

Tips and Tools for Diagnosing and Remediating Hebrew Reading Difficulties

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A. Introduction

1. Personal introductions
2. Goals of the session: diagnosis and remediation
3. Introduction to common terms used to describe learning difficulties:
Learning Disabilities, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit
4. Defining the terms: *Reading versus Decoding*
5. Characteristics of children with Hebrew decoding difficulties
 - a) Difficulties with English reading and/or spelling
 - b) Difficulties hearing sounds in words (*phonemic awareness*)
 - c) Visual memory deficits
 - d) Attention deficits
 - e) Other factors e.g., attendance, motivation

B. Characteristics of the Hebrew Alphabet and its Morphology: “Regular” but Complex

1. The numerous look-alike letters and vowels
2. The vowel system: visual demands, multiplicity
3. Direction of reading
4. The *shva* and blending (CV units)
5. Other idiosyncrasies: same sound- different letter; final letters; unfamiliar sounds; vowels with *yod*; *patach gnuva*; *kamatz katan*; double duty dots etc.
6. “Square” uniform alphabet
7. Morphologically dense (e.g., “we ate in the morning”)

C. Assessing “Decoding Skills”

1. What, when, why and how to assess
 - a) Test construction: validity and reliability
 - b) Skill analysis
 - c) Screening versus diagnosis ; receptive versus expressive skills
 - d) Formative versus summative evaluation (ongoing versus end of year testing)
 - e) Examples of tests

2. Activity: Case Studies

D. Developing a Remediation Plan

1. Where do you start?
2. Dealing with specific problems
 - a) Confusing similar letters and vowels
 - b) Incomplete letter and vowel mastery
 - c) The Shva
 - d) Other blending difficulties
 - e) Reading fluency

E. Sample Materials

1. Assessment
 - a) *Diagnostic Reading Test and Remedial Worksheets* (Behrman House)
 - b) *Kadimah* letter recognition and writing evaluation (ARE Publishing)
 - c) *Z'man Likro* reading evaluation (ARE Publishing)
 - d) *Informal Evaluation of Letter name and sound knowledge* (Lenchner, 2001)
3. Remediation
4. My favorite games and tricks

Recommended Bibliography

Feitelson, D. **Relating Instructional Strategies to Language Idiosyncrasies in Hebrew.** In Kavanagh & Venezky (eds.) *Orthography Reading and Dyslexia.* Baltimore: University Park Press, 1981.)

Lenchner, O. **Why Jonathan Can't Read,** *Compass* (1983)

Share, D & Levin, I. **Learning to Read and Write in Hebrew.** In M. Harris & G. Hatano (eds). *Learning to Read and Write: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective,* Cambridge University Press, 1999.

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Warm Up Activity:

1. Which letters in Hebrew (block print) hardly get confused with others? Can you find more than 5 !?
2. What techniques do you use to reduce the confusion?
3. Which are the most difficult vowels for your students to master?
4. What are the most common mistakes students make when reading Hebrew?
5. What is the difference between decoding and reading?
6. In what ways is Hebrew reading different from English reading?