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# INTRODUCTION MODULE

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**CRIA**

**Authored by: Emeteri Frago and Maria Vivancos**

**MELODY**

METHODS FOR LEARNING  
DISORDERS IN YOUTH



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# Introduction

## INTRODUCTORY MODULE TO LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

### OBJECTIVES

The main goal of this module is to give a first approach to learning difficulties in the educative environment and the Melody project context.

*Key concepts: Learning Environment, Good Practices, Melody*

## The Melody project

The Melody project started in September 2018, with the intention to give further support to teachers, trainers and practitioners that encounter with children or young students that may present difficulties in their learning processes.

The Melody project partnership is configured by partners from different contexts, both educative (schools, VET providers, ...) and territorial (Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom, Spain and Italy). These factors create a perfect environment for the exchange of good practices and different points of view of a same subject, hence creating a very strong partnership for the product development and the overall project implementation.



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# Learning difficulties

## Theoretical framework

In order to present different ways of working on learning difficulties it is important to be able to recognize, in advance, what is meant by Learning Difficulties. Learning difficulties, learning disabilities or learning disorders are terms, usually used as synonyms. However, learning difficulties and learning disabilities are usually distinguished with learning difficulties being the broader term.

It is important not to be confused by the similarity of the terms learning difficulty or disorder and learning disability, since learning disabilities require a much more specific approach.

From a medical point of view, following the classification of ICD-11, learning disorders can be defined as:

*“Developmental learning disorder is characterized by significant and persistent difficulties in learning academic skills, which may include reading, writing, or arithmetic. The individual’s performance in the affected academic skill(s) is markedly below what would be expected for chronological age and general level of intellectual functioning, and results in significant impairment in the individual’s academic or occupational functioning.”*

(World Health Organization, 2019)

### DID YOU KNOW?

**ICD-11** refers to the 11<sup>th</sup> revision of the ICD, which is an acronym for “International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems”. The ICD is the global standard for diagnostic health information, edited by the World Health Organization (WHO). The latest ICD, ICD-11, was released in June 2018.

Learning difficulties are functional dysfunctions affecting children and teenagers, who are considered to have normal intelligence, conventional instruction and appropriate and similar opportunities as other students. Learning difficulties can cause Early School Leaving, and it is esteemed that their prevalence is between 5 and 15% of the school-age population. (Dra. Anna Sans Fitó, 2010)

Although learning difficulties may occur concomitantly with other conditions of disability (sensory impairments, mental retardation or severe emotional problems) or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences or insufficient or inadequate schooling), learning disorders are never the result of these conditions or influences.



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ICD distinguishes 3 types of *Developmental Learning Disorders*, those that present impairment in reading, those that manifest impairment in written expression and those that express impairment in mathematics. These Learning Disorders and their usual symptoms are defined below.

### **Impairment in reading**

This group of learning difficulties refer to those that present a challenge with learning academic skills related to reading. This skills or activities are usually word reading accuracy, reading fluency and reading comprehension.

Within this classification is included Dyslexia (World Health Organization, 2019) which is characterized by difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities, which result from a deficit in their phonological awareness. (Guinevere F. Eden, 2016).

Difficulties when reading can manifest even before learning to read. A clear example of this is children having trouble breaking down spoken words into syllables and recognizing words that rhyme. In further development stages these same children may not be able to recognize and write letters as easily as their fellow classmates. People with this kind of impairment may also be challenged for spelling accuracy. Individuals that present this kind of impairment tend to avoid activities that involve reading and they prefer other mediums such as pictures, video or audio.

(American Psychiatric Association)

It is esteemed that about 15-20% of the worldwide school population has symptoms compatible with dyslexia or a learning disorder with impairment in reading. (International Dyslexia Association, 2017)

### **Impairment in written expression**

Learning disorders with impairment in written expression, also known as dysgraphia, are those that can affect learning academic skills related to writing. These skills are usually as spelling accuracy, grammar and punctuation accuracy, organization and coherence of ideas in writing and even handwriting. Students that face this kind of learning disorder are basically challenged to put their thoughts on to paper. (American Psychiatric Association)

Due to lack of proper definition and diagnosis of these type of learning disorders specific studies on their prevalence is not well-known.

Some of the symptoms that students with a diagnosis compatible with a learning disorder with impairment in written expression are:



- 
- Students write with a mixture of upper and lower case letters
  - Letters and numbers are irregular in shape and size
  - Students leave many letters unfinished
  - Communicating through writing is difficult
  - Struggle to grip writing utensil/odd grip
  - Some students create many spelling errors
  - Abnormal speed of writing (slow or fast)
  - Talks to self while writing
  - Illegible writing
  - Does not enjoy writing tasks
  - Stress and frustration with writing tasks
  - Physical pain from writing
  - Poor use of lines and spaces

(Peter Chung, 2015)

### **Impairment in mathematics**

Learning disorders with impairment in mathematics, also known as dyscalculia, are those related to significant and persistent difficulties in learning academic skills related to mathematics or arithmetic. Those academic skills can include number sense, memorization of number facts, accurate calculation, fluent calculation, and accurate mathematic reasoning. (American Psychiatric Association)

Its prevalence is esteemed to be between 3-7% of the population, although this number may not be accurate because of the few studies that exist on the matter. (Martínez, 2017)

### **Learning disorders in the school environment**

This kind of disorders usually manifest during the early school years, when academic skills are first taught to students. The treatment and/or intervention on LDs is aimed at enabling students to, despite their difficulty in a specific area, develop their potential as their fellow classmates and, as a result of it, get their school title and, in some cases, higher education possibilities. Treatment during the first schooling years can improve the student's skills and capabilities while intervention with older students is mostly focused on their adaptation to the disorder.



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Children with learning difficulties are more likely to suffer from secondary emotional disorders, such as low self-esteem due to poor school achievement, with all the consequences that this entails in the student's personal and social environment.

#### SELF-REFLECTION

Is your school/educative institution well-prepared for LD diagnosis and intervention, why?  
Is it on your hands to improve it? How could you do it?

The outputs within the framework of this project have been developed from an educational point of view, not so much with the disorders themselves but with the educational intervention with students who may show difficulties in learning compatible with the methods and recommendations presented, thus avoiding the need for a medical diagnosis in order to carry out the educational intervention, a barrier identified by some of the project partners.

#### LINKS AND RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Links on further LD information, resources, classification, associations:

- LD ONLINE, educators site: <http://www.ldonline.org/educators>



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## International legislative framework

The aim of this section is to give an overview of the International Legislative Framework regarding education, special education and inclusive education, concepts that surround the policies on Learning Disorders and the intervention on a national level. This chapter pretends to summarize the work done on the first intellectual output of the project.

Education as a right first appeared in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human rights, in 1948. In this Article, it is stated that everyone has the right to education and that this shall be directed to the full development of the individual.

In 1960, in the General Conference of the UNESCO recalled the principle of non-discrimination in education, describing discrimination as any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference which, being based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic condition or birth, has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in education.

The General Assembly adopted, in 1982, the World Programme of Action (WPA) concerning Disabled Persons, WPA was a global strategy to enhance disability prevention, rehabilitation and equalization of opportunities, leading to full participation of persons with disabilities in social life and national development. It also emphasized in the need of approaching disabilities from a human rights perspective.

During the decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992) took place significant advances in teaching techniques and in the field of special education, mostly regarding early detection, assessment and intervention and special education programmes which enabled some disabled children to participate in a regular schooling environment. Another major outcome of this decade was the adoption of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities by the General Assembly on 1993. Those rules were not meant to be legally binding, but they showed a strong commitment of Governments to take action in the equalization of opportunities, they served as a common ground for policy-making.

During the nineties, the international movement for inclusive schools had impacts on policies and practices for children and young persons with special educational needs on the countries involved. The culmination of this movement was the adoption of the Declaration of Salamanca on Principles, Policies, and Practices in Special Needs Education and Framework of Action (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca Statement was the first international recognition that to meet the needs of pupils with special needs, the goal for these students should be changed from inclusion in education to inclusive education. It



emphasizes that inclusive schools are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.

The inclusive education approach has been present in the international laws regarding education ever since, one of the first examples of it was the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar that represented a huge commitment to education for all, and established six goals to be achieved by 2015.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, and its goal of achieving universal education reaffirms the belief that education is one of the most powerful and proven drivers for improving people’s lives and sustainable development.

In December 2017, the European Council, European Parliament, and the European Commission fully endorsed the adoption of the European Pillar of social rights. The agreement highlights the importance of the social, educational and cultural dimensions of EU policies in bringing Europeans together to build our common future.

The first principle of the European Pillar of social rights states that:

"Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and successfully manage transitions in the labor market".

As it is shown by several international standard-setting instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Accessibility Act and UN Sustainable Development Goals, we only reinforce at the national level that the fundamental human right to education should be protected and promoted.

To ensure this right for children, youth and adults with learning difficulties, policies must include changes as appropriate in education content, approaches, structures and learning support to the fullest achievement of the educational potential and all individuals accomplish at least a minimum level of skills.

EVOLUTION OF INTERNATIONAL LAWS ACCORDING UNITED NATIONS MILESTONES			
1948	INCLUSIVE	Universal Declaration of Human Rights/ Artº26: Right to Education	United Nations
1975		Special School Act abolished	Norway
1977		Act Nº 517: Integration of pupils with disabilities into mainstream state schools; eliminate special schools.	Italy
1981		International Year of Disabled Persons	



1983-1992	World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Person/ United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons/ Recommended in the World Programme of Action	
1983	Education Act, Law No. 46/86, 14 October: Artº 18: "Special education is organized preferably according to diversified models of integration in regular educational establishments."	Portugal
1985	Organic Law on the Right to Education (LODE): Legal definition of 'people with disabilities' was enshrined. A 'person with disabilities' is anyone with a permanent or progressive physical, psychological or sensory impairment that causes a learning, social, or occupational difficulty and that entails disadvantage or social marginalization.	Spain
1989	Law No. 9/89, 2 May: Including such pupils in the mainstream schooling system, as the educational strategy.	Portugal
1990	Decree-Law No. 35/90, 25 de January: Learners with SEN are obliged to attend compulsory schooling	Portugal
1990	Organic Law of General Regulation of the Educational System in Spain (LOGSE): in classrooms there are students with different learning needs; it mentions the concept of Special Education Needs.	Spain
1991	Decree-Law No. 319/91: Substitution of classification in categories based on medical decisions by the concept of SEN based on pedagogical criteria.	Portugal
1992	Act no. 104: Legal definition of 'people with disabilities' was enshrined. A 'person with disabilities' is anyone with a permanent or progressive physical, psychological or sensory impairment that causes a learning, social, or occupational difficulty and that entails disadvantage or social marginalization.	Italy
1993	Education Act, Law n. º 301/93: Students with SEN are required to complete compulsory education.	Portugal
1994	Declaration of Salamanca: UNESCO (SEN + Inclusive Education (education for all))	Salamanca
1996	Education (NI) Order 1996: provides rights to children with SEN to be educated in mainstream schools; rights for parents	Northern Ireland
1998	Education Act: Regulate primary and secondary education until today	Norway
2002	Organic Law on Education Quality (LOCE): It continues to work on the concept of Special Education Needs (within the SEN are included students with physical, psychological, sensory impairments and those to manifest serious personality or behavioral disorders).	Spain
2005	Special Education Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SEND0): Introduced disability discrimination.	Northern Ireland



2006	Decree-Law No. 20/2006, 31 January: Created the special education recruitment group for the first time.	Portugal
2006	Art. 24 and 45: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) entered into force on 2008 (mentions inclusive education).	New York
2006	The Presidential Decree of 19.5.2006 states that the medical commission appointed to issue a statement/certificate of disability has to refer to the international indicators listed by the WHO ICD-10.	Italy
2006	Organic Law of Education (LOE): Incorporates concepts such as serious behavioral disorders, the principle of inclusion, the equity among students, social cohesion and compensation of inequalities, or the principle of diversity.	Spain
2008	Decree-Law No. 3/2008, 7 January: inclusive education aims at educational equity, which is meant by guaranteeing equality, both in access and results.	Portugal
2010	Law 170 / 2010 Artº 1: Recognize dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthography and dyscalculia as Specific Learning Disorders.	Italy
2012	DIRECTIVE 27/12/2012: "Intervention tools for pupils with Special Educational Needs and territorial organisation for school inclusion".	Italy
2013	Organic Law of Education for Improvement of Educational Quality (LOMCE)	Spain
2016	Special Education Needs and Disability Act (NI) 2016 SEND ACT: New duties to Boards of Governors, EAs, Health and Social Services, rights to parents and children.	Northern Ireland
2018	Decree-Law No. 54/2018, 6 July: Bets on an inclusive school where each one of the students find answers that enable them to acquire a level of education and training that facilitates their full social inclusion; the right of each student to an inclusive education.	Portugal

#### LINKS AND RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

This chapter was an adaptation of the *Comparative report on the state of the art for learning disorders in the project Melody partner countries*. You can find it complete in: <https://www.melody-methods.eu>



# The Melody approaches

Four training modules – other than this one - are presented to support the teaching and educational support staff in the educational intervention with children and young people who may have some difficulty in learning. These four approaches were chosen based on the expertise of the partners who developed them and the gaps identified in the subject - be it in the literature or in the educational intervention institutions themselves. The modules developed are: Family Work, Mentoring, Classroom Management, and Ready to Read.

The following is a list of the contents of each module – both theoretical contents and practical proposals - , the age range for which they have been developed and the final beneficiaries profile of the and which may be helpful to educational support staff. This section should be useful to navigate through the developed contents

Name of the Module:	MENTORING
<i>Theoretical contents</i>	Concept of mentoring (definition, characteristics and principles) Analysis of different mentoring models and their stages
<i>Practical proposals</i>	The GROW model of mentoring.
<i>Age range of the students involved</i>	Last years of mandatory education (14-17 years old)
<i>Beneficiaries</i>	Young people with a Learning Disorder and at risk of Early School Leaving.

Name of the Module:	PARENTS ENGAGEMENT
<i>Theoretical contents</i>	Reflection on the families and school collaboration in educational processes. Analysis of different parent involvement models.
<i>Practical proposals</i>	Tips and recommendation on involving families in educative environments. Proposals on training activities for <i>Parent mentors</i> .



<i>Age range of the students involved</i>	Mandatory education (usually 3-16 years old)
<i>Beneficiaries</i>	Schools and families

Name of the Module: **READY TO READ**

<i>Theoretical contents</i>	Definition of different types of cognitive and learning styles. Theoretical models of reading.
<i>Practical proposals</i>	Strategies to encourage understanding of texts Resources and exercises to enhance the reading abilities of students.
<i>Age range of the students involved</i>	Students enrolled in levels on which they are able to understand the fluency of texts and specific vocabulary (approximately 9-14 years).
<i>Beneficiaries</i>	Students that present a diagnosis compatible with any Learning Disorder, mostly related to reading skills.

Name of the Module: **CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT**

<i>Theoretical contents</i>	Definition of the classroom management concept and its importance in learning environments. Definition of management styles. Revision of Recommendations on the development of relational skills.
<i>Practical proposals</i>	-----
<i>Age range of the students involved</i>	Mandatory education (usually 3-16 years old)



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*Beneficiaries*

All students.

#### SUMMARY

This module has served the purpose of contextualizing the Melody project and the rest of the modules. Defining, on one hand, the learning disorders – as the core of the project – and, on the other hand, the international legislative framework where the educational measures develop.

At the end of the module, a short description of the rest of the modules is provided in order that teachers can navigate through them more easily

#### SELF ASSESSMENT

The goal of this section is to assess the new knowledge acquired after the realization of the module, the questions should be related to the objectives stated at the beginning of the chapter.

- a) My knowledge of the definition of Learning Disorders has improved.
- b) I could recognize some of the signs associated to Learning Disorders on my students.
- c) I could easily use the given resources to further develop my knowledge of LD.
- d) I now have a further knowledge of the international laws regarding education.



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NOTES and OBSERVATIONS



