



DAS SpLD ASSESSMENT



DAS SpLD ASSESSMENT SERVICES

SpLD Assessment Services (SAS) comprises of a team of Registered Psychologists and Specialist Psychologists who receive intensive training to ensure that they are well skilled to carry out psycho-educational assessments. SAS Psychologists see over 1200 referral cases each year and accumulate significant experience in conducting SpLD Assessments.

Once the child has been diagnosed to have dyslexia and/or other learning difficulties and is found suitable for DAS programmes, the psychologists would then determine the learner's profile. Each child has his/her own strengths and weaknesses which come together to make up their own unique learning profile. For the child who has been diagnosed with dyslexia and/or other learning difficulties and is found suitable for DAS programmes, the DAS Psychologists will differentiate his/her needs accordingly for placement in an appropriate class. This facilitates the DAS Educational Therapist in selecting suitable educational goals that address the child's needs more closely.

The progress of every student is monitored and reviewed by DAS Educational Therapists every six months. After three years, psychologists may conduct review assessments to determine the child's overall progress since his/her previous assessment. This assessment may also determine if the child is eligible for access arrangements for school and national examinations.

The DAS offers a range of psychological assessments that may help to address your concerns with regard to academic, attention and social skills. The difficulties that may be investigated include:

- ◆ Dyslexia
- ◆ Dyscalculia
- ◆ Dysgraphia*
- ◆ Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- ◆ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- ◆ Intellectual Disability (ID)
- ◆ Giftedness
- ◆ Visual Processing
- ◆ School Readiness

** requires Occupational Therapy assessment*

DAS Psychologists can provide psycho-educational assessments for students (Primary to Tertiary) as well as school-readiness assessments for pre-schoolers. Assessments and consultations are also available for adults with concerns.

DAS SpLD Assessment Services (SAS)

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INTRODUCTION TO SAS - WHERE YOU GO TO KNOW MORE

The SpLD Assessment Services (SAS) as a division was launched in October 2017. With this launch, admissions to the English Language and Literacy (ELL) and Specialised Educational Services (SES) programmes were merged to allow a single point of entry to all the programmes offered at DAS. Additionally, the assessment arms within the DAS were also merged and housed within SAS. The scope of SAS was also broadened to allow for the assessment of issues beyond dyslexia. The inception of SAS made it more convenient for all clients regardless of the nationality, school and need, to access services at DAS. This minimised the possible confusion and burdens our clients may have faced in determining which service(s) they can access.

2018 saw the SAS psychologists evaluating a greater variety of referral concerns. With that came a need for training to further enhance the psychologists' knowledge and skills in the assessments of difficulties such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism spectrum disorder. In their continued efforts to raise awareness about SpLDs and the available assessment services, the SAS team has also been involved in various talks with different organisations over the course of 2018. Furthermore, research on the enhanced reading comprehension curriculum of the MLP was concluded.

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2. REFERRALS AND ASSESSMENTS – IN NUMBERS AND MORE

In 2018, SAS recorded an increase in demand for DAS services compared to the previous year. 1731 referrals were received and processed by the department, which represented an increase of approximately 8.9% from 2017. Many of these referrals were for the purpose of seeking psychological assessments; SAS psychologists conducted a total of 1146 assessments over the year. Most of the remaining referrals were channelled directly into the DAS Main Literacy Programme (MLP) as those children had already been diagnosed with dyslexia by psychologists from the Ministry of Education or other service providers.

While a vast majority of these assessments continued to be conducted with the intention of querying for dyslexia, the year 2018 featured greater diversity in the types of assessments done as well. This was the result of SAS' expansion of services in October 2017 to include assessments for other conditions as well as age groups. Including the last quarter of 2017, SAS psychologists had conducted 21 assessments for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, 10 for dyscalculia, and 3 for dysgraphia by the end of 2018. They had also seen 16 individuals of varied ages beyond secondary education.

As part of DAS ongoing mission to offer affordable services to children from families with financial constraints, bursaries continued to be granted to subsidize the assessment costs. By the end of 2018, 318 children, or about 27.8% of the children assessed, benefited from these bursaries.

3. RESEARCH

The Reading Comprehension Curriculum Evaluation Project concluded in 2018 with dissertations completed by Pei Yi and Minqi in fulfilment of their Master degrees at the National Institute of Education - Nanyang Technological University.

Findings from the research students are summarised as follows:

[a] Evaluation of the Enhanced Reading Comprehension Curriculum and Factors Predicting Reading Comprehension

This study examined reading comprehension in the context of dyslexia with two objectives. The first was to monitor the reading comprehension performance of primary school students with dyslexia who received literacy intervention at DAS before and after implementation of an enhanced reading comprehension curriculum. Students' (n = 42) reading comprehension scores were taken at three time-points (Time 1: baseline, Time 2: pre-enhanced curriculum and Time 3: post-enhanced

curriculum) over the course of two years. Significant improvements in reading comprehension were found for students with weaker verbal ability, but only for the period before enhancements to the curriculum were implemented.

While this finding suggests limited impact of the enhanced curriculum, definitive conclusions cannot be made at this point due to limitations of the study design. This pattern of results may suggest that a longer period of time may be necessary with advanced curriculum concepts. Additionally, weaker readers may need to follow the standard curriculum with a cut-off for skills required for implementation of the enhanced curriculum. Regardless, the findings provide an indication of how aspects of the intervention provided can contribute to improvements in reading comprehension (i.e. a greater language focus can be beneficial for students with weaker verbal ability).

The second objective was to explore the ability of five cognitive factors, namely verbal ability, non-verbal ability, phonological awareness, working memory and rapid naming ability, to predict concurrent ($n = 31$) and future reading comprehension performance at the end of one ($n = 48$) and two years ($n = 44$). Only verbal ability significantly predicted reading comprehension over time, suggesting its significance in the development of reading comprehension performance in students with dyslexia. It was further noted that these cognitive factors, including verbal ability and phonological awareness, did not fully explain the variance in reading comprehension skills in students. Hence, there may be more to reading comprehension than listening comprehension and phonological decoding skills, as the Simple View of Reading suggests. Additionally, recent interest in executive function suggests that aspects such as attention may be important here.

[b] Educational Therapists' Perceptions after Training for an Enhanced Reading Comprehension Curriculum

This study investigated the changes in perceptions and teaching behaviour in relation to teaching experience for Educational Therapists at the DAS following training for the Enhanced Reading Comprehension Curriculum. Forty-seven Educational Therapists were surveyed and changes in their perceptions and teaching behaviours post-training were analysed using mixed between-within ANOVAs. Findings showed that length of teaching experience affected the changes in perception and teaching behaviour in Educational Therapists following training. Less experienced Educational Therapists taught more of the skills they were trained on but the most experienced Educational Therapists did not. The training workshop also did not increase the perceived importance of skills covered during training for the most experienced group of Educational Therapists although it did for the less experienced Educational Therapists. In comparison, Educational Therapists of all

levels of teaching experience found greater ease in teaching the reading comprehension skills covered during training. With these findings in mind, curriculum teams and trainers may need to consider the teaching experience of educators as well as feedback from educators when implementing in-service training for curriculum changes.

4. CONTINUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF DAS PSYCHOLOGISTS

As part of DAS' commitment in providing high quality services to its service users, DAS psychologists continually receive training to update their knowledge of specific learning differences and enhance their assessment skills. Some of the external courses and workshops attended by DAS psychologists included ADI-R and ADOS-2 workshops by Dr. Jennifer Endre Olson, "Counselling Skills and Practice" at the Social Service Institute as well as a "Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Adolescents" by clinical psychologist Dr Goh Tze Jui from the Institute of Mental Health.

Additionally, DAS psychologists organise a range of activities, on a weekly basis, which include learning journeys, case discussions, topical or journal presentations, test kit trainings and supervision/training by external experts on specific areas. In FY18/19, DAS psychologists went on 2 learning journeys to Metta School and APSN Katong School and held 6 case discussions to discuss profiles and insights gained from complex cases that involved the assessment of dyscalculia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and intellectual disability, as well as language/ sensory/ behavioural issues that are comorbid with dyslexia.

DAS psychologists also learned how to use and/or discussed the interpretive use of the following tests:

- ◆ Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence - Fifth Edition
- ◆ Wechsler Adult Scale of Intelligence - Third Edition
- ◆ Test of Variables of Attention - Eighth Edition
- ◆ Keymath - Third Edition
- ◆ Vineland - Third Edition

Finally, to increase the support for the expansion of the SpLD Assessment Service, three external consultants, namely Ms Poon Siew Win (from Mind Matters), Ms Valerie Ho (from Insight Psychological Services) and Dr Liza Thia (from Liza Thia Psychological Consultancy), were invited to conduct training, supervision and consultations on either ADHD or ASD cases with senior DAS psychologists.

5. ENGAGEMENT AND AWARENESS

DAS psychologists conducted several talks and workshops to various audiences in 2018 as part of our efforts to bring awareness about dyslexia and DAS services to the public. Talks conducted by DAS psychologists include sharing about dyslexia with doctors at the Singapore National Eye Centre as well as to members of the public during the World Dyslexia Awareness Week. A career talk was also conducted for students from the Management Development Institute of Singapore (MDIS) School of Psychology where DAS psychologists raised awareness about dyslexia and shared about their experiences in conducting assessments for children.

Workshops were also run by DAS psychologists on how to read psychological reports as part of the training for new DAS Educational Therapists. At the DAS Academy, DAS psychologists also conducted certificate courses on Educational Psychology for parents and educators.



DAS SPLD ASSESSMENT SERVICES

www.das.org.sg/services/assessments.html

Scan me to find out more!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Director of SpLD Assessment Services, English Language and Literacy Division, & Staff Professional Development and Head of Research

Geetha Shantha Ram joined DAS on 16 August 2004 and assumed the post of Director of the English Language and Literacy (ELL) Division on 1 December 2014, which includes the Main Literacy Programme (MLP) and has led curriculum enhancements for the DAS through the Essential Literacy Approach and the current integrated MLP curriculum.

Besides ELL, Geetha oversees the SpLD Assessment Service and Staff Professional Development division, where she led the development of professional pathways and quality assurance of all educational efforts. She also heads the DAS Research Committee and is an advisor in the Register of Educational therapists (Asia) (RETA). Formerly, the Assistant Director of the DAS Academy, Geetha trained Allied educators, parents and other professionals and continues to present at conferences, most recently at the 2019 Dyslexia Speld Foundation Conference in Perth.

Geetha has a Masters in English (NUS) and a Post Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (Distinction) (LMU) and is currently pursuing her doctorate in the area of twice-exceptionality. With over 14 years of experience supporting children and adults in the area of dyslexia, Geetha aims to provide a quality service to dyslexics that searches for and realises their true potential and provides them with a view to appreciate their own unique abilities.



FONG PEI YI

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Pei Yi started out at the DAS as a Specialist Psychologist in 2012. Since then, she has completed the Master of Arts in Applied Psychology programme at the NIE and is a Registered Psychologist with the Singapore Psychological Society. Pei Yi is currently the Manager of the SpLD Assessment Services at the DAS, a team that provides a one-stop psycho-educational assessment service and facilitates the placement of students in learning programmes at the DAS. She also conducts psycho-educational assessments for individuals who experience difficulties with learning.