CORRESPONDENCE

The Diagnosis and Treatment of Reading and/or Spelling Disorders in Children and Adolescents

by Dr. rer. biol. hum. Katharina Galuschka, M.A. and
Prof. Dr. med. Gerd Schulte-Körne in issue 16/2016

A Misguided Educational Concept

The authors have succeeded in giving us a well laid-out and detailed presentation of the diagnosis and treatment of this disorder, which is also commonly encountered in the clinical practice of child and adolescent medicine (1). Unfortunately, however, they say little about its causes.

My experience over many years as a pediatrician treating children and adolescents indicates that a misguided educational concept is at fault that pays too little attention to the psychological basis of knowledge acquisition and to the practicing of what is supposed to be learned. In most elementary schools in Germany today, pupils are still being taught to write as they hear. This might well promote short-term motivation, but it also leads the way to long-term frustration later on in these children's schooling.

A very thorough discussion of a "healthier" way for children to learn to write, which can also serve as a means of preventing reading and/or spelling disorders, can be found in Jansen et al. (2). The method these authors propose can be recommended to the parents of affected children without any specialized instruction and brings about improvements in reading and spelling for many of them within a short time. Such successful experiences can alleviate or prevent secondary psychosomatic problems such as headache and abdominal pain, as well as behavioral sequelae such as lack of scholastic motivation, poor self-esteem, and aggressiveness.

The area of reading and/or spelling disorders serves as a good illustration of how important it is for basic psychological concepts to be translated into pedagogical practice as part of a holistic approach to teaching.

DOI: 10.3238/arztebl.2016.0680a

REFERENCES

1. Galuschka K, Schulte-Körne G: Clinical practice guideline: The diagnosis and treatment of reading and/or spelling disorders in children and adolescents. *Dtsch Arztebl Int* 2016; 113: 279–86.
2. Jansen F, Streit U, Fuchs A: Lesen und Rechtschreiben lernen nach dem IntraAct-Plus-Konzept. Heidelberg: Springer 2007.

Dr. med. Christian Mitt
Kinder- und Jugendarzt
Sölingen
docmitt@gmx.de

toms. In contrast, teaching methods that are based on particular concepts of the etiology of RSD (such as methods intended to promote visual or auditory perception and discrimination) (1, 2) have not been found effective for the improvement of reading or spelling performance. This is why the diagnostic methods and treatment approaches recommended in the relevant guidelines (3) are directly targeted to the processes of reading and spelling.

The manner in which a child is first taught to read has a major influence on the later development of reading and spelling ability. Therefore, we can only agree with Dr. Mitt's statement that current knowledge derived from basic psychological research should play a role in determining educational practice. Yet much research still needs to be done on supportive interventions before we will know how basic psychological knowledge can best be implemented in educational support measures and in everyday teaching. The example mentioned by Dr. Mitt, the teaching of "reading through writing" now in widespread use in German elementary schools, does in fact illustrate the reality that current knowledge from psychological research has not yet had enough influence on methods of instruction. For indeed, as recommended in the S3 guideline (3), the teaching of spelling and the supportive treatment of spelling disorders should be based on the acquisition of knowledge about orthography, rather than on the promotion of purely phonetically-oriented writing ability.

A more fruitful exchange between pedagogical practice and psychological research can only come about through an interdisciplinary collaboration in which each of the participating disciplines appreciates the contribution of the other. Such a reciprocal transfer of knowledge can help us implement evidence-based diagnostic and therapeutic measures across the entire field of education, both in the schoolhouse and beyond it.

DOI: 10.3238/arztebl.2016.0680b

REFERENCES

1. Ise E, Engel RR, Schulte-Körne G: Was hilft bei der Lese-Rechtschreibstörung? Ergebnisse einer Metaanalyse zur Wirksamkeit deutschsprachiger Förderansätze. *Kind Entw* 2012; 21: 122–36.
2. Galuschka K, Ise E, Krick K, Schulte-Körne G: Effectiveness of treatment approaches for children and adolescents with reading disabilities: a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *PLoS One* 2014; 9: e89900.
3. Galuschka K, Schulte-Körne G: Clinical practice guideline: The diagnosis and treatment of reading and/or spelling disorders in children and adolescents. *Dtsch Arztebl Int* 2016; 113: 279–86.

Dr. rer. biol. hum. Katharina Galuschka, Prof. Dr. med. Gerd Schulte-Körne
Klinik und Poliklinik für Kinder- und Jugendpsychiatrie,
Psychosomatik und Psychotherapie
Klinikum der Universität München
gerd.schulte-koerne@med.uni-muenchen.de

Conflict of interest statement

The authors of both contributions state that they have no conflict of interest.

In Reply:

The diagnosis and treatment of reading and/or spelling disorders (RSD) are most likely to lead to successful outcomes when they are oriented toward the affected person's symp-