills

- often looks **worried** / upset; may get very anxious
- poor **self esteem**,
- poor social skills - on the **edge of the group**
- **impulsive behaviour** - acts before thinking of the consequences
- may appear to **lack motivation**, which may stem from fear of failure

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- may appear to be **very confident orally**, but on closer inspection does not have the skills
- may lack appreciation of **non-verbal communication** such as body language, facial expression or gesture

Attention

- **doodles** while listening
- needs **frequent breaks** from sitting and concentrating
- **can't sit still**
- **paces** when talking

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