

A quick note:

Welcome back.

Well another summer has come and gone and it's back to work for most of us!

We have lots more articles and news for you in this edition of Éirim news. Once again we would love to hear back with suggestions about the types of articles you would like to see featured.

Enjoy the read!!

Please e-mail us your input and suggestions to training@eirim.ie

Rebecca James
Director

Reasonable RACE Assessments now available

In response to the high demand for RACE assessments, Éirim has now designed affordable assessments for reasonable accommodations in Certificate examinations (RACE).

The cost of each RACE assessment is **€200 per student** (based on a minimum of 2 students).

The test batteries used by our psychologists have been designed so that they can be used partly in groups (approx 30 minutes total) and partly on an individual basis (approx 40 minutes each).

Individual reports are written up for each student outlining their results and recommended reasonable accommodations where appropriate.

Each assessment measures the student's level of

- Word reading
- Reading comprehension
- Reading fluency
- Spelling
- Writing fluency

All of the reports are written in accordance with the criteria laid down by the Department of Education and may be used to apply for a spelling and grammar waiver, reader, scribe/tape recorder etc.

In some instances further information or testing may be required by NEPS.

For more information please contact our office.

Journal Reviews:

In this series we will review some recent research articles of interest to teachers

Computers in the classroom? by TJ

There has been a lot of talk recently about using computers in the classroom and the benefits that they can bring. But what about the downsides? While some research shows laptops can be an important learning tool, anecdotal evidence from the US suggests that more and more colleges are banning laptops from their classrooms because of perceptions that they distract students and actually detract from

learning. A recent study by Carrie Fried from Winona State University investigated this matter. The research, which is reported in Computers and Education, examined the nature of students' in-class laptop use and how that use influenced student learning in a large lecture-oriented course. Students completed weekly surveys of attendance, computer use, and aspects of the classroom

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Computers are a distraction in class

environment. Results showed that students who used laptops in class spent considerable time multitasking and that the computer use posed a significant distraction to both users and fellow students. Most importantly, the level of computer use was negatively related to

several measures of student learning, including self-reported understanding of course material and overall course performance. Maybe we should think twice before we put in an order for more computers in the classroom.

The wrong reading tests

by TJ & RJ

Screening tests widely used to identify children with reading problems are being misapplied, landing students in the wrong instructional level and delaying treatment for their true difficulties, says new research from National-Louis University and the University of Maryland.

graders, the ones with the word-finding problems, hadn't learned to read, as their schools believed, then they would perform on the silent tests only about as well as the rookies. But they didn't. The older children surpassed the rookies on these silent tests. They had learned, but just couldn't show it."

Most screening tests are oral tests but research found that oral tests fail to distinguish between children who can't understand words on a page and those who have language problems that make it difficult to prove their reading competence verbally. Children with these so-called "word-finding" difficulties can't manage to say out loud what they read on the page. The study recommends silent reading tests and limited use of oral ones.

The older children scored 98% in the silent test compared to 58% for the first-graders. The results also verified that children with word-finding difficulties had a much harder time with oral tests than silent ones. Accuracy on oral reading tests for these older children ranged from 57 to 62 percent. But on silent tests using the same words, their reading accuracy was significantly better, ranging from 85 to 88 percent.



Silent reading tests better than oral reading tests.....?

The researchers estimate that as many as 10% of all children may have these speech language problems. Roughly 1-in-5 children have some kind of learning difficulty, and nearly half of these have the "word-finding" problem.

Diane German, a special education professor at National-Louis University in Chicago, Illinois says "they really struggle when they have to read a simple word like 'nest' out loud. Some grimace, others look stuck. Some just blurt out an answer that's almost always wrong. Yet when asked to point to the same word on a page, they almost always get it right. Clearly they've got a problem and need help, but it's not that they lack reading skills."



The researchers used an experimental design, testing one group of 15 "typical learning" first-graders and another group of 25 second- and third-graders. The older children had word-finding difficulties and were getting remedial reading instruction. All the subjects were given an experimental reading assessment ("Test of Oral and Silent Reading Recognition"), as well as other language-related tasks.

One child in the study, previously diagnosed with these "word-finding" difficulties, couldn't say "cocoon" as he tried to read a story aloud. When he got to the word, he stumbled and added, "You know, it is that brown thing hanging in the tree." "Clearly, this child had managed to 'read' the word to himself and

"We tested the first-graders with the idea that they were rookies at reading," says Newman. "If the second- and third-

comprehend it, or he could never have come up with that kind of description,” explains psychologist Rochelle Newman. “He just couldn’t retrieve the sound pattern of the word.” While word-finding difficulties are relatively common, German and Newman say it’s unclear how many of these children end up mislabeled by schools. All 25 of the students in the experiment diagnosed with word-finding difficulties had been put in

remedial reading classes at school - unnecessarily, based on the study results.

The study recommends the use of silent tasks to determine the actual reading ability of children with speech or language difficulties. For example, to check reading decoding skills, children can be asked to “point to the word” or “find the word.” Multiple-choice questions can be used to check silent reading comprehension.



Useful Websites:

- Good study tips website:
www.how-to-study.com

If you have found any websites particular useful please e-mail them to us and we would be delighted to share it with others in the next newsletter.

****All of these websites and more can be found on our website www.eirim.ie**



Tea Time Teaser: by KJ

Sudoku Challenge

WIN €50 Return completed Sudoku to Éirim with name and school address enclosed.

5				8			4
	9				5	7	1
4		7	1				
				3			4
				6			7
9		8				3	6
		9			8		
	4			7		5	
		3	4	1	6	9	8



Aaaahhhh!!

Feature: Readers and Scribes in State Examinations:

- Are they Helping too Much? By KJ

This piece of research on readers and scribes in Irish State Examinations is certainly food for thought and poses questions about the validity of exam results.

The research was conducted by Éirim and presented at the International School Psychology Association Conference in Malta in July.

Readers and scribes are common accommodations used in both Junior and Leaving Certificate Examinations.

The Irish State examination system states that "reasonable accommodations are intended to ... ensure that, whilst giving candidates every opportunity to demonstrate their level of attainment, the special arrangements will not give the candidate an unfair advantage over other candidates in the same examination".



However, recent research found that the average score in a written assignment was higher for those who had scribes compared to those who wrote their own responses, thus suggesting that "scribes may be facilitating students' abilities to organize or be prompting for the students to elaborate their responses" (Tippets and Michaels, 1997).

Éirim conducted research in order to investigate whether assistance from scribes or readers (such as verbal encouragement, paraphrasing or simplifying questions) could influence students' scores on State Examinations in Ireland and whether candidates would achieve the same results using an alternative accommodation. This was done by contacting persons who had been scribes and readers and asking them to complete a questionnaire anonymously.

Results indicated wide variations in how much assistance is given to candidates by different scribes and readers in State Examinations in Ireland. The majority of respondents believed that candidates would not achieve the same marks using technological assistance (e.g. tapes or computers) instead of a personal reader or scribe.

These findings suggest that candidates who have the accommodation of a reader or scribe have an advantage over candidates that do not. These results show that there are implications for the validity of the candidates' results and for the integrity of the examinations.



"Students who have a scribe/reader have an advantage over others.."

**Feature:****Seeing the problem**

by TJ

-Visual difficulties in the classroom

“Many more children have vision difficulties than teachers realise”



Many vision difficulties go undetected

Like hearing difficulties, many more children have vision difficulties than teachers realise. There are many causes of visual impairment, which affect children in different ways. For example, some conditions let too much light into the eye which leads to reduced vision in bright sunlight. Others can result in patchy vision a bit like looking through a colander. Vision may be blurred, cloudy, or parts of the 'picture' may be missing. Most children with visual impairments cope perfectly well in school, with appropriate specs, but some need specialist help and others have problems that often go undetected.

One commonly missed vision problem is eyes that don't turn together properly to read. As many as one of every 20 students have some degree of what eye doctors call "convergence insufficiency," or CI, where eye muscles must work harder to focus up-close. And those standard vision screenings administered in schools will seldom catch it – they stress distance vision.

Complaints are rare in very young children because pictures and large type don't require as much convergence. Parents tend to start noticing a problem once homework and deeper reading begins because to read small print or other close-in work, both eyes must turn slightly inward, or converge to bring the words into focus. As its name implies, convergence insufficiency means the eyes aren't doing that properly. Words may appear blurry or double, or disappear as readers lose their place.

Of course the degree of convergence insufficiency differs and the degree of extra effort eye muscles must exert to compensate and bring that image into focus determines whether someone has obvious symptoms and how bad they are. Some students complain only in the teen or college years, perhaps when their workload

outpaces their ability to compensate. Others find they can read with one eye closed and do fine.

Where there are any signs that a learning problem might be caused by a visual difficulty, Éirim screens for this using a computerized screener which screens for colour blindness, near and distance vision as well as convergence. Diagnosis requires seeing an ophthalmologist or optometrist trained to treat children who can measure convergence, and where appropriate Éirim will provide a referral letter to an ophthalmologist.

Convergence insufficiency can be helped by exercises and the most commonly prescribed exercise is "pencil push-ups", holding a pencil about eighteen inches from your nose and moving it steadily closer until you see double.

Signs of visual difficulty:

- Holding head close to the desk/table or at an odd angle
- Holding books too close/too far away
- Blinking a lot, rubbing eyes
- Screwing up eyes to look at things, squinting at the board
- Sore-looking, weepy eyes
- Clumsiness, often getting bruised
- Headaches
- Sensitivity to bright lights
- Poor balance
- Messy work
- Confusion between similarly shaped letters/words
- Difficulty with copying.

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Attention Secondary Schools

Need a reader/ scribe / tape recorder / laptop for exams?

Éirim is providing assessments for Reasonable Accommodations in Certificate Exams (RACE).

€200 per assessment (based on minimum of 2 students)

Feature: Dyspraxia

by Harry Conway (Dyspraxia Association)



What is Dyspraxia?

Some children, despite adequate teaching, a stimulating environment and generally normal intellect, have difficulty with movement and specific aspects of learning. Dyspraxia is a difficulty with thinking out, planning and carrying out sensory/motor tasks.

How can Dyspraxia be recognised?

The child with dyspraxia may have a combination of several problems in varying degrees. These may include:

- Poor balance
- Poor fine and gross motor co-ordination
- Poor posture
- Difficulty with throwing and catching a ball
- Poor awareness of body position in space
- Poor sense of direction
- Difficulty hopping, skipping or riding a bike
- Sensitive to touch
- Confused about which hand to use
- Intolerance of having hair or teeth brushed, nails and hair cut
- Slow to learn to dress or feed themselves
- Find some clothes uncomfortable
- Difficulty with reading, writing
- Speech problems - slow to learn to speak and speech may be incoherent
- Phobias or obsessive behaviour and impatient

Children with dyspraxia can be of average or above average intelligence but are often behaviorally immature. They try hard to fit in to socially accepted behaviour when at school but often throw tantrums when at home. They may find it difficult to understand logic and reason. Not all children with Dyspraxia have all of these problems. Many parents will say that their children have some of these problems but if your child has dyspraxia, either diagnosed or not, you may have observed a cluster of difficulties.

What do children with Dyspraxia need?

Children with dyspraxia benefit most from one-to-one therapy. They need the support of qualified professionals on a regular basis to help them reach their full potential. Children with dyspraxia need support and understanding in the educational system.

What does the family of a child with Dyspraxia need?

The challenges presented by living with a child with dyspraxia frequently go unrecognised outside the immediate family unit. In addition to the normal stresses and strains of raising a family in today's society, families of children with dyspraxia cope daily with their child's ongoing frustration at their own limitations.

They also cope with the demand and strain of constant teaching. Families must also deal with their child being misunderstood by the general community and in the educational system.

What families need most is for dyspraxia to be better understood and recognised. With greater awareness, both professionals and the general community could respond to the needs of families in a more supportive way by providing adequate therapy, adequate support in the educational system and practical support to families.

What about the future?

Dyspraxia is not curable. However, prognosis is hopeful in that the child will improve in some areas with growing maturity. Children can be helped to a large extent with the appropriate treatment to overcome the continuing problems which they may face.

About the Dyspraxia Association of Ireland

The Dyspraxia Association of Ireland provides access to assessment and therapy intervention, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, drama therapy, educational psychology assessments, counseling and speech and language therapy to members. The association also provides a teen and young adult support group network for social interaction and activities.



"Children with dyspraxia...try hard to fit in socially"



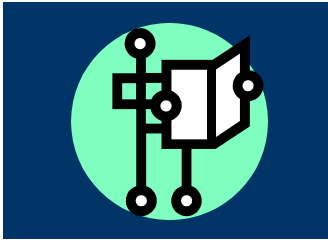
The Dyspraxia Association of Ireland

Carmichael House,
North Brunswick Street,
Dublin 7

Tel: 01 8747085

Email:
dyspraxiaireland@eircom.net

Website:
www.dyspraxiaireland.com



Quote Corner

"The important thing is not to stop questioning"

(Albert Einstein)

Éirim
65 Bath Avenue
Sandymount
Dublin 4

Phone:
01 6674174

Fax:
01 6674174

E-Mail:
eirim@eirim.ie

Sign up to the newsletter online at
www.eirim.ie

About Our Company.....

Éirim: The National Assessment Agency Ltd is a private practice which conducts psycho-educational assessments for private individuals, educational institutions, Department of Education and the HSE. All of our assessments are carried out to the highest of standards

by qualified psychologists.

Éirim also runs training courses, online & intensive, for those interested in or in the educational sector. All of the courses are approved and verified by the British Psychological Society (BPS).

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Éirim:
65 Bath Avenue,
Sandymount,
Dublin 4,

