

Dyslexia Assessing and Reporting: The PATOSS Guide (2013)

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This is the second edition of the *PATOSS* (Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties) *Guide* and retains much of the information contained in the original *PATOSS Guide* edited by Gill Blackhouse and Kath Morris in 2005. The *PATOSS Guide* is addressed to the specialist assessor of specific learning difficulties in the UK. However all teachers, especially support teachers who undertake diagnostic assessment of learners with literacy difficulties, would find the book a useful resource. From the outset, the authors stress the interactive nature of assessment as a process where learners are actively involved at every stage, and where the assessor works closely with other professionals and parents to understand the learner better and promote their best interests.

There are three main parts in the book. Parts 1 and 2 address the knowledge and skills needed by *all* assessors regardless of the context in which they work. Part 1 covers the principles of assessment, the basic concepts in psychometrics and there is a section on the ethical, legal and regulatory considerations relevant to professional practice in the UK. The first chapter outlines a model of early reading, (Frith, 2002) drawing from the simple view of reading (Hoover and Gough, 1990), although the simplicity of this model has been questioned in recent years (Snowling and Hulme, 2007; Oakhill and Cain, 2012).

A working definition of dyslexia (Rose, 2009) is suggested as a benchmark for evaluating assessment data. This also reflects the definition of dyslexia used in the Irish context. The causal modelling framework (Frith, 2002) is also used, which sets out three levels of description: the biological, the cognitive and behavioural, and which highlights the environmental impact at all three levels. These underlying principles provide the framework for an individualised diagnostic

assessment. Teachers will be familiar with analysis of literacy attainment at a behavioural level, highlighting reading accuracy, reading comprehension, reading speed, and difficulties with spelling and writing composition. A weakness in working memory is known to be prevalent in Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) and teachers will recognise this as an area of difficulty for some pupils. The authors state that 'analysis at a cognitive level is central to the assessment of SpLDs' (p. 9). A core set of cognitive abilities, which are linked to phonology, memory, speed of processing and visual and verbal and non-verbal abilities are described. A simplified representation of verbal/visual domains based on a model of working memory is presented (Gathercole and Packiam-Alloway, 2008). The authors acknowledge that we cannot solve the dilemma between the medical and social models of specific learning difficulties, but, as assessors, we must address both aspects.

Part 2 of the *PATOSS Guide* focusses on all the practical aspects of assessment and the areas to be explored: background information; cognitive abilities; attainments in reading accuracy, comprehension, fluency and speed of reading. Teachers will find the information on underlying verbal, non-verbal ability and working memory, pp. 56-59 useful. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on interpreting the evidence, scores, observations and comparisons and refer to the importance of making links across the assessment. The authors suggest how drawing all the information /evidence together from a wide range of sources should provide a profile of strengths and weaknesses. A brief description focussed on 'classic' profiles of specific learning difficulties is included in Chapter 7, but not intended as diagnostic checklists. The underlying premise is that the teacher/assessor keeps an open mind, and takes an approach which reflects the emerging evidence, rather than one which seeks support for a pre-determined view. A useful set of questions that assessors might work through is presented in Chapter 8. This includes collaboration with others, already referred to at the outset and briefly summarised here. This is followed in the next chapter by guidelines on writing the assessment report, the report structure and format, and in particular the professional and informed language used.

Part 3 of the *PATOSS Guide* refers to considerations through the age range: the early years, the primary phase, the secondary phase, further education and higher education. Teachers could go directly to this section of the book for practical and useful recommendations. Sample case studies are also included. Support teachers can also refer to Part 4, for a list of current resources organised thematically for ease of reference.

There is no doubt a growing focus on understanding the complexity and co-occurrence of specific learning difficulties, both in England and Ireland. There is also a growing awareness of a social model of disability, and this is to be welcomed. Although the purposes of assessment may vary, the principles of good practice remain constant. This *PATOSS Guide* is a useful and informative resource for teachers who wish to update their skills and knowledge in assessment practice. It is especially useful for support teachers and members of multi-disciplinary teams who are interested in diagnostic assessment and wish to learn more about conducting an assessment and reporting.

Oakhill, J. and Cain, K. (2012) The Precursors of Reading Comprehension and Word Reading in Young Readers: Evidence from a Four-year Longitudinal Study, *Scientific Studies of Reading*, Vol. 16 (2), 91-121.

Snowling, M.J. and Hulme, C. (Eds) (2007) *The Science of Reading: A Handbook*, London: Blackwell.

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