

January 2009
Volume 1, Issue 1

Éirim News

Resource and information for schools and individuals interested in assessment & special needs

A quick note:

Welcome to the very first edition of Éirim News.

This quarterly newsletter has been put together as a resource for teachers in both primary and secondary school.

We have tried to give it a mix of useful resources for teachers, activities and relevant research and journal reviews.

We would be delighted to receive input from teachers to print in the next issue. It could be anything from an educational poem you've written to a new strategy for learning you've used in the classroom.

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

Rebecca James

Director

Contents:

Get Qualified!!..... 1

Journal Reviews

Tell your ma!..... 1

Start Hard..... 2

Useful websites... 3

Tea Time Teaser.. 3

Feature

Pre-referral Intervention & assessment..... 4

NVLD..... 6

Resource Review

SNIP..... 7

Get Qualified in Educational Testing

***NEW * The Certificate of Competence in Educational Testing (Level A)** is an excellent opportunity for teachers and others who work with children and adults to receive a qualification in the administration, interpretation and use of psychometric tests.

The course is fast becoming the industry standard and benchmark for the use of psychometric tests in education. It promotes a wider conceptual model of assessment than 'diagnosis' and thus enhances one's understanding of assessment in general.

Benefits of the course:

- ◆ Qualify to select, administer, score & interpret a wide range of tests
- ◆ Gain credibility in the eyes of professionals, peers, Psychological Societies, parents and those being assessed

- ◆ Confidently choose appropriate tests for different groups of students
- ◆ Gain extensive knowledge on different aspects and types of assessment (e.g. reliability, validity etc.)
- ◆ Gain access to higher level tests e.g. Conners' Rating Scale
- ◆ Save on NEPS/SCPA assessments by reducing reliance on their support & by selecting the more 'high priority' students for professional assessment

The course is an online course and conducted in one's own time and at one's pace (also run as a 4 day intensive course). Students are assigned a qualified and experienced psychologist to help and support them throughout the course.

For more information contact: Éirim (01) 6674174 or visit www.eirim.ie.

Journal Reviews:

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

Tell your Ma! (or your teacher!!)

by TJ & RJ

The authors of this journal article (Bethany Rittle-Johnson, Megan Saylor & Kathryn Swygert) set out to determine if 4- and 5-year olds learn more when they have to explain the solution of a problem to someone else. The children were shown a series of plastic bugs, and then had to say which bug should come next in the series based on color and type of bug (challenging for 4-5 year olds). The children were told to explain the solution to their mothers, to themselves or to simply repeat the answer out loud.

If they were explaining to their mothers the mothers just listened without interrupting.

The researchers found that both explaining the answer to themselves and to their mothers improved the children's ability to solve similar problems later, and that explaining the answer to their mothers helped them solve even more difficult problems.

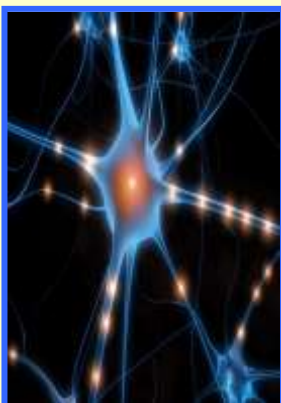
"We knew that children learn well with their moms or a peer, but we did not know if that was because they were getting feedback and help" Rittle-Johnson said. "In this study, we just had the children's mothers listen, without providing any assistance. We've found that by simply listening; a mother helps her child learn".



“Get the kids to explain things....it will help them!”



“Starting with harder problems then moving to easier ones produced best results.”



A neuron cell

The idea is to get kids to explain things rather than just telling them the answer. Explaining their reasoning, to a parent or teacher or peers, will help them understand the problem and transfer what they’ve learnt to other situations.

This new finding can help parents and

teachers better assist children with schoolwork, even when they’re not sure of the answer themselves.

So, asking kids to verbalize what they’ve learnt, even if they do roll their eyes, will prove beneficial.

Starting hard helps pupils learn

by TJ & RJ

What is the best method of teaching students new skills? That’s the challenge for all educators. Is it better for children to learn gradually, starting with easy examples and slowly progressing to more challenging problems? Or is it more effective to just dive-in head first with difficult problems, and then move on to easier examples? Although conventional wisdom suggests that the best way to learn a difficult skill is to progress from easier problems to more difficult ones, research examining this issue has resulted in mixed outcomes.

Brian Spiering and Gregory Ashby from the University of California wanted to pinpoint the best strategies for learning new information. In their study, a group of volunteers were taught a new task in which they had to categorize items. The volunteers were trained to complete the task by one of three methods—starting with easy problems and working up, starting with harder problems then moving on to easier examples or being shown examples in random order.

The results, published in Psychological Science, showed that the effects of the different training methods depended on the type of categories that the participants were learning. When the categories could be easily described (i.e. was the line horizontal or vertical?), all three of the training procedures were equally effective. However, when the categories could not be described easily, starting with the

harder problems then moving to easier ones produced the best results.

The volunteers in the easy-to-hard group were able to come up with simple rules and category descriptions, which worked for the easy problems, but were not applicable to more complicated problems. As a result, these participants ended up doing poorly on the task because they were unable to think abstractly to solve the problem. On the other hand, the participants who began with harder problems very quickly stopped trying to come up ways to describe the categories and thought about the problems in a more abstract way; this strategy helped them to perform well throughout the task.

These findings have important implications for teachers and educators and suggest that materials should be presented to students in a specific order, depending on what is being taught.

Useful Websites:



Éirim recently sent out bookmarks containing useful websites to schools around the country. However, since some of you have mislaid them or simply not seen them, here are some:

- ◆ The Dyslexia Association of Ireland (www.dyslexia.ie)

This site contains many useful resources for working with children with dyslexia. Many are of interest to both parents and teachers and free to download!

- ◆ Irish Autism action (www.autismireland.ie)

Contains general information about autism and resources and tips

- ◆ Dyspraxia Association (www.dyspraxiaireland.com)
- ◆ General learning resources (www.ldonline.org)

Contains some great resources and general information on different learning styles, learning disabilities and disorders.

- ◆ Literacy Resources (www.dyslexics.org.uk)
- ◆ Maths resources

www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/maths/measures.htm#money

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



Tea Time Teaser: by LB

Sudoku Challenge

WIN €50 Return completed Sudoku to Éirim with name and school address and phone number enclosed. The Winner will be contacted & announced next edition.

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 9 | | | | | |
| | | 6 | | | | | | |
| 5 | | | 6 | 3 | 7 | 5 | | |
| | 6 | | | | 3 | | 1 | 9 |
| 2 | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 4 | 7 | | 1 | | | | 5 | |
| | | | 5 | 6 | 2 | | | 7 |
| | | 8 | | | | | 9 | |
| | | | | | 8 | 2 | | |

Scribbles !!!



Aaaahhhh!!

Good luck!!

Feature:**Pre-referral intervention & information for Assessment**

As every school knows educational assessments paid for either by the school or by the Department of Education (NEPS) are precious! The students selected and put forward for these assessments should thus be chosen carefully.

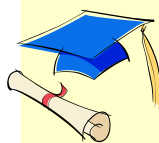
Pre-referral intervention is a process, which takes place before any professional assessment takes place. It is the practice of screening for difficulties, gathering information on sources or possible cause of difficulties (student, teacher, curriculum, environment, home, etc.), putting intervention processes in place to support those students & reviewing those interventions. The idea behind this is 2-fold:

1. Ideally to enable the classroom teacher to identify and tackle the response to the difficulty and thus reduce the numbers of students referred to psychologists for diagnosis and intervention.
2. To provide detailed and informative data to the psychologist that may lead to increased validity of diagnoses and referrals.

The following steps should be usually taken before a referral:

- 1) **Formulate an initial description of the problem**
- 2) **Gather information:** The teacher will need to gather much information to make an initial assessment of the pupil's needs, including their strengths & weaknesses.

Gather information from *the student* (their view); *the classroom* (samples of work; survey of learning environment; screening tests etc.); *the family* (background information; information on behavior & learning at home; any factors which could be contributing to the



difficulty); *other sources* (e.g. information from other schools or social services)

- 3) **Planning & Intervention:** Draw up a simple plan of classroom-based actions based on the information gathered. Actions may include: classroom/yard management strategies; differentiated curriculum or individualized teaching methods; positive behavioral reward system; circle time etc.

It is important that a simple written record of the classroom interventions is kept and that the student's response and progress over time is kept.

- 4) **Review:** This may involve the parents, class teacher & student. It should focus on the students response to the intervention; their progress; the effectiveness of the actions & possible next steps.

If the strategies don't work talk to others about approaches they find helpful (e.g. reaching out for courses/coaching/mentoring and requesting additional staff development on working with such students)

Classroom support is the most common type of initial support but sometimes interventions at this level are not enough to fulfill student's special needs. If this is so support at the school level may be necessary.

Detailed guidelines & a resource pack for teachers on planning & interventions for students with special needs can be obtained from NEPS or http://www.sess.ie/sess/Files/neps_special_needs_guidelines.pdf

NEW!!

Certificate of Competence in Educational Testing (Level A)

For more information visit www.eirim.ie
Or phone (01) 6674174



Pre-referral intervention & information for Assessment (Cont.)

If the teacher/school feels that a professional assessment is still necessary (e.g. for resources/exemptions or interventions) then the information supplied & gathered during the pre-referral process will prove invaluable to the psychologist and to the assessment.

Éirim's referral form

Below is part of a referral form used by Éirim

to gather information. Often teachers tend to simply fill in comments such as good/ reasonable/ poor etc. With this in mind the referral form has been filled in with tips on the type of information the psychologist requires. The quality of the information given will enhance the psychologist's knowledge of the difficulty, contribute to the type of assessment used and lead to increased validity of any diagnoses.

| | <i>Comments/observations/examples</i> |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Listening Skills | Effectively listens & follows oral instructions? How developed is their receptive language? Do they interpret complex instructions easily or omit steps? |
| Memory | Recalls simple non-educational facts easily e.g. what they did at the weekend? Recall previously learned facts? Rote learns tables/alphabet/ days of week etc. effectively? |
| Concentration | Remains seated? Easily distracted? Zones out? Recalled to task frequently? |
| Oral Language | Effectively express thoughts and feelings orally? Use and understanding of vocabulary age appropriate? |
| Reading | Phonics - are all letter names and blends known to an age-appropriate level? Sight words - are most common Dolch words known automatically? Fluency -reads slower than others? Reading is fluid? Interprets punctuation correctly and uses appropriate intonation? Comprehension -understands what they have read? Recalls what was read and answers questions related to the text without having to re-read it? |
| Handwriting | Correct letter formation, size and spacing? Writing is legible? Has an awkward pencil grip? |
| Spelling | Spells common words accurately? Makes good approximations when spelling unknown words? Reverses letters e.g. b/d |
| Number | Understands concept of addition, subtraction, multiplication & division? Recalls math tables accurately from memory? Understand abstract concepts e.g. fractions etc.? Much repetition needed? |
| Motor Development | Fine and gross motor skills age appropriate? Clumsier than others? |
| Relationship with Adults | Interact appropriately with adults? Respect authority? Responds appropriately to correction/reprimands? |
| Relationship with Peers | Interacts appropriately with peers? Do they understand social rules? Tends to socialise with younger children? Fights often? |
| Behaviour in class | Respects class rules? Frequently reprimanded? Display disruptive/aggressive behaviour? |
| Behaviour in playground | Plays appropriately with peers? Engages in rough play or get involved in games readily? Difficulty waiting their turn in games or lines? |
| Self-esteem | Good self-image? Happy in school? Engages in self-downing? Gives up easily? Anxious? |



Feature:

Non-Verbal learning Difficulty (NVLD) by LB & RJ



Good verbal and reading skills but underperforms in school??



“NVLD presents a unique challenge to parents, teachers and adults”

Nonverbal learning difficulties (NVLD) are typically characterized by good verbal abilities and good reading skills but seemingly poor academic performance in comparison.

Difficulty socializing and impaired motor skills are often also linked with NVLD. Nonverbal learning difficulties (NVLD) often go undiagnosed because reading ability and verbal communication tend to be regarded as the chief indicators of academic ability by most academic institutions. Because it has a pronounced effect on social interaction, as well as academic performance, NVLD presents a unique challenge to parents, teachers and adults.

NVLD and Asperger’s Syndrome
Research has shown that NVLD is closely linked to Asperger’s syndrome. Indeed many of the characteristics associated with Asperger’s Syndrome e.g. social, interpersonal and imaginative difficulties as well as well developed verbal skills are present in NVLD (particularly when the discrepancy between verbal and non-verbal skills is very marked).

Studies conducted by the Yale Child-Study Group suggest that up to 80% of children who meet the criteria for AS also have NVLD. While there are no studies on overlap in the other direction, most likely children with the more severe forms of NVLD also have AS. Children from both groups are socially awkward and pay over-attention to detail and parts, while missing main themes or underlying principles. However, the two groups differ in the range of severity.

Characteristics:

Young children with NVLD tend to stray from home or groups and get lost easily. They often spill things at mealtime because of problems with motor coordination and have trouble dressing themselves for the same reason. Problems with spatial skills appear in weak understanding of nonverbal information (e.g. pictures,

cartoons, passage of time) and nonverbal tasks like puzzles.

Students with NVLD generally appear to possess above-average cognitive skills because of their verbal strengths, but often show academic difficulties as they reach secondary levels. It may appear that the child is lazy and not fulfilling their academic potential. They may appear inattentive and poorly organized because they have trouble integrating and interpreting incoming information. Spatial and coordination problems make printing and writing, learning maths, telling time, reading and colouring maps and keeping their place on the page difficult from early years. By secondary school, more complex verbal language is based on nonverbal processes like spatial relationships (in science, for example), logical ordering, and sequencing (both skills necessary for writing essays). This can cause problems in subject areas other than maths. Students can often experience difficulties with sense of time, arranging written material on a page, making change, and sewing and typing, all of which demand good spatial awareness.

Possibly the biggest area of concern for children and adults with NVLD is social skills. One result of having trouble processing nonverbal and spatial information is missing or misinterpreting subtle social cues, like facial expressions, gestures and tones of voice. For example, a phrase like “nice going” means something different when you’ve just dropped a ball or tripped over a skipping rope (again) than when you’ve got a perfect score on a spelling test. Confusing the two can spell “disaster” on the playground. Unlike a student who has difficulty reading but does well with social and sports activities, students with NVLD are affected in all areas. This can lead to social isolation, and children will sometimes try to alleviate this by interacting only with adults, who are more appreciative of their verbal strengths and less concerned about physical awkwardness or violations of

NVLD (Cont)

social conventions.

How can the teacher help?

It is important to remember that things like map reading, higher order maths concepts, diagrams; colour-coding, drawing and copying may be hard for a child with NVLD. They will need plenty of repetition when studying these concepts, and reminding to double-check what is required, especially in maths. Encourage the children to use their verbal abilities to talk themselves through difficult tasks. It may also be necessary to teach children with NVLD how to recognize subtle social cues and how to react appropriately in social situations. Parents and teachers can help children with NVLD learn more effective social skills by talking about

social rules and playing games in which children guess the feelings that go with facial expressions and tones of voice (and figure out appropriate responses!).
I find out more?

Foss, J. (1991) 'Nonverbal learning disabilities and remedial interventions', *Annals of Dyslexia*, 41, 128-40.

Johnson, D. and Myklebust, H. R. (1967) *Nonverbal Disorders of Learning. Learning disabilities: educational principles and practices.* Grune and Stratton.

Rourke, B.P. (1995) *Syndrome of Nonverbal Learning Disabilities .* Guilford Press.

Thompson, S. (1997) *The Source for Nonverbal Learning Disabilities* East Moline, IL: LinguSystems.



Teachers can help children with NVLD learn more effective social skills

Resource/Intervention Review:

Precision Teaching (SNIP)

by RJ

Precision Teaching by Carol & Phil Smart

Intervention: To increase word reading accuracy & fluency

Aimed at: Students with reading age 10+

Brief summary of intervention:

This is a free downloadable resource. The pack includes lists of useful curriculum related words and words that often contribute to reading hesitation and are irregular i.e. not phonic (you can add your own words onto the list). Each list has been collated so that it contains words containing the same number of syllables. There are 37 lists of words (1 to 5 syllables long) which are intended to last a full academic year of teaching.

Students spend approx. 5 mins daily with a tutor practicing a word list (it's recommended to start with one-syllable words). They are then timed on their ability to read the word list fluently and without hesitation. It is important that complete reading mastery is achieved - this means that the words are read

fluently and without hesitation before the student moves onto the next list.

Compared to other programmes used at post-primary level, this produced the biggest improvement in word reading in the shortest time (Based on O'Neill and Murphy's (2008) study with second level students in Ireland with average age 13yrs 8 months)

Advantages

- ◆ Free resource
- ◆ Structured and easy to use
- ◆ Can be done in groups
- ◆ Can be done in very short sessions
- ◆ Increases student self confidence

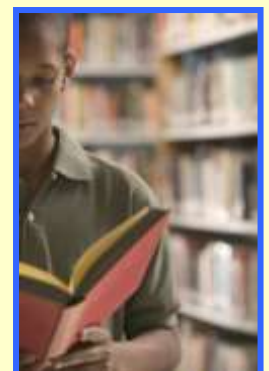
Disadvantages

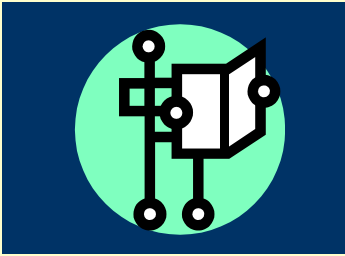
- ◆ Can be boring
- ◆ May not be suitable for very weak students

The SNIP pack can be found at <http://www.snip-newsletter.co.uk/pdfs/downloads/26.pdf>



SNIP produced the best results in the shortest amount of time!!





Quote Corner

"Accdrnig to rscheearch at Txes M&A Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttar in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoetnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a total mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe."
(Anonymous)

Éirim
65 Bath Avenue
Sandymount
Dublin 4

Phone:
01 6674174

Fax:
01 6674174

E-Mail:
Éirim@eircom.net

We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.eirim.ie

About Our Company.....

Éirim: The National Assessment Agency Ltd conducts educational assessments for private individuals, educational institutions and the HSE. All of our reports are accepted by NEPS and can be utilized to apply for resource

hours/exemptions/SNA's etc.

Éirim is also running online training courses that have been approved and verified by the British Psychological Society (BPS).

Éirim:
65 Bath Avenue,
Sandymount,
Dublin 4,

