MODERATE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES
UNIT 12
IDENTIFYING PUPILS WITH MODERATE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

This unit will introduce you to and illustrate some of the assessment and identification issues in practice. How assessment is conducted is an extremely important factor to consider. Assessment affects who is identified as having moderate learning difficulties, is relevant to pupils, their parents and teachers. These are the learning outcomes for this unit.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:
1. To understand how the current definition of moderate learning difficulties can be used in practice and the assessment options available;
2. To understand the difference between a static (unassisted) assessment and a teaching (dynamic or assisted) assessment of a pupils' understanding of concepts and problem solving
3. To understand how a teaching assessment is relevant to identifying and planning for a pupil with moderate learning difficulties.
4. To try out a teaching assessment of a pupil's understanding and problem solving in using numbers and words: comparing a pupil who has been identified as having moderate learning difficulties with another pupil whose attainments are low but not identified as having moderate learning difficulties.

ONLINE RESOURCES

The content and tasks throughout these PDFs are supported by online resources that are designed to facilitate and supplement your training experience.

Links to these are signposted where appropriate. The resources use graphics and interactive elements to:

- Highlight salient points

- Provide at-a-glance content summaries

- Introduce further points of interest

- Offer visual context

- Break down and clearly present the different stages and elements of processes, tasks, practices, and theories

The online resources offer great benefits, both for concurrent use alongside the PDFs, or as post-reading revision and planning aids.

Please note that the resources cannot be used in isolation without referencing the PDFs. Their purpose is to complement and support your training process, rather than lead it.

You should complete any learning or teaching tasks and additional reading detailed in this PDF to make full use of the Advanced training materials for autism; dyslexia; speech, language and communication; emotional, social and behavioural difficulties; moderate learning difficulties.

To find out more about the resources, how they work, and how they can enhance your training, visit the homepage at: www.education.gov.uk/lamb

The first resource for this unit can be found here:
www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/identifying/intro

This unit will illustrate some of the assessment and identification issues in practice. This will have some impact on who is identified as having moderate learning difficulties, which is relevant to pupils so identified, their parents and teachers.

BRIEFING
Complexity of defining and identifying MLD

The following is the Government's working definition of MLD:

"Pupils with moderate learning difficulties will have attainments significantly below expected levels in most areas of the curriculum, despite appropriate interventions. Their needs will not be able to be met by normal differentiation and the flexibilities of the National Curriculum. **They should only be recorded as MLD if additional educational provision is being made to help them to access the curriculum.** *Pupils with moderate learning difficulties have much greater difficulty than their peers in acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills and in understanding concepts. They may also have associated speech and language delay, low self-esteem, low levels of concentration and under-developed social skills." (DfES, 2003; bold in the original)* [1]

See online resource: www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/identifying/definition

Table 1 sets out the areas of the definition, the implied sub-areas and possible practical ways of assessing these sub-areas.

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[1] DfES *Data Collection by Type of SEN* (2003)

There are some important key points that need to be made:
1. The MLD category can be associated with other areas of difficulties
2. This is a broad category and covers a range of difficulties in cognition and learning
3. Its use does not imply any particular causal origin; different pupils identified as having MLD might come to be so identified with quite different causal histories.
4. Categories have different uses and purposes and when you use the term MLD, you need to be aware about why you are using it and for what specific purpose or purposes:
   a. For reporting on the incidence for statistical data collection
   b. For making decisions about whether more resources, e.g. staffing and class size, are to be allocated, and
   c. For making decisions about how to plan and teach pupils so identified.
5. You also need to be aware that using MLD in relation to individual pupils can have negative implications for their identity and status, for example some parents of pupils who struggle with their learning prefer the term 'specific learning difficulties' or 'dyslexia' rather than a general learning difficulty, such as MLD
6. When using the term MLD, you need to be aware of the related areas of difficulties in learning. MLD is in an uncertain area between severe learning / intellectual difficulties AND those not identified as having SEN, but having low attainment; It is used to contrast with specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia) as being a *general learning difficulty*.
7. How to identify a general learning difficulty such as MLD is contentious because of the uncertainty of how to define the various areas involved in the definition as Figure 1 below illustrates:
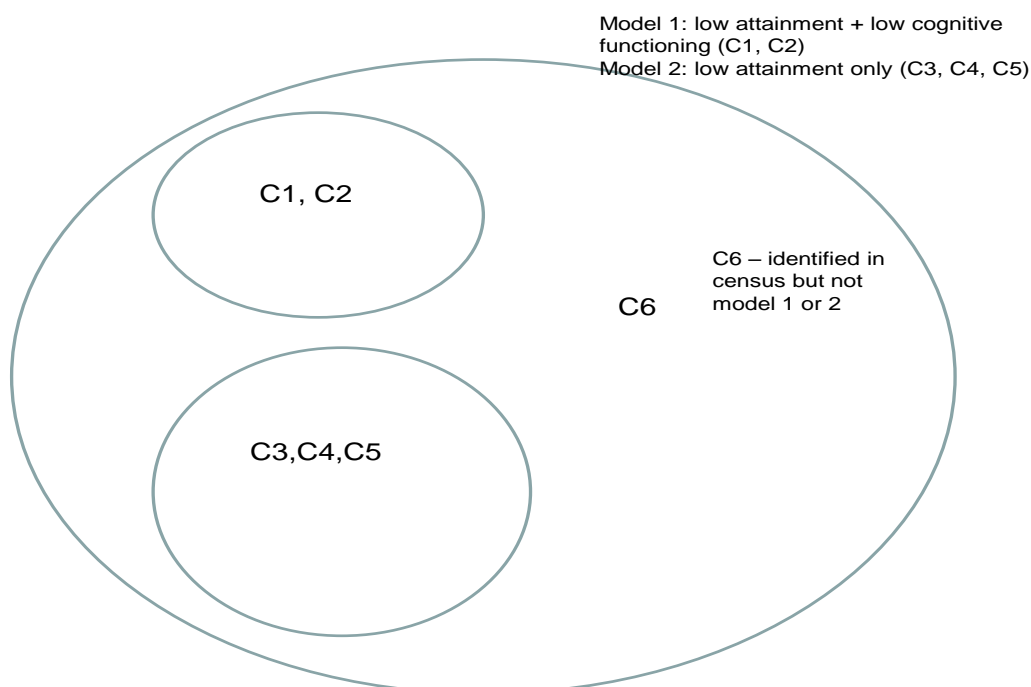
Table 1: MLD definition and identification options

	Area	Sub-area		Operational assessment options
Child functioning	**Significant low attainment in most areas of curriculum**			
		Literacy	1	Centile cut off for standardised test (e.g. below 5th centile)
			2	Teacher assessed level (e.g. defined level below expected level (varies according to age)
			3	SAT level (test results) e.g. defined level below expected level (varies according to age)
		Numeracy	1	Centile cut off for standardised test (e.g. below 5th centile)
			2	Teacher assessed level (e.g. defined level below expected level (varies according to age)
			3	SAT level (test results) e.g. defined level below expected level (varies according to age)
		Other e.g. science		Similar options as above
	Much greater difficulty in understanding concepts	Verbal and non-verbal reasoning: verbal concepts	1	Teacher assessment (year/class group referenced e.g. lowest 1-2)
			2	Cognitive ability tests (On CAT, WISC, BAS e.g. lowest 2-5 centile)
			3	Dynamic assessment (teaching assessment; teacher assessment based on degree of gain in response to assistance)
	Speech and language delay	Age level dependent		Teacher assessment (using Assessment of Pupil performance – APP) Speech therapist assessment
	Low self esteem			Teacher assessment Use of self esteem or similar inventory
	Low level of concentration			Teacher assessment
	Under-developed social skills			Teacher assessment Use of social skills or similar inventory
Environmental factors	School attendance	Consistent		
	Additional teaching programmes	Tried and revised		
	Supportive and engaging learning environment			

Current research shows that pupils identified by secondary schools as having MLD in terms of the above Government definition, fall into 3 subgroups as illustrated in Figure 1 (Ylonen and Norwich 2011):

1. Those with low attainment and low concept understanding and reasoning (model 1)
2. Those with low attainment only (model 2)
3. Identified as MLD but not with low attainment nor concept understanding/ reasoning.

These findings suggest that some pupils are identified as having MLD inappropriately (group 3), while for others concept understanding and reasoning are not used as indicators of MLD.

Figure 1: Different models of MLD

Model 1: low attainment + low cognitive functioning (C1, C2)
Model 2: low attainment only (C3, C4, C5)

C1, C2

C6 – identified in census but not model 1 or 2

C6

C3,C4,C5

Teaching assessment:

What is called a teaching assessment here derives from work developed by educational psychologists over many years, often called dynamic or assisted assessment (Feuerstein, 1979; Campione et al., 1985; Hassan and Joffe, 2007)[2], to reflect that the assessment is focused on the ***processes of learning and teaching*** and not just the product. There are various versions of dynamic assessment with slightly different aims and methods, but what they share in common are the following:

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[2] Check reference

1. Focus of assessment on the way in which the potential for learning and change is assessed,
2. The assessor interacts with learner by teaching and supporting to examine ways of facilitating learning,
3. The assessed task can be either general processes of learning, e.g. reasoning or problem solving, or task specific e.g. relating to specific skills and knowledge e.g. expressive language skills

Teaching assessments can be used in two ways:
a. to differentiate between learners who perform similarly on a 'static' (unassisted) assessment, by showing different responses to teaching; AND / OR
b. to identify what kinds of teaching and support facilitate change and learning.

In this assignment the teaching assessment will focus on both the responses to teaching and what teaching facilitates change.

Task 1

1. To understand how a teaching assessment (dynamic assessment) of a pupil identified as having MLD can produce evidence about the appropriateness of using this category

2. To find out how a teaching assessment can reveal how well a pupil identified as having MLD responds to teaching as well as what kinds of teaching might support the pupil improve their learning.

Design of Teaching Assessment

See online resource:
www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/identifying/teaching-assessment

In this task you will assess 2 pupils (one identified as having MLD and another with low attainment) on 2 types of tasks (verbal analogies and a series tasks).

There are two phases, one using verbal analogies and the other a number series questions. In each phase there will be 3 kinds of questions: Questions 1 and 3 are for monitoring pre and post teaching changes in answering these questions. Question 2 is another version of Question 1(same demand/ level), but for teaching use only.

Question 1 is the type of analogies problem for which there will be teaching and therefore will be a problem at a 'just cannot do' level. Question 3 is to assess the

transfer of learning to do analogies from the teaching on Question 2. It involves a different but related kind of analogies problem.

Teaching will be focussed on Question 2 only which will be a different version of Question 1 (at same level of difficulty).

Table 2: Design of Teaching Assessment for 2 pupils

2 Pupils: Pupil with MLD + Pupil with low attainment	Pre-teaching assessment	Teaching	Post-teaching assessment
Phase 1:			
Verbal analogies problems	**Question 1 (just cannot do level)**	**Question 2 (similar level as Question 1 used in teaching)**	**Question 1 (repeated)**
	Question 3 (transfer task: related but different from Question 1)		**Question 3 (repeated)**
Phase 2			
Number Series problems	**Question 1 (just cannot do level)**	**Question 2 (similar level as Question 1 used in teaching)**	**Question 1 (repeated)**
	Question 3 (transfer task: related but different from Question 1)		**Question 3 (repeated)**

Procedures:
- You design the same Questions for both phases for the 2 pupils.
- You undertake phase 1 fully and then phase 2.
- In phase 1 you administer Question 1 and 3 before the teaching. In this pre-teaching assessment you do not support or teach the pupils, just ask them the questions showing them the Questions written out and spoken mode. Explain what you are going to do and put them at ease; presenting these as puzzles or games. Let them know that they will get help later on with them.
- In phase 2 you go through the same routine as in phase 1.

Questions for you to answer from undertaking this teaching assessment:
1. To what extent does the teaching assessment improve performance on Question 1 for the 2 pupils?

2. To what extent does the teaching assessment improve performance on Question 3 for the 2 pupils?
3. How do performance gains on Question 1 compare with gains for Question 3?
4. What kinds of teaching and how much teaching assisted the 2 pupils in learning to improve their Question 1 and 3 performances?
5. How does the teaching used in the teaching assessment for the 2 Questions relate to gains made by 2 pupils across both problems?
6. What are the implications of the results of this teaching assessment for the original identification of pupils as either MLD or lower attaining and for planning teaching?

Task 2

Identifying 2 pupils for teaching assessment
Identify two pupils; one you teach or have taught identified as having MLD and another with below average attainments but not identified as having MLD (called from now: low attaining).
Pupil with MLD identification:
1. Identify pupil who was recorded as having MLD as main area of SEN in school annual census preferably one you teach – consult the SEN Coordinator about this,
2. Discuss with SENCO the criteria that were used to identify the pupil as having MLD – consider which of the various options set out above in Table 1 were used,
3. Which model of MLD is used? Model 1 (very low attainment and cognitive functioning, Model 2 (very low attainment only or Model 3, neither of these.
4. Find out about the other areas relevant to the definition from files, talking to teaching assistants and other teachers
5. Talk with the pupil on one to one basis about learning approaches, issues in learning based on definition areas above etc.

Pupil with low attainment:
1. Identify a pupil you teach or have taught, of similar age and gender as the pupil with MLD (above)
2. Attainments in maths, English and science will be well below average, but not to an extent where special educational needs or MLD have been considered as relevant category

Task 3

Preparation for teaching assessment
Preparing Assessment and Teaching Questions:
You need to select problems – verbal analogies and number series – that involve some conceptual processes that are challenging for the 2 pupils; a 'just can't do' level. You could select some from websites like the following:
http://www.englishforeveryone.org/Topics/Analogies.htm
http://www.superteacherworksheets.com/analogies.html
http://www.education.com/

See online resource:
www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/identifying/teaching-assessment-examples

You could try out these problems for the appropriate level required.

Phase 1 word questions:
Question 1:
word analogies (opposites)
 e.g. Happy is to sad as hot is to_____. (cold, warm, mad)
IDENTIFY 3 VERSIONS LIKE THE ABOVE FOR QUESTION 1

Question 2: similar level as Question 1 for teaching purposes only;
 e.g.
Strong is to weak as wealthy is _____.
(poor, broke, hungry, cold)
IDENTIFY 3 VERSIONS LIKE THE ABOVE FOR QUESTION 2

Question 3: word analogies (as transfer task different relationship)
e.g. Cup is to coffee as bowl is to (container to content)
    a. dish.
    b. soup.
    c. spoon.
    d. food.
IDENTIFY 3 VERSIONS LIKE THE ABOVE FOR QUESTION 3

Phase 2 series tasks:
Question 1: number series
e.g. Look at this series: 8, 43, 11, 41, __, 39, 17, … What number should fill in the blank?
a. 8;   b. 14   c. 43   d. 44
IDENTIFY 3 VERSIONS LIKE THE ABOVE FOR QUESTION 1

Question 2: similar level as Task 1 (also number series) for teaching purposes only (have 3 versions ready).
e.g. Look at this series: 15, __, 27, 27, 39, 39, … What number should fill the blank?
a.51   b. 39   c. 23   d. 15
IDENTIFY 3 VERSIONS LIKE THE ABOVE FOR QUESTION 2

Question 3: letter series (transfer task)
Look at the series of letters: N G O H P I Q J __ __ __. What letters come next in series?
(answer : R K S L)
IDENTIFY 3 VERSIONS LIKE THE ABOVE FOR QUESTION 3

There are further word and number problems included at an appendix at the end of this unit.

Preparation for the Teaching in phases 1 and 2:

Some guidelines to follow:

i.   In this teaching assessment you need to be flexible but have planned approaches and options ready to use.

ii.   This involves being alert to new approaches that emerge while teaching.

iii.   Teaching assessment could be for a period of 10-15 minutes,

iv.   You can come back to the teaching the next day and try again, perhaps to check the consistency of pupils' responses to the teaching,

v.   Have the tasks and teaching approaches ready before you start.

Suggested teaching approaches:

1. Explain context and what task requires: aim to help solve the problem
2. Questions and prompts: e.g. what other problems like this have you tried and did you solve it;
3. Provide time for pupil: to follow instructions / task demands and work out responses
4. Encouragement and support; communicate 'can do' messages with focus on effort and not rushing to respond,
5. Use of materials, e.g. concrete objects, visual images such as number lines, alphabets
6. Modelling ways of approaching a solution; giving initial steps and gradually adding prompts only if still cannot produce a solution,
7. Task analysis: breaking down the task into sub-tasks and presenting these in the order from where pupil is (baseline) to where he is to be (to give a solution)

Teaching approaches can be seen to take account of INPUT, PROCESSING and OUPUT aspects:

Input:	Processing:	Output:
Focus attention task	Provide assistance to working memory e.g. concrete / visual pictures etc	Enable pupil to communicate their answer / response
Encourage task engagement	Support pattern finding	Remind and encourage the need for precise / accurate responses
Provide time to register task demands	Support transferring pattern to find solution	
	Provide time to complete process	

Task 4

Carrying out the teaching assessment
NOW YOU ARE READY TO CARRY OUT THE TEACHING
ASSESSMENT

Task 5

Recording responses to teaching assessment
Use Table 3 to summarise the 2 pupils' responses to the tasks you are using.

Materials for recording and analysing teaching assessment

Table 3: Recording sheet: of responses to tasks

		Pupil with MLD	Pupil: low attaining
Word questions	Performance Change in Question 1		
	Performance change in Question 3		
	Difference between Questions 1 and 3		
Number questions	Performance Change in Question 1		
	Performance change in Question 3		
	Difference between Questions 1 and 3		

Recording instructions:
In the above cells record for the word and number questions whether the teaching
led to performance change from pre to post teaching for the Questions 1 and 3.
Compare changes for Questions 1 and 3 between the pupil with MLD and lower
attaining pupil.

Task 6

Recording teaching approaches used
Use the record sheet below to record in note form the kinds of teaching approaches which you used to promote enhanced performance on the questions. You may have fuller details recorded elsewhere.

Table 4: Record sheet teaching approaches used

	Pupil with MLD		Pupil: low attaining	
	Word questions	Number questions	Word questions	Number questions
Input related:				
Processing related				
Other				

Task 7

Evaluating your learning
You can use the table below to summarise what you found out from the teaching assessment for how these 2 pupils learn and their original identification as well as for possible useful approaches to teaching.

See online resource: www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/identifying/post-assessment

Table 5: Teaching assessment analysis sheet

	Pupil with MLD	Pupil: lower attaining
Original assessment details		
Teaching approaches leading to gains		

Extent of gains on Questions 1 and 3 for both word/number problems		
Implications for how pupils learn AND original identification of pupils		
Implications for teaching		

REFERENCES:

Campione, J.C., Brown, A.L. and Ferrara, R.A. (1985) Mental retardation and intelligence, in R.J. Sternberg (ed.) *Handbook of human intelligence* (pp. 392-490) Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Feuerstein, R. (1979) *The dynamic assessment of retarded performers; the learning potential assessment device, theory instruments and techniques.* Baltimore: University Park Press;;

Hassan, N. and Joffe, V. (2007) *The case for dynamic assessment in speech and language therapy*. Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 23, 1, 9-25.

Ylonen, A. and Norwich, B. (2011) *The concept of moderate learning difficulties and its use in secondary schools using lesson Study as a way of promoting achievements for students so identified*. (Working paper)

Appendix:
Further word and number problems:
Verbal analogies:

1. Happy is to sad as hot is to _____.
(cold, warm, mad)

2. Wealthy is to rich as poor is to _____.
(broke, hungry, cold)

3. Shoe box is to cardboard as five pound note is to _____.
(rich, money, paper)

Another format
Cup is to coffee as bowl is to (container to content)
  e. dish.
  f. soup.
  g. spoon.
  h. food.
Exercise is to gym as eating is to (activity to place where done)
  a. food.
  b. dieting.
  c. fitness.
  d. restaurant.
Oar is to rowing as foot is to (means to activity)
  a. running.
  b. sneaker.
  c. skateboard.
  d. jumping.
Types of relationships in verbal analogies: to be used in designing Questions
  1. CAUSE to EFFECT or EFFECT to CAUSE
  school : learning :: recess : playing

  2. CLASS to TYPE/SPECIES or TYPE/SPECIES to CLASS
  mammal : whale :: fish : tuna

3. OBJECT to ACTION or ACTION to OBJECT
eye : see :: finger : feel

4. OBJECT to PREDICTION or PREDICTION to OBJECT
cloud : storm :: drought : famine

5. OPPOSITES
hot : cold :: east : west

6. PART to WHOLE or WHOLE to PART
mouth : face :: arm : torso

7. PERSON to GROUP/SOCIETY or SOCIETY/GROUP to PERSON
diva : opera :: danseuse : ballet

8. PERSON to TOOL OF TRADE or TOOL to PERSON
printer : press :: blacksmith : anvil

9. PERSON to HOBBY/WORK or HOBBY/WORK to PERSON
aviator : flying :: navigator : sailing

10. PRODUCT from SOURCE or SOURCE to PRODUCT
wool : sheep :: blanket : wool

11. TIME SEQUENCE
early : late :: morning : night

12. TOOL to OBJECT WORKED ON or OBJECT to TOOL
scissors : hair :: saw : wood

Number series
This set contains additional number series questions, some of which are in Roman numerals. These items differ from common number series problems because they ask you to find the number that fits somewhere into the *middle* of the series. Some of the items involve both numbers and letters; for these questions, look for a number series *and* a letter series.

1. Alternating - +3 then -2 type: Look at this series: 8, 43, 11, 41, __, 39, 17, …
   What number should fill in the blank?
   a. 8
   b. 14
   c. 43
   d. 44

2. Repeating number type: Look at this series: 15, __, 27, 27, 39, 39, … What number should fill the blank?
   a. 51
   b. 39
   c. 23
   d. 15
3. Cycle type 3: minus 10 then 93; minus 10 then 93 and so on:

e.g. Look at this series: 83, 73, 93, 63, __, 93, 43, … What number should fill the blank?
   a. 33
   b. 53
   c. 73
   d. 93

Letter series:
Other instances
N N type: H Q I R J S K T __ __ __ __ (L U M V)
N I N I type: T J F O U J G O __ __ __ __ (V J H O)
B N type: U C T D S E R F __ __ __ __ (Q G P H)
N = next in series: I = same in series; B = back in series