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ESL + SPECIFIC READING DISABILITY: DIAGNOSIS AND INTERVENTION

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Abstract

Specific reading disability is difficult to diagnose when it is an isolated problem, but becomes even more difficult if it is masked or complicated by other factors such as ADHD or, in this case, ESL. Specific reading disability is just as prevalent in non-English speaking populations as it is in English only populations (Wade-Woolley & Siegel, 1997). It is therefore just as likely for a child who is an ESL speaker to have a specific reading disability and it is imperative that this is considered when ESL children show signs of reading difficulty. This paper provides an example of just such a child. The process of diagnosis and successful intervention is reported.

INTRODUCTION

The following case study highlights the problems encountered in distinguishing linguistic and cultural differences from learning disabilities and in identifying students who have learning disabilities concomitantly with linguistic and cultural differences. Ashman and Elkins (1998) concur that "...there is a lack of Australian and New Zealand research which examines the needs of students from other cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds who experience learning difficulties" (p.149).

Torgesen's (cited in Ashman & Elkins, 1998) definition of learning disabilities states:

Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance) or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences (p.137).

In the current study there is little doubt that some of the difficulties experienced **are** related to cultural differences, insufficient and inappropriate education and perhaps sensory impairment (hearing loss). However, on close reflection it can be argued that the difficulties cannot be explained or even excused due to these influences alone. The child in question has a younger brother with a similar school history and the same cultural background, but he has learnt to read and write. There are many ESL students at St Michaels (fictional name) who successfully meet the demands of the curriculum.

We suggest that the child in question has a learning disability and his intervention to date has been unsuccessful because it has been based on the premise that his difficulties are purely related to cultural and linguistic differences.

Geva, Yaghoub-Zadeh, and Schuster (2000) have suggested that "... well intentioned professionals and school officials have avoided diagnosing ESL learners as LD for a number of years" (p.123). Their research (Geva et al., 2000) suggests that:

normally achieving children [L1 (English as a first language) and L2 (English as a second language)] should not experience persistent difficulties in acquiring basic reading skills. Furthermore, like L1 children, some L2 learners may have a specific disability involving word recognition skills, and the common practice of delaying assessment and remediation for a number of years until language proficiency develops may lead to cumulative deprivation. It is necessary to develop ways of minimising over-identification and under identification of ESL learners who may also be at risk of being reading disabled (p.124).

CASE STUDY: LUA

Lua (a Year 5 student, pseudonym used) is experiencing significant difficulties meeting the academic needs of the classroom. He has a non-English speaking background and a history of irregular school attendance in the early years and, in this respect, is typical of many St Michael's students.

St Michael's school is in a community that is very poor economically, with high levels of unemployment, single parent families; those with a non-English speaking background and welfare beneficiaries. The population of the school is transient with many students who move home and change schools often. For a significant number of students, their first language and/or home language is not English. The predominant ethnic backgrounds of the students in the school are Samoan, Tongan and Romanian.

We were interested to explore the nature of Lua's learning difficulties and how these related to his cultural and educational background. We were also keen to explore whether Lua, as an ESL student who was viewed as a poor language learner, was struggling because he had a learning disability

The referral

Lua's teacher requested assistance from the learning support teacher, because "Lua cannot read or write and there's not much he can do in the class without lots of help." She specifically requested intensive teaching: "Could he be withdrawn for reading lessons at his level? Last year the learning support teacher worked with him for 4 sessions per week". She also requested resources and programming assistance: "I'd like some work that he could do independently in class and for homework".

Family background

Lua has lived in three different countries, moved house over seven times and has attended three different primary schools. Lua was born in Samoa. His first language was predominantly Samoan with some English. When he was three years old his family moved to New Zealand and two years later they moved to Australia.

Lua is the 4th child of six in his family. There is also an extended family of Samoan "cousins". The main language spoken at home is English. Sometimes Samoan is spoken. Lua's mother reported that Lua is able to understand the Samoan language, but he is unable to speak it. His older brother and sisters can speak Samoan. Lua's father is presently unemployed. His mother works part-time.

Lua's mother attended one interview at the school and failed to keep the appointment for the second one. She expressed some concern about Lua's learning difficulties. She felt he was "...too lazy. I know he can do anything. He can cook, clean, wash at home; but when it comes to homework he won't do it. I want to see him read and write."

History of schooling

Lua began his schooling in New Zealand in August 1996, shortly after he turned five. His family moved to Australia in 1997, but because of the difficulties with housing and becoming established, he was not enrolled in Year 1 in his local Catholic Primary school until May. He was living close to this school and remained enrolled there until the end of 1998 after completing Years 1 and 2.

Reports from this school indicate that Lua missed a great deal of early schooling. He was absent for 42 days of Year 2. His mother reported that he missed school due to illness and that he and his older brother had not coped with the change in climate. Lua received support from the ESL teacher but not the Learning Support Teacher.

At the end of 1998, reports, assessment and work samples done with the ESL teacher indicate that Lua was still a role play reader and writer. He could identify (name) seven lower case letters, but was unable to give the accompanying sound for any letters. He recognised some words on sight (less than 10) and could recognise his name. He had developed some knowledge of book language and understood basic concepts of print, and was able to use visual and contextual clues when reading in a shared reading situation. Lua used drawing as an initial form of self-expression. He was able to copy writing and pictures from others. He was able to count and compare numbers, and had some knowledge of number facts to 10.

Lua was able to comprehend English in familiar contexts. The ESL teacher reported:

He was able to follow instructions within a small group activity if explained and presented clearly, though he will often rely on further repetition of instructions on a one-to-one basis. He requires intense

concentration to comprehend fully and he is likely to lose comprehension with high background noise present.

Lua was able to communicate in social and learning situations with teacher and contextual support. The ESL teacher reported: "He can sustain a conversation with an attentive adult on a familiar topic but his language is fragmented as he searches through his English to express his thoughts and convey precise meaning."

In the general summary of his Year 2 report, Lua is described as a child "experiencing difficulty in some areas who requires a modified program." It stated that he "demonstrated a love of learning and had achieved the rewards of applied effort" and also stated that "his learning was jeopardized by irregular attendance."

In 1999 Lua and his younger brother were enrolled at St Michael's after the family moved again. Lua went into Year 3 and his brother into Year 1. Lua is now in Year 5. His irregular attendance pattern has continued with the total number of days absent in Years 3 and 4 being over 80.

Year 3 (1999)

Soon after he commenced at St Michael's, Lua's teacher became concerned about his lack of reading skills. She referred him to the ESL teacher and Learning Support Teacher (LST). During that year he was withdrawn for small group language lessons with the ESL teacher and small group lessons with the LST. There is no record of the focus or content of these lessons. Class reports indicate that he was following a modified class program.

Following a child study meeting in April to discuss Lua's lack of progress, he was referred to the guidance officer. In June the guidance officer assessed Lua's cognitive functioning using the WISC-111, and in August further academic assessment was done by the Special Education Consultant.

WISC-111 results	Guidance Office
Verbal (VIQ)	105
Performance (PIQ)	102
Full Scale	104

Lua's general cognitive ability fell within the average range of intellectual functioning. His difficulties could therefore not be attributed to intellectual impairment. Compared to his mean score for all the verbal reasoning tasks, Lua's performance was significantly better on the Comprehension subtest (scaled score 19) and significantly weaker on the Information and Digit Span subtests (scaled scores 7). In the Comprehension subtest he was required to provide oral solutions to everyday problems and to explain the underlying reasons for certain social rules or concepts. The above average result in this subtest indicates that Lua has good comprehension of social situations and good knowledge of conventional standards of social behaviour. The Information subtest is primarily a measure of Lua's fund of general knowledge. His relatively poor performance on this subtest may have been influenced by cultural experience, as well as his ability to retrieve information from long term memory. The digit span subtest assesses his short-term memory and requires attention, concentration, mental control and the ability to correctly sequence.

Summary of Results of Assessment 2-8-99 (Special Education Consultant)

Assessment given: DABERON-2 (Danzer, Gerber, Lyons & Voress, 1991) a school readiness screener, Weschler Individual Achievement Test – Screener (WIAT).

In terms of age equivalence, results across both assessments given were similar, reflecting a delay of close to 2 years in comparison to his chronological age. His results indicated difficulties in:

- expressive language skills
- phonological awareness and work attack skills
- identification of numerals
- number and numeration
- understanding of mathematical concepts

Programming recommendations included a focus on phonological awareness training and number concepts 1-10.

There are no records to indicate the nature of the intervention that followed these assessments. The results of a standardised reading test (Burt Graded Word Reading List) given in November indicated that the only word Lua recognised in this test was *is*. He scored a reading age of 5 years.

In Lua's school report at the end of Year 3 the class teacher indicated that he had made "limited progress" in oral reading, reading comprehension, written language and spelling. For mathematics, science and social studies the comments were "tries, but finds work difficult".

In physical education he rated "high standard". The general comment included the statement "Lua finds all aspects of his schoolwork quite difficult, despite a great deal of learning support. He is always cheerful and well mannered. It is imperative that he establish a record of regular attendance." The ESL progress report included the comments "very competent in the area of oral English; needing help with reading and writing; potential to improve."

Year 4 (2000)

Lua continued with small group support from both the ESL teacher and Learning Support Teacher. In the classroom he was following a "modified English program". Again, there were no records regarding the content of the programs implemented or the progress made.

The end of year report was more positive than the previous year's, with comments including "steady progress in reading and writing; increases in confidence, vibrant and enthusiastic student." However, his work was "generally below average."

Lua's ability and needs to access learning tasks in class

Lua is now nine years old and in Year 5. To ascertain Lua's current level of academic functioning and his learning strengths and weaknesses so as to begin planning an intervention program, several informal and formal assessment procedures were applied. Interviews were held with Lua, his mother, previous teacher, ESL teacher and class teacher; observations were made of his interactions in the classroom and the playground: and several screening, diagnostic, and standardised tests were administered. It is acknowledged that this diagnosis and Intervention is particularly complex and therefore a wide range of assessment instruments has been included (Table 1). Recent research findings (Limbos & Geva, 2001) cautions against using teachers spontaneously expressed concerns to inform the intervention plan, as they can be highly inaccurate and significantly lower than standardised test measurements.

Table 1. Summary of assessment

Student: Lua H. Date of Birth		Class: 5N Chronological Age: 9 years 6-7 months		Teacher: Ms W Year of Schooling: 5	
Area	Assessment item	Result	Observations	Analysis/Diagnosis	
R E A D I N G	Daniels and Diack (1976) R1 (Word Recognition in Context)	Raw Score 0 Reading Age: < 5.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attempted with enthusiasm recognised several words on sight (<i>can, has, cat, egg, sun</i>) able to decode the word <i>run</i> by successfully blending the three sounds did not self correct or use context confused <i>b, d</i> and <i>p</i> substituted the short /i/ and long /e/ sounds for the short /e/ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relies on limited sight vocabulary Limited word attack skills Confuses visually similar letters /i/ /e/ confusion Able to blend cvc words 	
	Word Recognition (Reading Freedom Developmental – First 40 words)	18/40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Words recognised: <i>a as I he in is no to on up and her see the you look go</i> Words sounded: <i>his</i> Confused <i>w</i> and <i>m</i> Confused <i>b, d</i> and <i>p</i> (<i>p</i> for <i>b, d</i> for <i>b</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor phonemic awareness (<i>elephant</i> for <i>all</i>) Able to blend cvc words Confuses visually similar letters 	
	Running Record PM Benchmark Level 5 Sam and Little Bear	Retell: good Comp'n: 3/3 Accuracy 93% Instructional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> enjoyed story used picture cues and context finger points confused <i>n</i> for <i>m</i> some self correction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more sight words recognised in context 	
Letter naming		22/26	m for w x for z	y for v d for q	Confusing visually similar

AUDITORY PERCEPTION	Sounds	20/29	/d/ for /p/ /m/ for /w/ /i/ for /e/ /f/ for /th/	/w/ for /v/ /ex/ for /x/ pup for /qu/	Visual errors /i/ /e/ confusion
	Reading Freedom Phonemic awareness test (PA-1 & PA-2)	22/25 7/25	/g/ for /j/ /u/ for /y/ • unknown: ng oo oi aw oy au ir ar ou e row ur	/z/ for /x/	Most single consonant sounds known
	Rhyming words AU-1 & AU-5	5/5 & 5/5			Understanding of rhyme
	Beginning sounds consonants AU-2	5/5	/c/ /f/ /j/ /p/ /y/		
	Ending sounds consonants AU-3	3/5	Errors /n/ /l/		Vowel intrusion
	Middle Sounds Vowel AU-4	3/5	Errors /i/ for /e/ /ee/ for /i/		/i/ /e/ confusion
	Beginning sounds Consonants AU-6	4/5	Correct /f/ /b/ /c/ /z/		/b/ /d/ and /p/ confusion
VISUAL PERCEPTION	Ending sounds Consonants AU-7	4/5	/i/ for /e/		/i/ /e/ confusion
	Sequencing Ability AU-9	9/15	Errors mostly transpositions /f/ for /th/		Difficulties with s blends and endings
	VP 1-4	18/20	• Experienced difficulty – high score achieved with effort and attention to task • Tried hard not to make errors on this test • Made many self corrections		Direction error x1 Transpositional error x1
	LANGUAGE	Spelling Westwood Spelling Test (class screener)	Raw score: 9 Result: critically low Spelling Age: < 6 years	• Poor letter formation • Reversed letter p x2 • c-v-c words mostly correct • /n/ for /m/ /a/ for /u/ /b/ for /d/ • /e/ and /i/ correct	
Written Expression Writing Sample		No sentence Single words: 15 attempted 10 correct	• Would not attempt • Unable to write sentence • Poor letter formation and spacing of words • Able to write single words • Reversed word si for is		• Encoding difficulties • Poor visual – motor planning
Receptive Language PPVT-111 A		Raw Score 101 St. Score 83 Per. Rank 13 Stanine 3 Age Equiv 7 ⁷			• Delayed receptive language
MATHS		Maths DMT2		• Many number facts unknown • Reverses numbers • Patterning and sequencing difficulties • Problem solving difficulties • Poor concept of time • Poor spatial concepts	

Results of Assessment (February /March 2001)

During testing Lua was cooperative and attentive. Lua attempted most tasks with enthusiasm, but with reservations about his ability. He often made statements such as “I can’t read that,” “I can’t do that,” and “I don’t know that,” yet he was able to maintain concentration for sessions lasting up to 45 minutes and very rarely showed signs of frustration. He initiated and was able to maintain conversation on familiar topics. It is felt that the results in Table I are a true indication of Lua’s current functioning in the areas assessed.

Lua in the classroom

To best ascertain his classroom behaviours and learning style, Lua was observed in the classroom over several sessions and interviews were held with his classroom teacher, ESL teacher and his Year 3 teacher. His class teacher also completed “Learning Skills” and “Learning Characteristics” Checklists. The Year 5 class group consists of 14 girls and 5 boys. One of the girls (B) has an intellectual impairment and spends 20-30% of the day in an alternative setting. As well as Lua, there is another student (R) who also

experiences significant learning difficulties and four others with mild to moderate learning difficulties. There are 10 students with a non-English speaking background and 1 indigenous student. The class teacher, Ms W, has 5 years teaching experience in upper primary grades and is confident in her role. She has good classroom management skills and, as a group, the class are well behaved and respond well to teacher direction.

Lua's classroom is a single room. Student desks are arranged in 4 rows facing the blackboard. Lua's desk is in the front of row 4. R and B also sit in the front of rows 3 and 2. There are tables at the rear and on one side of the room that are used for group work. The teacher's desk is on one side of the room alongside row 1. The room is well lit, well ventilated and uncluttered with clearly defined areas. The teacher gives many of her instructions from her desk, which being at the side of the classroom, forces most of the students to turn their heads or chairs to attend. Lua does not turn his head or chair, and is poorly placed to hear many instructions. When the teacher directs from the blackboard he is well placed.

Lua appears to be attending to verbal instruction, but his responses to directions and questioning indicate that he is failing to hear and/or process most classroom language. He raises his hand and attempts to answer questions, but in many cases gives an incorrect answer or no response. He experiences word retrieval difficulties and misinterprets lengthy oral directions.

Most of the time Lua appears disinterested and is easily distracted. He looks out the window and fidgets and squirms in his seat. Lua's work space is disorganised. He has difficulty locating the correct workbooks, his pencils are often missing or unsharpened and he wastes time finding equipment. He often appears confused about what he has to do next and therefore experiences most difficulty at times of transition. He relies on his peers to organise him.

Lua attempts set work using a variety of mostly ineffectual strategies. He is encouraged to copy work from others and ask his peers for assistance with spelling and reading. Teacher expectations for Lua and R appear to be that they try their best and complete what they can in the time frame. Their programs are not individualised and there are no clear teaching and learning goals. In contrast, B's classroom program is highly modified and when in the classroom she is given alternative tasks and resources with occasional support from the integration teacher or teacher aide.

Ms 'A' does give Lua and R extra assistance and she modifies instructions. She is keen to modify the curriculum and has sought assistance regarding more appropriate resources. Most of the time, however, they are challenged with work that has no purpose for them and requires skills and knowledge that they have yet to attain. They are not admonished for incorrect or incomplete work and are given generous encouragement for what is attempted.

During group activities Lua participates with enthusiasm. Other group members allocate him easier tasks such as drawing or colouring and will take over, often answering for him or doing his work. He prefers group work because he can rely on his peers and usually this type of work offers him more contextual support.

For three sessions per week the ESL teacher supports the class teacher in the classroom. She works with Lua and other ESL students who require assistance. This mainly involves oral language instruction with vocabulary development and some literacy skills are addressed incidentally, Lua responds well to having this extra support.

It is questionable how much Lua is actually learning in the present classroom environment. A great deal of instruction is at a level beyond his current ability and he is receiving limited instruction and practice in early reading skills.

Lua's learning difficulties

As it was difficult to evaluate Lua's learning from previous years we were unable to compare his progress with other ESL children in the same classes. The assessment provided was sketchy and inconclusive. It was therefore difficult to conclude whether he did indeed have a diagnosable reading disability, or mainly problems due to second language acquisition.

However, Lua's classroom behaviours and assessment results clearly indicate that he has severe learning difficulties that appear to be permanent language-learning problems rather than second language problems.

Both Levine (cited in Root, 1994) and Hoffman (cited in Root, 1994) divide the learning problems associated with a learning disability into categories of difficulties related to language, attention, spatial awareness, sequencing, memory and fine motor skills. Lua's classroom behaviours and test performance clearly fall within these categories (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Summary of learning difficulties/learning behaviours
[adapted from Levine and Hoffman (cited in Root, 1994)]**

Specific Area of Difficulty	Lua's learning behaviours
Language related difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in interpreting and/or remembering verbal messages and instruction • Tendency to raise hand with answer but unable to supply any answer when called upon (poor word retrieval) • Supplies incorrect answer (associative naming errors) • Poor verbal organization as content becomes more complex • Difficulty getting started in terms of expression and organization • Severe difficulty with phonics acquisition and application • Response delays while attempting to sort out verbal confusion
Selective attention immaturities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent levels of task attentiveness • Variable levels of performance accuracy – diminished with increase in group size and noise levels (N.B. this could be due to hearing difficulties rather than a specific learning disability)
Spatial orientation Visual, association confusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty with processing information visually and distinguishing similar looking letters • Difficulties with causal relationships • Difficulties with inferential reasoning • Tendency to be excessively attentive to non salient details • Poor visual spatial organization
Sequencing difficulties Limited concept manipulation, inner language skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty organizing information and instructions into appropriate order • Limited self-generation and use of strategies • Reduced efficiency/accuracy re information organization • Restricted inferential reasoning skills • Difficulties with abstract events • Impaired comprehension skills • Restricted mathematical problem solving skills • Limited skill generalization from one event to another
Memory difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appearance of disorientation or confusion (misinterpretation of language) • Appearance of forgetfulness (information not received or processed) • Response delays • Compromised memory skills
Fine motor control issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handwriting difficulties

**Table 3. Learning characteristics and intervention plan
[Table adapted from Mercer (1991)]**

AREA	INEFFECTIVE	EFFECTIVE	ACTION
Learner Expectancy	Perceives himself as a non reader and writer	Wants to learn to read. Persistent with tasks if he perceives to be achieving success	Teach to read/provide success in reading Give corrective feedback Provide purpose & context for learning
Teacher Expectancy	Assigns work that lacks purpose and is too difficult Limited expectations	Believes he is intelligent and has potential	Formulate IEP with realistic attainable goals
Peer Expectancy	Do too much for him	Popular Give assistance and instruction when asked	Continue to use cooperative groups and peer tutoring Train peers to be more effective tutors (peer tutoring training – Sunshine Centre)
Parent Expectancy	Believe him to be lazy Limited support/involvement in school program	Know he has potential	Invite parents to be involve in school based program - volunteer tutor - driver for Friday sport
Instructional Arrangements	Easily distracted in large groups and noisy environments	Likes 1 – 1 and small group instruction	Use small group for reading instruction
Physical	Often unwell Poor diet Vision and hearing concerns	Good gross motor skills	Referral to ENT specialist Referral to school nurse – vision and hearing screeners Parent interview – discuss diet & referral to specialists
Instructional Techniques		Will attempt most work	Teach strategies for learning Use specific feedback

Materials	Poor organizer of materials	Likes concrete material Likes scores/results in tables Likes computer	Use visual representation to show gains Use concrete material Teach organizational skills
Learning Style	Poor visual and auditory modalities	Visual stronger than auditory	Try kinaesthetic
Response Types	Writing too slow and difficult	Likes computer Prefers short verbal response Likes to use same equipment as others in class	Try computer, dictated stories Letter cards, blocks Use felt pens for writing Use whiteboard
Subsequent Events	Misinterprets lengthy oral feedback	Requests corrective feedback Responds to verbal praise tokens Likes scores/marks/graphs	Increase use of corrective feedback Use stickers on charts
Program Implementation	Current program not appropriate – does not include explicit teaching or opportunity for practice	LST, ESL, TA & volunteer tutor all available resources	Explicit teaching for reading Focus program on interests and strengths

The intervention program

It was important to consider a profile of Lua's strengths and weaknesses in order to formulate an intervention plan. It was also important that the classroom teacher and the ESL teacher be involved in the formulation of Lua's program.

A planning meeting was organised to consider Lua's needs and formulate an IEP. At this meeting we considered the class teacher's initial request for programming support, resource provision and direct teaching. This request was considered in the context of the available resources, and what we had learned about Lua in consideration of his English as Second Language (ESL) and Specific Reading Disability. As a result of the meeting an IEP was implemented.

Features of the Individual Education Plan

Lua's IEP was formulated and implemented with the major goal being to develop his literacy skills. Reading materials were collected from a variety of sources. These materials were left in the classroom in two sections. These materials were left in the classroom in two sections. One group of materials (labeled Lua's homework books) contained mostly structured texts (e.g., PM readers, Sunshine Books) that Lua was able to "read" independently or with limited support. The second collection included magazines, newspaper clippings, topic texts and books related to the present class theme (Sport).

Daily reading and writing experiences were planned for. Each afternoon during class silent reading time, Lua would choose a reading book from his special selection. The class teacher would discuss the book, read it to him and he would then read it with the teacher. This book then went into his homework folder to be read at home. The next morning a volunteer tutor would listen to Lua read any of the books in his homework folder, as well as revise/practice his sight words. Charts were made and displayed to record which books had been read. At any time Lua wished to read one of his books to himself, a peer, or principal he was encouraged to do so.

During the class story writing lessons one of the authors worked in the classroom with a group of students including Lua. This group was given index notebooks (personal dictionaries) and support during writing. Co-operative grouping has been found to be an effective means of improving reading comprehension of learning disabled ESL students (Klingner & Vaughn, 1996) Lua was encouraged to dictate his stories as the author wrote the first draft into his notebook. Encoding strategies, phonic patterns and sentence formulation were modeled for him. Lua then read his story to a peer, and together they typed it on the computer. The stories were printed in large font in triplicate. One copy was illustrated and kept in a display folder. The other published stories were used for comprehension, transformation and oral reading activities.

For homework the class was given a list of spelling words and related activities (copy the words, put them in alphabetical order). Lua and R were given an alternative list of spelling words. Quota Spelling (level 2) was chosen as the resource. Lua started on a quota of 4 words. The words were pretested on Monday, and Lua had the same homework as the rest of the class based on his words. His words were post tested on the Friday, and his quota of words for the following week increased if he was successful. Related activity worksheets were completed by Lua during class language times with teacher support.

Explicit and direct reading instruction was given to Lua and B in a pull-out program consisting of three 40 minute sessions per week. The aim of this program was to increase phonemic awareness knowledge and

skills, while at the same time developing word recognition skills. Lua brought his “homework folder” to these sessions, which included instruction and activities based on his spelling list, published stories and current readers. A variety of resources and approaches were used whilst carefully sequencing content. Practice games, worksheets and materials were taken back to the classroom to be used with the class and volunteer tutor.

Lua’s class teacher was responsible for providing him with increased opportunity to practice and apply the new skills he was learning. She was encouraged to increase her use of effective teaching strategies, especially guided practice, corrective feedback and allowing more time for students with learning difficulties to respond.

To give literacy a sense of purpose for Lua, a cooperative groups class project was organized with the theme of “Sport”. Lua’s group was given the task of organizing the class footy tipping competition. Lua shared tasks such as recording the weekly scores, announcing winners at school assemblies and locating football results in newspapers. The teacher aide helped with the implementation of this project.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teaching outcomes

Lua is now reading and writing on a daily basis. It was decided not to assess his reading on a standardized test until the end of semester 1 when the IEP is reviewed, but informal observations indicate that his reading skills have developed and he can independently read texts at a 6-year-old level, as well as some of his published stories.

Lua has activities that he can complete in class independently. He will now attempt to write short sentences, and has a basic sight word knowledge of 75 words which he can read and spell. He is applying more appropriate strategies to help himself learn and remember new work. Homework is completed regularly, and he has increased his quota of spelling words from 4 to 10. His peers have learnt how to give prompts rather than read for him, how to use published stories for transformations and to ask his advice about football tipping! Lua’s school attendance pattern has also improved significantly.

Lua’s teacher, Ms W has become more confident and proactive regarding individualizing his program. She has developed an interest in the “teaching of reading”, and is incorporating more skill-based instruction into her general program.

She expects more from Lua in terms of participation and, as a result, he is a more active than passive learner. We have tried to maintain transfer of learning between different contexts by regular informal meetings between the class teacher, ESL teacher and myself, and carefully recording the books read, words recognised, work attempted and levels achieved. This has been invaluable; as Lua knows we all “mean business” and can see his progress on the many charts and tables.

As suggested by Westwood (1993), providing an IEP was only “part of the solution.” It was necessary to adapt the actual process of instruction both in the classroom and in the pullout program, as well as individualising the curriculum (p.185). We found we had to adapt our instructional methods and that Lua learns best by doing. He needs to watch others perform a task, then repeat it himself over and over. He needs immediate feedback and gratification. He responds best to instruction that is highly structured and predictable with small amounts of material presented at a time in sequential steps. He needs visual cues and concrete materials. He needs to be given extra time to respond to simpler, shorter questions and instructions.

Lua continues to experience difficulties learning, and he remains a challenge to teach. He has auditory difficulties — distinguishing final sounds in words, blending 4 or more sounds and following instructions in background noise; visual/orientation difficulties — he continues to confuse b, p. and d, he requires an alphabet strip to help him remember the correct formation of letters; and organisational difficulties — he is still untidy, loses things and becomes easily confused. However, he now has some strategies and resources to help him overcome these difficulties and it is imperative that we continue to “...provide explicit, focused, and at times, isolated instruction to the extent needed, and integrate it into the larger literacy context” (Hams & Graham, 1996, p.26).

Does identifying Lua as having a learning disability change anything? Does he have anything to gain from further referral and ascertainment? What assessment processes best serve ESL students suspected of having learning disabilities? How can the classroom teacher better teach students like Lua? Detailed analysis of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper. However, due to their implications for future planning they are considered briefly in the next section.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PLANNING

Referral and ascertainment

Ashman and Elkins (1998) warn of the disadvantages of categorisation (p.12). The special services or learning support we provide for Lua are not dependent on him being formally ascertained or categorised into a particular area of special need. Service provision at St Michael's tends to be based on level of educational need. Lua's educational need is clearly very high — he is a non-reader in Year 5.

However the issues of categorisation and ascertainment become important when funding becomes part of the equation. Do we, for example, in an effort to gain an extra 1-5 hours/ week of teacher aide time, spend 6 months and many hours in consultation and report writing trying to get Lua ascertained in the Speech/Language category? An assessment by a speech language therapist will no doubt uncover some speech/language delays and/or disorders. However, there is the risk that his difficulties may again be attributed to cultural and linguistic influences, and this may exclude him from ascertainment in this category.

There is a good chance Lua has a central auditory processing disorder. Do we refer him to an audiologist and/or neurologist at his parents' expense? We are still waiting on the appointments with the school nurse and the Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist. What of their recommendations?

The process of referral, assessment, and ascertainment may give further insight into the nature of Lua's difficulties, and in that there is some value, However there are inherent dangers in ascertainment for the sake of ascertainment, just as there are dangers in assessment for the sake of assessment. In Lua's case, it is vitally important that we keep our goals in mind when we consider the purpose of any intervention. Our goal was to teach him to read. Will a label and teacher aide time meet this goal? We believe it is vital to concentrate our resources (time and people) on teaching him to be a better learner and on us learning to be better teachers.

Better identification and better teaching

We acknowledge that it is very difficult to define this complex area of learning disability and that any inferences are made solely on this single case study. However, it is important to consider that relying on measures of oral language proficiency leads to misclassification of reading disability in ESL children (Limbos & Geva, 2001).

Geva et al. (2000) suggest that the assessment of phonological awareness and processing skills of ESL students can be used to predict word recognition skills, and is a reliable indicator of potential reading disability. Ortiz (1997) argues that referral, assessment and intervention processes must be adapted to better serve culturally diverse students suspected of having learning disabilities.

In a school such as St Michael's, with a high proportion of students who have a non-English speaking background, it is logical to assume that a significant number will also have learning difficulties and specific learning disabilities. In order for these students to learn we must consider devising early identification processes, adapting the learning environment, and most importantly providing the necessary special services or learning support. "Students with disabilities and learning problems often need more structured methods, a varied strategy or a different style of presentation" (Kauffman. 1993, p.14). It is also paramount that all personnel share their knowledge and expertise to prevent the escalation of learning disabilities in cases such as this.

Our focus therefore must be on **teaching and learning** and **early intervention** because ultimately education, not just special education, as stated by Kauffman (1999), "can be no better than the instruction offered by teachers" (p.247).

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