

Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties

A professional learning series presented by David A. Kilpatrick, Ph.D.

Module 13 Session 1

*Sponsored by the Exceptional Student Services Unit (ESSU) and created in collaboration with
Specific Learning Disability Specialists Jill Marshall and Veronica Fiedler*



COLORADO
Department of Education

Module 13: Specific Learning Disability Identification

Session 1: Factors that May Affect SLD Identification



Vision

All students in Colorado will become educated and productive citizens capable of succeeding in society, the workforce, and life.

Mission

The mission of the CDE is to ensure that all students are prepared for success in society, work, and life by providing excellent leadership, service, and support to schools, districts, and communities across the state.

**Every student,
every step of the way**

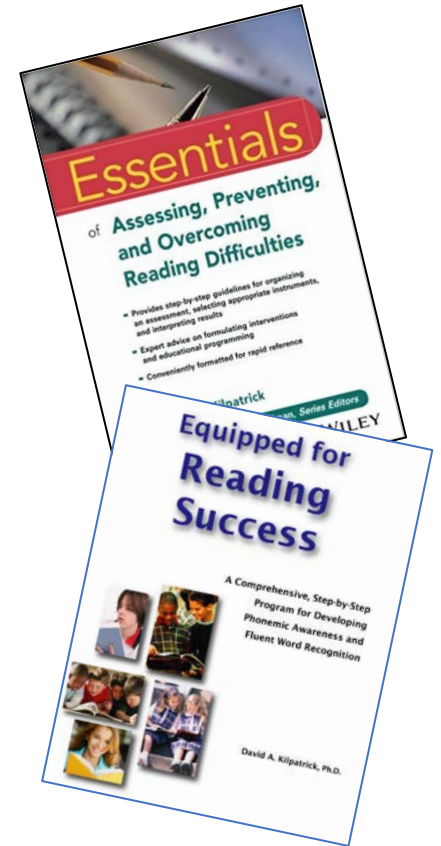
Reference and Disclaimer

- This on-demand webinar series, *Assessing, Preventing and Overcoming Reading Difficulties*, was developed by David Kilpatrick, Ph.D., in collaboration with the Specific Learning Disability Specialists in the Exceptional Student Services Unit of the Colorado Department of Education.
- Content of the webinar series was originally included in the book *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties* (Wiley, 2015).
- This material was developed under a grant from the Colorado Department of Education. **The content does not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.**

The Presenter



DAVID A. KILPATRICK, PHD is Associate Professor of Psychology for the State University of New York, College at Cortland. He teaches courses in learning disabilities and educational psychology. He is also a New York State Certified School Psychologist and has conducted over a thousand evaluations of students with reading difficulties during his 27 years with the East Syracuse-Minoa Central School District. David is currently involved in a number of research and writing projects. He facilitates professional development workshops for educators and presents regularly in districts, and at state and national conferences. He is the author of *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties* (Wiley, 2015), and *Equipped for Reading Success-A Comprehensive Step-by-Step Program from Developing Phonemic Awareness and Fluent Word Recognition*.



Series Designed for Use in Multiple Ways

1. **Complete all 13 modules:** Participants who engage in all thirteen modules will be provided a comprehensive learning experience encompassing research, impact, and critical elements of assessing, preventing, and overcoming reading difficulties.
2. **Complete individual modules:** Participants may view a session/s for specific information and guidance on topics related to assessing, preventing and overcoming reading difficulties. This format is ideal for short professional development opportunities, e.g., during an Impact Team meeting or Professional Learning Community.
3. **Complete as a book or chapter study:** Participants may view all or part of the series as a tandem companion or supplemental resource for supporting a study of the book: *The Essentials of Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties* (Wiley, 2015)

Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties

Objective:

Through engagement in this series of 13 on-demand webinars, participants will understand the current research, implications, and the essential elements necessary for assessing, preventing, and overcoming reading difficulties.



ASSESS

PREVENT

OVERCOME

Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties

Webinar Series Modules

Module 1: Reading Research and the Research to Practice Gap

Module 2: Current Approaches to Reading Instruction: Why Many Learners Still Struggle

Module 3: The Simple View of Reading

Module 4: Word-Level Reading

Module 5: Reading Comprehension

Module 6: Introduction to Reading Assessment; Assessing Phonological Skills

Module 7: Assessing Phonics Skills

Module 8: Assessing Word Identification and Reading Fluency

Module 9: Assessing Reading Comprehension and Related Skills

Module 10: Effective Approaches for Preventing Reading Difficulties

Module 11: Effective Interventions for Reading Difficulties

Module 12: Case Examples of Reading Disabilities

MODULE 13: Specific Learning Disability Identification

Module 13 Overview

Module 13: Specific Learning Disability Identification

13.1 Factors that Affect SLD Identification

Learning Intentions



Module 13 Session 1: Factors That Affect SLD Identification

Participants will be able to:

- ✓ **Identify the key factors that may distinguish between a student with an SLD in reading vs. milder reading difficulties**

The Continuum of Difficulty in Reading Difficulties

- Researchers have a very good understanding of the nature and cause of reading difficulties
- Reading-related skills and sub skills fall along a continuum of severity with no natural “cut off” between those with reading “disabilities” and those with milder reading problems
- Educational professionals and policy makers (state level, school district level) must decide on the “cut offs”
- There exist no definitive answers—only relevant factors to consider
 - The goal is to make sensible, informed decisions

SLD In Reading Should Be Much Less Common

- RTI/MTSS was prompted by research findings showing that most reading difficulties could be prevented, and for those that could not, weak readers could achieve better than they do
- Implementation of RTI/MTSS has not taken account of the actual Tier 1 instructional practices or Tiers 2 or 3 intervention approaches that yielded such great results
- Thus, we have far more students identified with SLD than would be the case if those best practices were used

Questions to Consider When Pursuing an SLD Diagnosis

- **What will be different for a student once identified with SLD?**
 - More instructional time? Different type of instruction?
 - Research on special education reading help has been discouraging
- **Has an SLD candidate had the best practice Tier 1 instruction (Module 10) and Tier 2 or 3 intervention (Module 11)**
 - Or have they received ineffective approaches (Session 11.2)?
- **Are best practices actually available to validly use the student's response to intervention to help identify an SLD?**
- **Is the student unable to function without additional support?**
 - The practical reality is that IEPs afford more than just more intensive instruction

Problems With Traditional SLD Diagnostic Approaches

- **The IQ/Achievement Discrepancy had many technical issues**
 - failed to recognize that the reasons a student with a 115 IQ struggled in word reading were identical to the reasons a student with a 90 IQ struggle
 - developed before researchers came to understand reading disabilities
- **The Patterns of Strengths and Weaknesses approach has not interacted with the reading research and has generally focused on scatter within a student's cognitive testing profile**
 - This approach as also had numerous technical problems with its validity
- **Identification through RTI presumes students get best practices instruction and intervention, which is almost never the case**
 - no clear answers on length and intensity of instruction prior to identification
 - This is particularly a problem when best practices are absent

Considerations When Diagnosing SLD in Basic Reading

- **If best practices are genuinely present, response to intervention is an excellent guide (but specifics of length are lacking)**
- **How severe is the phonological-core deficit?**
 - How low is the timed and untimed single word reading skills?
 - How low are the timed and untimed nonsense word reading skills?
 - How low are the phonological-core skills (i.e., PA, WM, RAN, etc.)
 - Are they at the 10th percentile, 15th or at the 1st through 5th?
 - Best practices yield a 14-17 point improvement regardless of starting point, thus if normalization is not likely with best practices, SLD may seem warranted
 - How many of the phonological-core skills are affected?

Considerations When Diagnosing SLD in Reading Fluency

- Many of the same considerations apply from identifying and SLD in basic reading
- Recall that fluency is a by-product of the size of the sight vocabulary and not a separate and independent reading skill
- Adding to the basic reading considerations would be the percentile level on fluency tests

Diagnosing SLD in Reading Comprehension (RC)

- The issues of response to intervention and severity of the skills and subskills applies here as well
- How are the word reading skills? Do they interfere with RC?
- How are the student's oral language comprehension skills?
 - Would SLD be a better determination?
- How is the student's working memory? Attention?

Conclusions Regarding Diagnosing an SLD in Reading

- Not an exact science, clinical judgment will be needed
- Evaluation teams should encourage schools to use best practices to limit the number of struggling readers and to assure more valid diagnoses

Summary: Module 13 Session 1

- ✓ Reading skills fall along a continuum with no natural cut off to signal a “disability”
- ✓ Use of best practices to prevent and intervene in reading is not common, complicating the validity of identifying SLD in reading
- ✓ The number of underlying skills that are deficient and the severity of those skill deficits can help inform the identification process
- ✓ Clinical judgment will be needed, but more informed judgment should lead to more valid identification



A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a grey sweater, is shown from the chest up. She is looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression, her right hand resting on her chin. The background is a dark chalkboard covered with numerous white question marks drawn in chalk. A large, dark, cloud-like shape with a blue outline is positioned on the left side of the image, containing the text.

Reflect and Connect:

What are the key factors that may suggest that a student has an SLD in reading?

Wrap Up

What was your biggest takeaway?

What questions do you still have?



Thank You

**Please visit the CDE Specific Learning Disability Website
for more information:**

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/SD-SLD>