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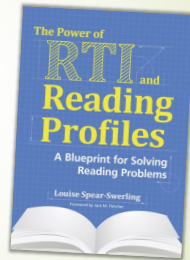
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Common Types of Reading Difficulties

Coffee Chats with Brookes

May 1, 2020

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Research strongly supports the idea that three types – three profiles – of reading difficulties are common.

Poor reader profiles are based in the “simple view” of reading (Hoover & Gough, 1990) which says ...

Good reading comprehension depends on both of the following:

- **Good word recognition** (including, e.g., letter-sound knowledge, phonological decoding skills, structural analysis, automatic word recognition)
- **Good oral language comprehension** (including, e.g., vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, comprehension of syntax)

Three profiles of reading difficulty are common (e.g., Catts et al., 2006, 2012; Leach et al., 2003; Lesaux & Kieffer, 2010; Spear-Swerling, 2015):

- **Specific word recognition difficulties** (SWRD; reading problem is specific to word recognition/decoding)
- **Specific comprehension difficulties** (SCD; reading problem is specific to language comprehension)
- **Mixed reading difficulties** (MRD; problems involve both word recognition and oral comprehension)

PROFILE	Word Recognition/Decoding	Oral Language Comprehension
Specific Word Recognition Difficulties	Below average	Average or better
Specific Comprehension Difficulties	Average or better	Below average
Mixed Reading Difficulties	Below average	Below average

Each profile of reading difficulties:

- Has different intervention needs (e.g., Aaron et al., 2008)
- May manifest in somewhat different ways in math and written expression
- **May be associated with a variety of underlying causes** (e.g., intrinsic learning disabilities, limited exposure to English language/literacy)

Examples: Mollie, Calvin, and Jose

- Three fourth graders
- All with below-average performance in **reading comprehension**
- All with below-average performance in **silent reading fluency**

Mollie

- Reading difficulties noted in Grade 1
- Early difficulties centered on phoneme blending and decoding
- Current difficulties involve decoding of multisyllabic words and automaticity of decoding; spelling also weak
- Has always done well in teacher read-alouds, class discussions
- Good ideas for writing but poor spelling drains motivation to write

Mollie (continued)

- Math problem solving abilities are a strength but she often ends up with the wrong answer due to fact errors
- Reading comprehension is good *if* she can decode the text
- Teacher assessments show accuracy and automaticity of decoding are below average
- Vocabulary knowledge and listening comp are solidly average

Mollie has a profile of **specific word recognition difficulties (SWRD)**

- Weaknesses in word recognition, decoding, and spelling
- Strengths in oral vocabulary and oral language comprehension

What are Mollie's intervention needs in reading?

- Explicit, systematic phonics intervention focused on multisyllabic words
- Application of decoding skills in reading text, including oral text reading with a teacher who provides appropriate scaffolding and cues (e.g., Spear-Swerling, 2011; Vadasy et al., 2005)
- Do not ignore "contextually appropriate" errors such as *a* for *the*, *the* for *this*, etc.
- Activities to build fluency such as wide/repeated reading of text
- Despite low reading comprehension score, she does not need **intervention** in vocabulary or comprehension

Calvin

- No history of reading difficulties in K-3
- Development of phonemic awareness and decoding skills was typical
- Reading difficulties first identified early in Grade 4
- Biggest difficulties involve vocabulary weaknesses, background knowledge, and inferencing
- Similar difficulties manifest in listening/class discussions as well as in reading

Calvin (continued)

- Spelling is grade-appropriate but composition aspects of writing (e.g., word choice, clarity and elaboration of writing) are weak
- Math problem-solving is a significant weakness (e.g., deciding correct operation, finding relevant information)
- Teacher assessments show word recognition and decoding are excellent, above average
- Listening comprehension and especially oral vocabulary are below average

Calvin has a profile of **specific comprehension difficulties (SCD)**

- Strengths in word recognition, decoding, and spelling, with no history of problems in these areas
- Weaknesses in vocabulary knowledge and overall language comprehension

What are Calvin's intervention needs in reading?

- Interventions focused on vocabulary development (e.g., explicit teaching of important words, instruction in morphology)
- Explicit teaching of background knowledge especially in relation to texts he is reading
- Oral discussion of text to probe basis of inferencing problems and promote deeper level of engagement with text
- Vocabulary and language intervention could also help him in math and writing

Although Calvin had a low score on a silent reading fluency measure, he probably will not benefit from the types of activities that should benefit Mollie, such as repeated reading of text.

- Calvin's reading difficulties are based in vocabulary/language comprehension, not decoding
- Reads slowly because he is struggling to comprehend
- Fluency techniques such as repeated readings emphasize building accuracy/automaticity of word reading, not a need for Calvin
- Improvements in Calvin's vocabulary and language comprehension should ultimately benefit his reading fluency

Jose

- English learner, native Spanish speaker
- Reading difficulties evident when he entered school system, Grade 3
- Current difficulties involve decoding of multisyllabic words and automaticity of decoding (like Mollie); spelling also weak
- Also has weaknesses in vocabulary knowledge and background knowledge (similar to Calvin)
- These difficulties evident in read-alouds/oral discussions as well as reading
- Teacher assessments show decoding is mildly below average
- (English) vocabulary knowledge is well below average
- Reading comp lower than oral language comp, due to influence of decoding


Jose has a profile of **mixed reading difficulties (MRD)**

- Mild weaknesses in word recognition, decoding, and spelling
- More significant weaknesses in vocabulary/oral language comprehension


What are Jose's intervention needs in reading?

- Explicit, systematic phonics intervention focused on multisyllabic words (like Mollie)
- Activities to build fluency such as wide/repeated reading of text (like Mollie)
- Activities to build vocabulary/language comprehension (like Calvin)
- Teaching of morphology (e.g., roots, prefixes, suffixes) could be especially beneficial to Jose because it can address his needs in decoding, spelling, and vocabulary
- Also requires intervention targeted to his characteristics and needs as an EL (e.g., exploit cognate knowledge; *delicioso* = *delicious*)

Poor reader profiles may also be associated with certain patterns of difficulties in math and written expression



- Children with **Specific Word Recognition Difficulties (SWRD)** are almost always poor spellers (Ehri, 2005) and may also have difficulty with automatic recall of math facts (Peng et al., 2016)
- Children with **Specific Comprehension Difficulties (SCD)** may have difficulty with language demands of math, such as math problem solving (Fuchs et al., 2018), and with composition aspects of writing (e.g., word choice/vocabulary, elaboration)
- Children with **Mixed Reading Difficulties (MRD)** may have broad weaknesses in multiple components of math and written expression
- For all profiles, difficulties may vary from mild to severe



Summing up

- Three common poor reader profiles are well documented in research: SWRD, SCD, MRD
- Identification of a child's profile provides an excellent starting point for planning intervention
- Can also have implications for understanding a poor reader's performance in math and written expression
- Poor reader profiles are useful across a wide grade range and for students with/without disabilities



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