

Please keep in mind that this article is not designed to attack the personal integrity of any teacher or teaching as a profession. It is also not written to undermine the Australian or Queensland schooling system. Teachers as professionals and schools as institutions of learning have both strengths and weaknesses. This article is not concerned with this. It is written so that parents, and all others who seek the welfare of the child, will be able to understand the best way(s) to treat the child's difficulties.

Making a Decision

Many parents either assume that their child's school will play a part in remediation or they actively seek to involve the classroom teacher and/or the learning support teacher. A smaller percentage is very adamant that they do not wish their child's school to be in any way involved.

It is not easy making a decision about the level and type of school involvement. On the one hand it seems like the child's teacher should play a significant role because, after all, the child spends most of his or her time at school and school is the obvious environment in which skills like reading writing and spelling should take place. On the other hand, it could be argued that because the child is struggling and hasn't learnt to read properly that the school in some way has failed the child and therefore they have had their chance and now the parent is going to take over and seek private external assistance. Still, in other cases, the parent realizes that their child has a legitimate learning disability and that the school has done all they can do and because of issues like funding, time or staffing they can't meet the child's need in full. Any one of these scenarios could be true but they do not necessarily decide how and where remediation takes place or who should take responsibility for this. This decision can only be decided on the basis of what the child's difficulties are and what therefore are the best ways to treat such difficulties. If all of the adults involved focus on the best outcome for the child and always put the child's needs first then they won't have any difficulties in accepting most of the suggestions and recommendations that are made.

Four Responses to a Child's Needs

There are four ways to respond to a child's difficulties.

1. **Wait and See** - this means do nothing. Usually not acceptable but often "The Wait and See if it Clicks" approach turns out to be "The Wait' til He's Failed and Humiliated" approach
2. **Remediate** – this is a big task and is really an all or nothing concept. Programs and interventions that don't meet acceptable intensity, frequency and duration requirements will hardly be able to be systematic, cumulative and goal driven. In other words intervention cannot be ad hoc or partial.

3. **Accommodate** – this is a much undervalued area of LD. It is an area in which the school, at the classroom level, can have a huge impact. The greatest accommodation that most LD kids need is more time. Research shows that most teachers are at a loss to know how to properly implement suitable levels of compromise. Unfortunately, some still think if you help a child in a way that is over and above other children that you are giving them an unfair advantage. They don't stop to think that the child is already far behind, learns differently and is being unduly penalized because of a legitimate problem. No one would ever consider a wheelchair ramp as an unfair advantage for a person in a wheelchair yet they are willing to believe that reading a math's problem to a Dyslexic child is giving them an unfair advantage compared to other students.

4. **Remediate/Accommodate** - a mixture of the two is the best outcome. But there needs to be a distinction between the two concepts. In the main the classroom teacher should be the chief proponent of accommodations and the specialist should be responsible for intervention.

Are there Reasons Why School Teachers Could Not Be Involved?

Consider the following:

One Size Fits All or Tailor Made

The best interventions are those that are based on the eight scientific and evidenced based principles outlined in the associated information handout. There are many interventions that meet this criteria-most of which originate from the UK or USA. Australia is gaining ground in this area. However, despite the growing prevalence of certified designed programs it is still considered more scientifically sound for a practitioner to be eclectic. This means that the professional involved designs the reading system specifically for the individual child. This means that all resources and methodologies (techniques) employed are firmly based on scientific evidenced based principles but the practitioner has the flexibility to adjust any aspect of the program as the need arises. This recognizes that though a program may be very good the notion of "one size fits all" is pedagogically unsound.

This approach, by default, means that only one practitioner can implement the program. Thus the involvement of school teachers in addition to the private specialist as administrators of the program violates the eclectic principle as well as the principles of flexibility, systematic delivery and cumulation.

What About Parent Involvement – Somebody has to Follow Up

An essential aspect of remediation should be parent education. If the school assumes responsibility for the remediation or joins with the private practitioner in a co management arrangement instead of the parent then the parent will pass up the opportunity to be educated relative to their child's difficulties. In order for the parent to provide ongoing support both in a technical and empathetic way they should not only be present each session to observe the professional at work but they should then administer follow up work on a daily basis. This allows them to gain the best possible insight into how a person actually learns to read and in particular how their child learns. This would all be forfeited if a teacher took over this role. Thus remediation has a dual goal of student recovery and parent education.

Interventions – A Good Literacy Program or a Holistic Treatment Plan

Remediation of serious Learning Disability means more than just the implementation of a good literacy program. Hence the term intervention covers more than just the educational aspect of the learning disability. Often, but not always, learning disability is one manifestation of much larger more complex problems. Severe reading disability often co exists with attention and concentration problems or other psycho-emotional stability difficulties. For this reason a complete medical history is usually need to ascertain not only what the real problems are but to plan how and in what sequence these difficulties should be treated. Whilst the main concern appears to be reading it may in fact be a secondary problem stemming from poor attention or a negative sense of academic self worth. There may be unhelpful levels of anxiety which should be treated before considering literacy remediation. Thus the implementation of a remedial reading program may be just one step in a multi-step process. In the main this concept is not well understood. If this is the case then it is more beneficial for the child for them to complete the remediation in an environment where the other needs can be fully managed.

Accountability – Who Should Have Ultimate Responsibility

Some parents want school to assume the responsibility for either implementing the program in its entirety or at least doing the follow up work. This notion misunderstands how the whole process has to work. Essentially this means that the school would use the professional's resources, techniques and intellectual property and expect the professional to maintain an overarching governance of the program and in doing so accept full responsibility and accountability for the outcomes but essentially remove the capacity for the professional to exercise maximum influence. This is untenable and in the end the child will be the loser. If a private professional is going to be employed then decisions about accountability need to be made before remediation commences. In the main the concept of co-management between parents, school teachers and private professionals in this particular area does not always work well. Best practice procedures and proven formulas for operation should always guide the way the entire intervention is played out.