Section 3

Dyspraxia
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I’m not naughty – I’m Dyspraxic

Headline from a survey commissioned by Dyspraxia Foundation UK for Dyspraxia Awareness Week 24–30 September 2007

Dyspraxia is often treated in the literature under two separate headings: developmental coordination disorder (DCD) and developmental verbal dyspraxia (DVD) or verbal dyspraxia as it is more commonly known. Students may present with either DCD or DVD or a combination of both.
Remember – he would if he could, but he sometimes can’t. He is not lazy, he just sometimes loses his praxis or plan!

Taken from *How do I teach a child with Dyspraxia?* Dyspraxia Support Group of New Zealand, http://www.dyspraxia.org.nz/

Students diagnosed with DCD find it exceptionally difficult to acquire the movement skills that are expected of them in everyday life and are often referred to as ‘clumsy’. Such students do not suffer from any known neurological condition and their difficulties are not explicable in terms of a generalised delay in development. Students may have difficulty co-ordinating their movements, perceptions and thoughts. They exhibit difficulty with everyday tasks such as buttoning shirts and using a knife and fork, and may confuse left and right.

In school, activities such as writing, Visual Arts, and Physical Education may pose problems. In play, difficulties may be observed in tasks such as running, jumping, hopping and catching a ball. In the classroom, the student may bump into and drop things and tend to find drawing and writing difficult. It is often difficult for the student to maintain erect posture, either when sitting or standing, and the effort expended on this can be considerable, giving rise to fatigue. Students may also need to prop up their bodies with their arms, which may cause problems when they have to use their arms for writing. This difficulty may also result in students being fidgety or exhibiting a tendency to lie across the desk.

Some students have additional speech problems, others are distractible and show an inability to organise their behaviour. Students may also have poor spatial awareness. Students have difficulty with self-help and organisational skills and may find it difficult to remember what equipment is needed for particular activities and typically will mislay their belongings at school. At home they may be untidy and slow at tasks that require fine-/gross-motor skills. Students may have an inability to recognise potential dangers (e.g. using Bunsen burners and other equipment in science and technology subjects).

Often students may appear to have a lot of information but are unable to record that information in a logical and meaningful order. Their written work does not match their apparent verbal ability. These difficulties can lead to frustration and problems with self-esteem, which can further lead to either withdrawn behaviour or disruptive behaviour. DCD can also be associated with a delay or disorder in expressive language skills, such as sequencing words within a sentence, or in controlling the movements necessary to articulate certain speech sounds.
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Tips for Learning and Teaching

- Structure the classroom environment to minimise the possibility of furniture/fittings causing a problem for the student. Ensure seating allows the student to rest both feet on the floor with the desk at elbow height and with the additional option of a sloping surface. Position the student where he/she has a direct view of the teacher. Provide an uncluttered personal workspace for the student.

- Directly teach organisational skills through making lists, sequencing events and using timetables.

- Provide an alternative means of recording work (e.g. computer/specifically differentiated worksheets).

- Break down assignments into smaller components.

- Avoid giving more than one worksheet at a time and allow for the worksheet to be attached to the desk when a writing implement is being used (e.g. tape or clip paper to the desk, or use a non-slip mat under the copybook to stop it slipping).

- Fold worksheets in half and have the student come up to you when the first half is completed and allow the student a break before continuing with the work.

- Ensure homework tasks are understood and not too onerous.

- Limit copying from the black/white board and use highlighters to chunk information in texts.

- Be aware that growth spurts at particular phases of development may intensify problems for the student.

- Provide clear and unambiguous instructions and check that the student understands what is required of him/her.

- The student with DCD may find it difficult to multi-task (e.g. tie a shoelace and follow directions simultaneously). Consider this when giving directions/instructions.
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- Use visual supports in implementing the curriculum.
- Consider using stopwatches or timers to develop an awareness of time.
- Give as many cues as possible. Use visual demonstration and verbal instructions to reinforce teaching.
- Place students at the front of the classroom so they can hear instructions clearly and copy from the board easily.
- Keep the environment as predictable as possible to allow students time to plan their actions and avoid anxiety.
- In Physical Education make participation and not competition the goal.
- Encourage a partner/buddy relationship with another student or other students.
- Provide praise and encouragement and reward effort as well as the final product.
- Thicker pencils, pencil grips or pencils with triangular barrels may be easier for the student to hold. Pencils with soft leads are also easier to move. Ask the student what he/she prefers to write with. For students with shaky hand movements or tremors use a heavy, weighted pencil.
- If a student presses too hard with the pencil allow him/her to practise writing with a towel under the page.
- If a student writes very lightly allow him/her to practise writing using carbon paper.
- Use grid paper to prompt students to leave a space between words.
- Allow the student to stop if he/she is tired.
- Encourage older students to do rough drafts in order to organise their work.
- To specifically develop hand skills allow the student to manipulate play dough, pop Bubble Wrap, squeeze clothes pegs, scrunch paper, squirt water pistols, wring out a wet sponge, stretch rubber bands, construct toys, rip up pieces of paper, etc.
- Text to speech (e.g. Kurzweil®) and speech to text (e.g. Dragon Naturally Speaking®) may be useful computer programmes to use for particular students.
- Mind-mapping® can be invaluable in helping the student to organise his/her thoughts.
**Developmental Verbal Dyspraxia (DVD) / Verbal Dyspraxia**

It sounds like your son is making really good progress with his language development. You must be very proud of him, especially as he knows he is doing so well and is so pleased with himself.

Taken from a message of 27 April 2003 posted to Mumsnet Discussions – verbal dyspraxia
http://www.mumsnet.com/Talk/8/7503

DVD is essentially an expressive language disorder where it may be difficult to understand what the student is trying to say. In severe cases the student’s speech may be unintelligible. The student with DVD frequently struggles to produce words or sounds, and facial distortions may accompany his/her struggle to produce targeted sounds. The student may have a limited range of consonant and vowel sounds. Speech may be slow and lacking in normal phrasing and intonation, and as a result the student’s speech may sound very flat and what he/she is communicating may not sound very interesting, with the result that the student may not communicate what was intended.

The student with DVD often has difficulty producing on request the speech sounds and phrases he/she is capable of producing in spontaneous speech. Students may have problems with modulating speech volume (too loud/too quiet). Students frequently communicate using short simple sentence structures. Students may be slow to initiate communication and may be reluctant to communicate verbally, particularly in group situations. Some students appear expressionless and in addition may have difficulties interpreting facial and body language. DVD may impact on a student’s willingness to interact with peers, which has an impact on the development of age-appropriate social skills.

Students may present with limited concentration and attention in school. Students may also have problems following directions and instructions, acquiring vocabulary and learning grammar. Difficulties are likely to be experienced with the acquisition of reading skills, particularly in the initial stages of learning, and the learning of spellings may also be affected, with speech distortions impacting on the student’s production of required sound sequences. These difficulties undermine the student’s writing ability. Furthermore, difficulties in organising and sequencing expressive language to express thoughts and ideas will impact on the ability to write longer passages, and this will have significant consequences at post-primary level.
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**Tips for Learning and Teaching**

- Reduce your rate of speech.
- Encourage the student to reduce his/her rate of speech.
- Provide clear models for sound production.
- Encourage students to participate with peers in activities.
- Encourage students to initiate conversations.
- Allow additional response time.
- Try not to ask for repetitions. Instead identify for the student the portion of what he/she has said that you understand, ask the student to clarify the parts of the sentence you did not understand and encourage the student to do so in a slow, steady voice.
- Remember that difficulties and frustrated behaviour may present if the student is asked to repeat something or is put on the spot.
- Try not to complete sentences for the student.
- Encourage the student to persevere with what he/she is trying to say.
- Use visual cues where possible.
- Use concrete materials in the implementation of the curriculum.
- Home-school journals can be helpful as a means of communicating interests and experiences, particularly with younger students or students whose speech is particularly unintelligible.
- Be consistent in the language you use (e.g. instructions, explanations etc) and ensure the student is following what you are saying. Sometimes restate the instruction in a simpler manner.
- Praise the student for effort.
- Be aware that the student may need a break from oral activities.
Additional Resources/References

1. Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland (AOTI), website: http://www.aoti.ie/
5. The Dyscovery Centre, *Living with Dyspraxia* (DVD), website: http://www.dyscovery.co.uk/
7. Dyspraxia/DCD Association (Cork, Ireland), website: http://www.dyspraxiadcdcork.ie/
9. Instructional Intelligence offers samples of mind and concept maps, website: http://www.instructionalintelligence.ca/html/resources.htm
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Notes