Book Study
Prepared by the
Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) Project

Learning Disabilities: From Identification to Intervention
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(Guilford Press, 2007)

Book Description
Learning Disabilities: From Identification to Intervention is a selection of research in the area
of learning disabilities. The book provides a conceptual framework for assessment that
includes Response to Instruction, but is also grounded in an understanding of the relationship
between and the impact of core cognitive processes, neurobiology, behavioral/psychosocial
factors, and the environment. The book facilitates an understanding of how all of these
factors contribute to a child's academic achievement. This book would not be considered
light and it is necessary that the reader have prior knowledge of the assessment of learning
disabilities.
Target Audience
Special education staff, school psychologists, special education directors would be a good
audience for this book.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview
This chapter is a general overview of the format of the book that also sets up the conceptual model for the assessment of learning disabilities.

Helpful Hints
It might be beneficial for the first day of the book study to read chapter one during the time allotted and discuss learning disabilities and what the participants currently know about it. It will be necessary to take time to understand the conceptual model provided. It would be very helpful to have that model printed on a separate piece of paper for participants to take notes on as it is discussed.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the most common misconceptions about children with learning disabilities?

2. Discuss the visual model provided and make sure that everyone has a common understanding of it.

3. What do our current assessment practices look like and entail?

Chapter 2: History of the Field

Overview
This chapter provides a brief overview of the history of the evaluation of individual differences and the concept of a learning disability.

Helpful Hints
This chapter is short enough to be done with Chapter 1. To contextualize the information in this chapter it might be helpful to also have, for the participants, the local and/or state definition of learning disability. It might also be helpful for the facilitator of the group to create a timeline of the history.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the evolution of the term "learning disability" as presented in the chapter.

2. Depending on the age and years of service in education, discuss experiences and observations participants may have had as the field has emerged.

3. How are the local/state definitions similar to what is provided in the chapter?

Chapter 3: Classification, Definition, and Identification of Learning Disabilities

Overview
Chapter 3 is an overview of the various models of identifying learning disabilities. The chapter begins with defining the general purpose of a classification system in both research and practice as well as why learning disabilities are so difficult to define. The chapter then describes the various models of classification systems including the validity and reliability of each system.

Helpful Hint
From this point forward, the chapters provide a fairly detailed link between research and practice and provide a significant amount of content. Before launching into each chapter, it might be helpful to facilitate discussion around the current practices of the group and perhaps provide an outline for the participants to enable them to continually be comparing the information provided in the book to local practices and state policy.

Discussion Questions

1. Have a discussion about the local model and which category it fits with.
   - Aptitude – Achievement Discrepancy Model
   - Low Achievement Models
   - Intra-individual Differences Model
   - RTI (or MTSS) Models
   - The Integrated Model

2. How do the validity and reliability of each model compare to each other? Use a table similar to the one below to organize the discussion.

Model	Validity	Reliability
Aptitude-Achievement Discrepancy		
Low Achievement		
Intra-individual Differences		
RTI		
Integrated		

3. Exclusionary Factors have been a required part of an initial evaluation for special education for a long time, but have often been a mere check box rather than a critical

element of the evaluation. How does the local evaluation address this component of an initial evaluation?

4. Pre-referral and/or general education interventions have been a part of IDEA for more than a decade, however, similar to the exclusionary factors, have been more of a checkbox rather than a dynamic element of the evaluation. Bring an example of a local initial evaluation and consider how the current practices address general education interventions.

5. How could an evaluation of the adequacy of instruction be done in a sensitive but authentic manner?

6. How might progress monitoring data (or the reading collaboration tool) provide a more detailed look at instruction?

Chapter 4: Assessment of Learning Disabilities

Overview
Chapter 4 provides more information about the hybrid model of identification the authors proposed in Chapter 3. The model consists of monitoring progress, evaluating interventions, identifying inadequate response, evaluating achievement domains (reading, writing, etc.), and assessing contextual factors and related conditions.

Helpful Hints
From this point forward, the chapters provide a fairly detailed link between research and practice and provide a significant amount of content. Before launching into each chapter, it might be helpful to facilitate discussion around the current practices of the group and perhaps provide an outline for the participants to enable them to continually be comparing the information provided in the book to local practices and state policy. It may also be helpful to have on hand during discussion, a copy of the Kansas Special Education Process Handbook to reference.

Discussion Questions

1. Review a local evaluation in comparison to what was described in the chapter and discuss the similarities and differences.

2. What pros and cons were given regarding the use of standardized assessment?

3. Below is an excerpt from the July 2000 Kansas Special Education Process Handbook Chapter 3. Does it appear that the recommended procedures in Kansas allow educators to conduct evaluations similar to what was described in the chapter?

7-2000 p 3-1

school-aged children. The use of a problem-solving process during screening or general education intervention assists teams in making decisions about referrals for initial evaluation by: (1) documenting a description of the presenting behavior of concern; (2) collecting data related to the presenting concern; (3) documenting the formation and implementation of interventions designed to address the behavior of concern; and (4) documenting the effectiveness of the interventions. An appraisal of the effectiveness of the interventions, including the interventions that worked for the child, and the degree to which the interventions require substantial resources are important to consider when deciding whether a child should be referred for possible special education services, and are essential in planning and conducting the initial evaluation after a referral has been made.

The initial evaluation is also based on the use of a problem-solving model, and this chapter addresses initial evaluation from that perspective. Figure 3-1 at the beginning of this chapter is a flow chart that identifies the basic steps in the initial evaluation process. An initial evaluation involves the use of a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional and developmental information to assist in determining if the child is eligible for special education, which is twofold: (1) to determine if the child has an exceptionality (disability or giftedness); and (2) by reason thereof, has a need for special education and related services. The use of a problem-solving model to accomplish this shifts the focus of the initial evaluation to providing a solution (not just access to services) by assessing the concern identified to determine if the child is eligible and to develop an educational plan whether the child is found eligible or not. New laws and regulations focus the school's attention on what the student needs to enable him or her to learn effectively and to participate and progress in the general curriculum.

4. Are and/or how could the results of progress monitoring be incorporated into and or summarized in an eligibility report?

5. What data are currently collected for progress monitoring and how frequently are they reviewed by grade level teams, classroom teachers, or special education teachers?

6. Discuss how interventions and contextual factors are being evaluated? How can regular education and special education partner to accomplish this component?

Chapter 5: Reading Disabilities Word Recognition

Overview
Chapter 5 examines various factors related to word level reading disabilities and provides an explanation of the link with dyslexia. Below is an outline of the many sections in this chapter.

Helpful Hints
Chapter 5 is a long, complex, and technically written chapter. Allow additional time for the participants to get through the material. It may also be helpful to jigsaw the chapter.

Discussion Questions
1. If the chapter was jig sawed, have each group provide a brief summary of the portion that was read.

2. Identify and discuss the specific academic skill deficits that are markers of word recognition reading disabilities.

3. Dyslexia is a term that is used frequently in mainstream society. Often, parents will ask the school if their child could be tested for dyslexia. Since that term is not one of the disabilities categories under IDEA, school teams will often respond with an explanation that dyslexia is a "medical diagnosis" not an educational diagnosis. After reading this chapter, what would be your answer if a parent asked that question?

4. The chapter provides significant evidence of the malleability of the brain as well as the power of instruction. Discuss this in relationship to past and current attitudes about students who are at-risk or have a learning disability.

5. Identify the diagnostic process currently being used to identify word level reading difficulties. Based on the chapter, should anything change? How does this chapter's recommendations line up with MTSS recommendations?

6. Discuss the importance of response to intervention in relationship to the identification of a word level reading disability.

7. Discuss the current interventions being used in your school to address word level reading disabilities. Do they tend to be preventative or remedial?

Chapter 6: Reading Disabilities Fluency

Overview
This chapter examines the aspect of reading fluency both as a result of various types of phonemically based and word level reading problems as well as a specific domain of reading disabilities.

Helpful Hints
When reading this chapter, as well as all the others, it will be helpful to keep in mind the current reading programs used in order to continually be examining what is being said within the context of the instruction being provided.

Discussion Questions
1. The importance of fluency as a critical component of reading is provided in this chapter. Despite the abundance of research in this area educators continue to downplay the importance of this skill as well as misinterpret "fluency" to be about speed. How does this continue to be an issue?

2. Consider the assessment system (screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, outcome) at your school. How is reading fluency assessed and utilized to evaluate programs and performance from the school level to the individual student level.

3. In elementary schools we often hear the comment, "He's just a slow reader, his comprehension is fine if he's given enough time." Based on this chapter, formulate a response to this comment.

4. Identify and discuss the specific academic skill deficits that are markers of a reading disability in the area of fluency.

5. Discuss the intervention approaches discussed in the chapter. How are the interventions used in your school like or unlike what was described in the chapter?

Chapter 7: Reading Disabilities Comprehension

Overview
This chapter follows the same format as the chapters on word recognition and fluency; however, the research in this area is not as developed.

Helpful Hints
As with the previous two chapters, it will be helpful to understand the district's reading curriculum, instruction, and materials when reading this chapter.

Discussion Questions

1. Consider the assessment system (screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, outcome) at your school. How is reading comprehension assessed and utilized to evaluate programs and performance from the school level to the individual student level? Discuss how the different assessments measure different aspects of reading comprehension.

2. The chapter is clear about the link between reading comprehension and language skills. What is the current role of the speech and language pathologist in reading evaluations? How might that role change or be expanded in light of this, and previous, chapters?

3. Discuss the intervention approaches discussed in the chapter. How are the interventions used in your school like or unlike what was described in the chapter?

4. Identify and discuss the specific academic skill deficits that are markers of a disability in the area of reading comprehension.

Chapter 8: Mathematics Disabilities

Overview

This chapter follows the same format as the chapters on reading disabilities with the major sections being: Academic Skill Deficits, Core Cognitive Processes, Epidemiology, Neurobiological Factors, Summary: From Academic Skill Deficits to Neurobiological Factors, Interventions, and Conclusions.

Helpful Hints

As with the reading chapters, it will be helpful to understand the district's mathematics curriculum, instruction, and materials when reading this chapter.

Discussion Questions

1. Consider the assessment system (screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, outcome) at your school. How is mathematics assessed and how are the data utilized to evaluate programs and performance from the school level to the individual student level? Discuss how the different assessments at your school measure different aspects of mathematics.

2. What are the differences between arithmetic, algorithmic computation, and arithmetic word problems? Are these skills hierarchical?

3. Identify and discuss the specific academic skill deficits that are markers of a disability in the area of mathematics.

4. Discuss the link between reading and math. Should all initial evaluations for a learning disability assess both areas?

Chapter 9: Written Expression Disabilities

Overview
This chapter follows the same format as the previous chapters with the major sections being: Academic Skill Deficits, Core Cognitive Processes, Epidemiology, Neurobiological Factors, Summary: From Academic Skill Deficits to Neurobiological Factors, Interventions, and Conclusions.

Helpful Hints
As with the reading chapters, it will be helpful to understand the district's writing curriculum, instruction, and materials when reading this chapter.

Discussion Questions

1. Consider the assessment system (screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, outcome) at your school. How is writing assessed and how are the data utilized to evaluate programs and performance from the school level to the individual student level? Discuss how the different assessments at your school measure different aspects of writing.

2. Identify and discuss the specific academic skill deficits that are markers of a disability in the area of writing.

3. Discuss the link between reading and writing. Should all initial evaluations for a learning disability assess both areas?

4. How could a speech and language pathologist contribute to an assessment of a child's writing skills?

Chapter 10: Conclusions and Future Directions

Overview
Congratulations! You finished this book!! The primary foci of this chapter are to identify the difficulties bringing research to practice and to provide basic principles for instruction students with learning disabilities. It is not a summative review of chapters 1-9.

Helpful Hints
All the helpful hints of the previous chapters apply.

Discussion Questions
1. What have been your experiences with bringing research to practice? Identify successes and failures.

2. Identify some of the potential reasons educators resist or have difficulty with the application of research to their practices. What could be done to change this?

3. Think about the way those students with learning disabilities are currently served in your schools. What are the similarities between the current practices and what is provided in this book?

4. How will you share this information with your colleagues?

5. After reading this book, how have your views of assessment, intervention and research changed?