



AN CHOMHAIRLE MHÚINTEOIREACHTA

The Teaching Council

An Action Research Study of Developing Provision for Children with Dyspraxia/DCD

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Rationale and Aims

This rationale for this research stemmed from the researcher's concern that, although the EPSEN Act (2004) defines inclusive practice for all children in Ireland with SEN, the area of dyspraxia/DCD has received little attention compared to other disabilities.

Dyspraxia/DCD is reported to present several barriers to learning. Those with the condition experience challenges to emotional wellbeing and difficulties in areas such as: coordination and motor skills; handwriting; participation in sport and PE lessons; and planning and organisational competencies. Thus, there is a need for a professional response by teachers to meet the needs of children with this disability. However, the researcher suggests that there appears to be little understanding amongst primary teachers of the condition and how to support pupils with it. This is possibly compounded by an absence of guidelines and assessment instruments for use in the educational context. Hence, the researcher was inspired to determine key elements of effective provision for children with dyspraxia in the SEN department of an Irish primary school.

The aims of the study were as follows:

- to examine the barriers to learning posed by dyspraxia
- to develop suitable programmes and interventions
- to assess the effectiveness of those programmes and interventions
- to make recommendations to improve the efficacy of provision.

Research Topic

The author examines the definitions of dyspraxia and discusses the aetiology of the condition. Neurological, genetic and environmental influences are cited. However, further research is required to determine causal pathology and it is likely that there are several causes.

Barriers to learning are presented and considered. They include the absence of assessment tools for motor coordination and sensory skills, and the lack of teacher knowledge and understanding about dyspraxia/DCD.

Key elements of inclusive school practice are reviewed and it is suggested that there are four hallmarks of effective provision namely:

- early identification and assessment
- suitable models of provision of additional teaching
- adopting a whole school approach
- collaboration.

Differentiation, handwriting programmes, and exercise and motor skills programmes are among the interventions that are described and analysed by the researcher.

Design and Methodology

A case study of one recently-diagnosed eleven year old girl formed the lens through which the school's provision was examined. An action research approach was adopted with multiple data collection methods, perspectives and observers. Structured and unstructured observations, semi-structured interviews, research diaries, checklists and samples of work were used.

New and more cost-effective methods of allocating SEN resources within the school were tried and tested.

Findings and Recommendations

The case study child showed improvements in motor strength and a willingness to try motor activities. Her parents also noted a marked improvement in her self-esteem. Teachers reported an improvement in behaviour and a reduction in the incidence of emotional outbursts. There was a slight improvement in handwriting and some improvement in emotional literacy particularly in the areas of self-regulation and self-awareness. Other children with SEN who attended the group sessions on fine motor and gross motor skills development also showed encouraging development in target areas.

The study concludes with a series of recommendations for teachers, principals, parents, schools, colleges of education, policy makers and statutory bodies such as the NCCA and the NCSE.

Some key recommendations are listed below:

- The NCSE should compile a register of pupils diagnosed with dyspraxia/DCD so that a prevalence rate can be calculated. This would enable policy makers, parents and educators to plan effective provision.
- The NCCA should support teachers' knowledge and understanding of dyspraxia by issuing baseline assessments for sensory and motor difficulties. Teachers could use the results of assessment to inform learning objectives and facilitate reporting to other professionals.
- Schools should consider organising provision for sensory and motor needs in group settings (due to the overlapping nature of dyspraxia, ADHD, Cerebral Palsy, ASD and dyslexia).
- Schools should adopt specific emotional literacy assessment skills training programmes for children with DCD.
- The DES and colleges of education should collaborate to design courses for teachers to enhance their knowledge and understanding of dyspraxia, its educational implications, and how to support pupils with this special educational need.
- Parents should be made aware of support available in the Dyspraxia Association.
- SEN teachers and principals need to be sensitive to the needs of parents of children with dyspraxia and offer support.
- The DES should provide exemplars on research-based interventions to meet the needs of children with DCD.

- The SESS should help teachers to adapt the PE curriculum to facilitate accessibility and inclusion.