



## THE FIELD OF SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES IN SPAIN AFTER THE 2006 EDUCATION ACT

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Assessment and intervention in students with learning disabilities (LD) requires specific intervention that takes account of the reality of this problem, in line with international scientific knowledge and the empirical evidence. In Spain, the 2006 Education Act (LOE) represented a significant milestone in the field of LD, since it was the first legislation to refer to LD as a specific category of special education. However, the law does not clarify the specific organizational and functional measures to be implemented, delegating the responsibility for this to the Regional governments. In this paper we reflect on the changes to the LD field in Spain resulting from the LOE legislation and analyze the specific measures introduced by the Regions. Considering the limitations of these initial steps in the LD field in Spain, we look at some of the practical and educational implications in relation to the goal of providing adequate educational intervention for students with such disabilities.

**Key Words:** Specific learning disabilities, Spanish Educational System, 2006 Education Act (LOE), Spanish regulations on learning disabilities.

La evaluación e intervención en alumnos con dificultades de aprendizaje (DA) requiere un tratamiento específico que entienda la realidad de esta problemática, en coherencia con el conocimiento científico internacionalmente establecido y las evidencias empíricas. En España, la LOE se ha convertido en un punto de inflexión determinante en este aspecto, al incluir por primera vez las DA dentro de la categoría de necesidades específicas. Sin embargo, la Ley no clarifica las medidas organizativas y funcionales que se deben emprender, delegando en las Comunidades Autónomas su concreción. A lo largo del presente artículo se reflexiona acerca de los cambios ligados al ámbito de las DA introducidos por la LOE, abordando además el análisis de las medidas emprendidas por las Administraciones autonómicas. A partir de las limitaciones detectadas en estos primeros avances se aportan sugerencias sobre aspectos que todavía es necesario concretar o mejorar para asegurar un tratamiento educativo adecuado a los alumnos DA.

**Palabras clave:** Dificultades específicas de aprendizaje, Sistema Educativo Español, Ley Orgánica de Educación, Normativa española sobre dificultades de aprendizaje.

**I**n Spain, the term *learning disabilities* (LD) has been used for many years in a broad sense. The General Regulation of the Education System Act (*Ley Orgánica de Ordenation General del Sistema Educativo*, LOGSE) of 1990 was the first legislation to refer to Learning Disabilities, used synonymously with the broad concept of special educational needs (SEN) (Jiménez & Hernández, 1999; Ortiz, 2004). In this legislative framework pupils were considered to present LD when they could not learn in their ordinary class and the teacher observed a difference between them and the rest of the class in the instrumental learning they should have achieved for their age or school year, and regardless of the cause of such disability: sensory deficits, mental retardation, severe emotional disorders, cultural

differences or inappropriate/inadequate teaching (MEC, 1992). According to this conceptualization, LDs were not considered as a specific diagnostic condition; rather, the term referred to problems or difficulties a student could have with learning, independently of their cause. At the same time, on the SEN continuum, in contrast to “permanent” SENs deriving from sensory motor, mental or physical deficits, LDs were situated at the other extreme, transitory in nature and with less impact (Jiménez, 1999). This is in direct contradiction of the empirical evidence in relation to LD, as a problem covering the entire lifespan, and with an obvious need for differentiated and specific treatment.

If, in addition to a failure to acknowledge LDs as a specific diagnostic condition of Special Education, they are hypothetically situated at the “transitory” end of the SEN continuum, it should come as no surprise that there is a widespread lack of their appropriate educational treatment in Spain, reflecting serious shortcomings in the

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LD field so far, as corroborated by various reviews carried out at normative and educational levels (Jiménez & Hernández, 1999; García, Fidalgo, & Arias, 2006; Miranda & García, 2004).

However, the 2006 Education Act (*Ley Orgánica de Educación*, LOE) signalled a significant change, and a key one for the development of the LD field in our country. This was the first legislation to make explicit mention of specific learning disabilities as a separate diagnostic category in Special Education, referring to specific problems experienced by some students in the learning process (see Figure 1), in line with the restrictive conception of the term prevailing in the international scientific context, heavily influenced by its use in the US and Canada. From this point of view, LDs can be conceptualized, in accordance with the most consensus-based and influential definitions within this research field, as a heterogeneous group of disorders that manifest themselves in significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical skills (Kavale & Forness, 2000; Lerner & Kline, 2006). These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, supposedly due to dysfunction of the central nervous system, and can occur throughout the lifespan; moreover, they can coexist with problems in behaviours of self-regulation, social perception and social interaction, but do not in themselves constitute an LD. Although LDs may occur in concomitant fashion with other incapacitating conditions (such as sensory deficits, mental retardation or severe emotional disorders) or be subject to extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, inappropriate/inadequate teaching), they are not the result of such conditions or influences (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act – IDEA 2004. Public Law 108-446; National Joint Committee of Learning Disabilities – NJCLD 1997).

This legislation brought a series of changes at a normative level that will undoubtedly have considerable

influence on future developments in the LD field in our country, and on the response to LDs within the educational context. These aspects will be reviewed in the present article on the basis of the current international perspective, considering their implications at the conceptual-scientific and educational-applied levels. Certainly, the prospects for the LD field in Spain are excellent, given the knowledge and experience provided by over forty years of international research in this area (Kirk, 1963).

Specifically, in this article we analyze LD-related changes introduced by the LOE, before going on to look at their effective implementation, analysing the measures taken by different Educational Authorities since the passing of the Act. This will enable us to draw some conclusions in relation to future research lines and the development of this field in our country, at both the scientific and educational levels, considering the practical implications for the different professionals in the school context: psychologists, counsellors, teachers, and so on.

#### LEARNING DISABILITIES IN THE 2006 EDUCATION ACT

In Section II of the LOE, on students with specific support needs, it is significant that there is no paragraph dealing specifically with students with LD. As far as the principles most relevant to students with LD are concerned, the Act stipulates that: a) there will be support for early identification of special educational needs, through procedures and resources specified by the different Educational Authorities, with two diagnostic assessments of basic competences, at the end of the fourth year of Primary Education, and at the end of the second year of Secondary Education; and b) comprehensive attention to students with specific need of educational support shall begin from the moment such need is identified, and shall be governed by the principles of normalization and inclusion. In this regard, the treatment resources identified include: a) qualified teaching staff and other professionals, with ongoing training programmes related to the treatment of students with specific need for support; b) the means and materials necessary in each case; c) school organization measures referring to the adaptations and diversification of the curriculum necessary for all students to achieve the objectives set; d) the educational reinforcement measures to be taken when a student shows inadequate progress, and which will be adopted at any point in the school year as soon as difficulties are detected, aimed at guaranteeing the acquisition of the

**FIGURE 1**  
**ARTICLE 71.2 OF CHAPTER I OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC**  
**NEED OF SUPPORT, SECTION II OF EQUITY IN**  
**EDUCATION, LOE**

2. It is the responsibility of Education Authorities to guarantee the resources necessary for students requiring special educational attention due to special educational needs, specific learning disabilities (...) to be able to attain the maximum possible development of their personal abilities, and in any case to achieve the goals of a general nature set for all students.



learning essential for continuing the educational process.

Given that this section does not establish more specific and explicit guidelines on LDs, on their assessment and diagnosis, or on specific organizational and curricular resources for LD-related prevention and intervention, it seems appropriate to undertake a thorough review of this legislation, of its general principles and of its basic programme of educational organization and structure throughout the different stages of compulsory education.

First of all, among the principles and purposes of education related to the field of LD is the assumption of equity in education, which guarantees equality of opportunity, educational inclusiveness and non-discrimination, acting as a compensating element for personal, cultural, economic and social inequalities, with special attention to those deriving from disability. Also positive is the assumption of attention to diversity as a fundamental principle in all basic education, with a view to providing all students with an education appropriate for their characteristics and needs, adopting all the pertinent organizational and curricular measures, which will be analyzed presently. Thus, it is affirmed that basic teaching in compulsory education will be adapted to students with specific needs for educational support, in order to guarantee their access, continuity and progression within the educational system.

Considering the issue by educational stages, in Primary Education special emphasis is placed on attention to student diversity, on individualized attention, on the prevention of LDs and on the implementation of reinforcement mechanisms as soon as these difficulties are detected. With regard to such detection of learning problems, the legislation stipulates that a diagnostic assessment shall take place at the end of the fourth year of Primary Education covering all the basic competences acquired by the students, which will permit the detection of specific LDs. However, postponing the moment of diagnosis until the age of nine or ten means missing the possibility of early identification and intervention, with negative implications for the treatment and even the prevention of LD. A more appropriate approach would have been to bring this assessment forward or to use more preventive strategies, such as those based on the response to validated treatment protocols, in line with the "response to intervention" criterion currently employed in the USA (Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs, & Barnes, 2007). Even so, this type of approach is also possible within the legal framework set out in the LOE, which makes specific provision within

Infant Education for promoting a first approach to reading, writing and basic numeracy.

As regards compulsory Secondary Education (in Spain, *Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*, ESO), its principles include organization according to the foundations of a common education and attention to student diversity. As far as organizational and curricular measures for attention to diversity are concerned, responsibility for their regulation and implementation corresponds to educational authorities, and ultimately to schools themselves, allowing some room for autonomy and flexible organization within the general guidelines. However, among the measures of this kind specifically mentioned are: a) adaptations of the curriculum; b) grouping of subjects in broad categories; c) flexible grouping of students; d) splitting up of groups; e) offer of optional subjects; f) programmes for the reinforcement of basic abilities; g) curricular diversification programmes; and h) personalized treatment programmes for students with specific need of educational support, including those with LD – the first time they are explicitly recognized in this regard. Finally, Secondary Education also includes an assessment for the diagnosis of the basic competences acquired by students, taken at the end of the second year, of a formative nature and which serves as a guide to the most appropriate educational response for each diagnosis, since it is at this point that students can be placed on a curricular diversification programme (from the third year). The objective of such programmes is to enable students to achieve the general objectives of this educational stage through a specific methodology, with content organization, practical activities and in some cases material that differ from those on the general curriculum.

Another provision of the LOE, especially relevant for the field of LD, concerns the specification of the basic competences to be worked upon in Primary Education and attained in ESO; these are regulated in accordance with the Royal Decrees on minimum teaching requirements. The general diagnostic assessments of the basic competences attained by students can serve as a frame of reference for the diagnosis of LD, as long as an agreed basic level to be reached by all students at a particular point is established for each of the competences related to instrumental areas. In this way, these assessments would constitute the basic reference point in the early detection of students with specific learning difficulties who require special educational attention.



In this normative framework, eight basic competences are identified, even if only two are wholly related to LD: *competence in linguistic communication* and *mathematical competence*. In both cases, instrumental learning is identified in relation to content and assessment criteria of an essential nature, and which should therefore form the basis for decisions related to the teaching and learning process.

Competence in linguistic communication refers to the use of language as an instrument of oral and written communication, of the representation, interpretation and understanding of reality, of the construction and expression of knowledge and of the organization and self-regulation of thought, emotions and behaviour. In summary, *the development of competence in linguistic communication at the end of compulsory education entails mastery of oral and written language in multiple contexts and the functional use of at least one foreign language.*

For its part, mathematical competence refers to the ability to use and relate numbers, to carry out basic operations, and to use symbols, forms of expression and mathematical reasoning, both for the production and interpretation of different types of information and for broadening one's knowledge about quantitative and spatial aspects of reality, as well as for resolving problems related to everyday life and the world of work. Thus, the basic level to be reached by all students by the end of compulsory education in the development of mathematical competence involves *the spontaneous use of mathematical elements and reasoning for interpreting and producing information, for resolving problems arising from everyday situations and for making decisions. In sum, it means applying those skills and approaches that permit one to reason mathematically, understand mathematical argumentation and communicate in mathematical language, using the appropriate tools and integrating mathematical knowledge with knowledge of other types so as to better respond to everyday life situations of different levels of complexity.*

Obviously, these are merely general outlines: responsibility for the operationalization necessary for diagnostic assessment lies with the corresponding educational authorities. In this regard, more precise criteria for rating students' progress in the acquisition of these competences can be established through analysis of the general assessment guidelines set down for each stage

or year in primary and secondary education, and in the specific areas of language and literature and mathematics; however, closer inspection of these guidelines reveals that they are also quite broad in scope, and not particularly operational as referents for the diagnosis of possible LDs.

Having analyzed the basic and educational principles established by the LOE in relation to students with LD, it is interesting to consider the developments and actual progress in the field of LD since the passing of the legislation three years ago. To this end we shall analyze the measures taken by the different educational authorities within the scope of their jurisdiction.

### **ACTION BY EDUCATIONAL AUTHORITIES ON THE PRINCIPLES SET OUT IN THE LOE REFERRING TO THE FIELD OF LEARNING DISABILITIES**

In accordance with the administrative structure of the Spanish education system, it is the Education Authorities that are responsible for translating the legal principles enshrined in the LOE into policy. Therefore, we carried out a review of the information on the official websites of the Regional Governments (*gobiernos autonómicos*) as made available by the Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport. Our initial search of these websites involved the exhaustive analysis of section headings specifically referring to attention to diversity, in its different forms and under the different nomenclatures used in each Region. Given the limitation that these education websites had sometimes not yet been updated with regard to measures introduced in the Region, the research was complemented by parallel searches in engines such as Google. Having entered as a keyword "learning disabilities" or "specific learning disabilities" together with the name of each Region, we analyzed all the resulting entries related to some official body. In this regard, useful sources of up-to-the-minute information on the implementation of LD-related measures were the websites of the different associations of students with learning disabilities throughout the country, all of which were consulted (see Table 1). These associations have taken on the responsibility of negotiating – from their perspective as exceptionally well-informed agents – with regional education departments about the best way of putting the legislation into practice. Furthermore, we analyzed initiatives (programmes, policy measures, financial support, etc.) on the part of the Ministry itself for encouraging and helping the Regions to bring their



situation into line with the new legal guidelines, through a review of the ministerial website. A recent example of such initiatives would be the Resolution of 22nd March 2010 from the office of the Secretary of State for Education and Vocational Training, announcing the availability of funding for interventions addressing attention to students with specific need of educational support and the compensation of inequalities in education.

As regards the search period, it lasted from the passing of the LOE, in 2006, until January 2009, enabling us to scrutinize the activity of the regional education authorities over the course of the 32 months following the legal recognition of LDs. However, this search period was complemented by further reviews of some of the legislative measures taken by the Ministry of Education in relation to this area more recently, in 2010, an example being Order EDU/849/2010, for regulating the education of students with need of support and educational guidance services under that ministry’s jurisdiction.

All the documentation found in the search was analyzed in relation to two core categories: legislative measures, which included aspects such as the treatment of LDs in schools, detection-prevention and principles of educational response (see Table 2); and measures and resources related to the training of professionals and families.

As regards the first analytic dimension, referring to the legislative measures taken in relation to LDs in the different Regions, it should be stressed that although there is general recognition of students with LDs as being in need of specific educational support, the regulations in most regional authorities are quite unclear with regard to specific measures for the prevention of LDs and their detection and treatment. Given this variation in the extent to which curricula are specified, it is unsurprising that the authorities delegate to schools themselves the responsibility for regulating and implementing specific actions of attention and response to diversity, and in turn to the needs of students with LDs, as is reflected in the legal documents of eight regional administrations. In these it is stated, for example, that schools shall be authorized to implement measures for personalized attention to students with LDs, and that they should put into practice the appropriate reinforcement mechanisms, both organizational and curricular, as soon as LDs are detected, decisions about the application of such measures resting with the teaching staff.

Furthermore, and once again in line with the general guidelines set down in the LOE, all the regional authorities refer to different organizational and curricular measures addressing academic problems in relation to students with LDs, such as: the drawing-up of support and remedial plans, reinforcement programmes, individualized work schedules, programmes for extra work on instrumental or specific areas of failed subjects, and educational innovation projects for the adoption of special measures for attention to students. At the same time, they make provision for modifying the organization and placement of students, permitting schools to form flexible and subdivided groups and to offer help both inside and outside the normal classroom. But in addition to this they offer the possibility of adapting the curriculum, or access to it, for students with LDs, and in the case of Secondary Education, they propose curricular diversification programmes. On a negative note, however, we should mention the significance of the fact that, despite the emphasis in the LOE on the prevention and early detection of LDs, this approach is only referred to in thirteen Regions, leaving students in the other four at a disadvantage.

**TABLE 1  
LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATIONS  
IN SPAIN**

SCOPE	NAME OF ASSOCIATION
<i>Nationwide</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Federación española de dislexia y otra dificultades específicas de aprendizaje (FEDIS)</li> <li>✓ Dislexia sin Barreras</li> <li>✓ Asociación Nacional para las Deficiencias de Aprendizaje y su Rehabilitación (ANDAR)</li> <li>✓ Asociación Española de la Educación Especial (AEDES)</li> <li>✓ Unidad especializada en trastornos de aprendizaje</li> <li>✓ Hospital Sant Joan de Déu (UTAE)</li> <li>✓ Asociación dislexia y familia (DISFAM)</li> </ul>
<i>Regional</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Regional Dislexia Canarias y otras dificultades de aprendizaje (DISLECAN)</li> <li>✓ Asociación catalana de dislexia y otras dificultades específicas (ACD)</li> <li>✓ Asociación disléxicos de Murcia (ADIXMUR)</li> <li>✓ Asociación Valenciana para la Dislexia y otros problemas de aprendizaje (AVADIS)</li> <li>✓ Asociación Gallega de Educación, Desarrollo y Diversidad (AGAED)</li> <li>✓ Fundación pedagógica el BROT.</li> <li>✓ Asociación para la dislexia y problemas de aprendizaje de Asturias (ADISPA)</li> <li>✓ Asociación Cántabra de dislexia (ACANDIS)</li> <li>✓ Asociación de niños disléxicos y otras dificultades de Aprendizaje de Reus (Tarragona)</li> <li>✓ Asociación gallega de Dislexia (AGADIS).</li> <li>✓ Asociación Andaluza Dislexia en Positivo (ASANDIS)</li> <li>✓ Asociación Dislexia Bizkaia (DISLEBI)</li> <li>✓ Asociación Dislexia Jaén y otras Dificultades de Aprendizaje (ASDIJA)</li> <li>✓ Superar la dislexia (León)</li> </ul>



**TABLE 2**  
**SUMMARY OF THE LEGISLATIVE MEASURES IMPLEMENTED BY REGIONAL AUTHORITIES FOR THE RECOGNITION AND TREATMENT OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES AFTER THE PASSING OF THE 2006 EDUCATION ACT (LOE)**

Legislative measures		
Autonomous Region	Detection-Prevention	Educational response
<b>Andalucía</b>	<p>Emphasis on the detection of LDs as soon as they occur, establishing the mechanisms that permit them to be treated and overcome.</p> <p>The aim of guidance and counselling is to carry out personalized monitoring of students' learning process, with special emphasis on the prevention and early detection of LDs.</p>	<p>Programming of activities for the reinforcement and support of competences related to linguistic communication and mathematical reasoning, aimed at students with LDs.</p> <p>Measures for personalized attention to students with LDs: support and remedial plans, flexible groups and subdivision of groups.</p> <p>Curricular Diversification Programmes for LD students.</p> <p>Programmes for the reinforcement of basic instrumental areas aimed at students with difficulties.</p>
<b>Aragón</b>	<p>The educational authority shall make provision for the procedures and resources necessary for the early identification of LDs.</p> <p>Educational attention and support measures required by students with specific learning disabilities shall begin from the moment difficulties are identified and shall be regulated by the principles of normalization and inclusion.</p>	<p>Programmes facilitating the thematic organization of material, aimed at LD students.</p> <p>Curricular Diversification Programmes for students with LDs; support for these students inside and outside the classroom.</p>
<b>Asturias</b>	<p>At the beginning of compulsory secondary education, teachers will carry out an initial assessment to identify and address LDs.</p> <p>As soon as LDs are detected, the school must implement reinforcement measures.</p>	<p>When the progress of a student is inadequate, due to LD, measures will be implemented, both organizational and curricular: support in ordinary groups, flexible groupings and adaptation of the curriculum.</p> <p>Programme for the reinforcement of failed subjects, taking into account the LDs that led to failure.</p> <p>Curricular Diversification Programmes for students with generalized LDs.</p>
<b>Baleares</b>	<p>Pedagogical principles in Primary and Infant Education: prevention of LDs and initiation of reinforcement mechanisms as soon as they are detected.</p>	<p>Individual curricular adaptations for students with specific learning disabilities.</p> <p>Protocol for attention to students in need of support in tests for access to university.</p> <p>The regional government and the University of the Balearic Islands are designing a test to improve the diagnosis of dyslexia in Baleares.</p> <p>Guidance for schools authorized for training-course selection tests and whose students include some with specific learning disabilities.</p>
<b>Canarias</b>	<p>Use of instruments, strategies and resources for the early identification of students' needs and adaptation of the educational response to them.</p>	<p>Programme for educational attention to students with specific learning disabilities.</p>
<b>Cantabria</b>	<p>Emphasis will be placed in Primary Education on the prevention of LDs</p> <p>Educational guidance units and psychopedagogical teams: promoting actions for the prevention of LD, in conjunction with school teaching staff.</p>	<p>The Educational Dept. shall regulate specific solutions for attention to secondary-school students with specific learning disabilities.</p> <p>Reinforcement mechanisms as soon as LDs are detected.</p>
<b>Castilla y La Mancha</b>	<p>Education authorities have the responsibility to ensure the adequacy of resources for students requiring a different kind of educational attention due to specific learning disabilities.</p>	<p>Individualized work plans for those students requiring special educational attention due to specific learning disabilities.</p> <p>Guide to schooling of students with specific need of educational support, 2009-2010: procedure to be followed (assessment and intervention measures) for the education of students with specific need of educational support. Reference to specific learning disabilities in the introduction, though subsequently there is no description of the proposed treatment procedure.</p>
<b>Castilla y León</b>	<p>Students with specific educational needs. Specific language needs group: dyscalculia, dysorthography and dyslexia.</p>	<p>Educational reinforcement measures for students presenting LDs and who have failed to develop the appropriate work and study habits.</p>



In any case, in the majority of the Regions the potential effect of these measures is as yet somewhat dissipated, and in many cases they are proposed as common alternatives for adapting the teaching-learning process to

the whole spectrum of students with specific need of educational support, rather than exclusively for students with LDs. It is significant, in this regard, that even the legislative specifications of the Education Ministry – as

**TABLA 2 (continuación)**  
**SUMMARY OF THE LEGISLATIVE MEASURES IMPLEMENTED BY REGIONAL AUTHORITIES FOR THE RECOGNITION AND TREATMENT OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES AFTER THE PASSING OF THE 2006 EDUCATION ACT (LOE)**

Legislative measures		
Autonomous Region	Detection-Prevention	Educational response
<b>Cataluña</b>	Appropriate criteria shall be adopted for the detection and prevention of learning disabilities.	
<b>Extremadura</b>	With the aim of responding to the individual characteristics of students and facilitating educational success, there will be an increase in the number of programmes for the early identification of LDs.	Measures for attention to LD: support in ordinary groups, flexible grouping, curricular adaptation and specific reinforcement, remedial work, optional subjects. Educational Reinforcement Programme in Instrumental Areas. Educational Reinforcement Programme during School Timetable. Educational innovation projects to facilitate the adoption of measures for personalized attention to LD students. Curricular Diversification Programmes.
<b>Galicia</b>	Early detection of students requiring different educational attention due to specific learning disabilities.	Educational initiatives for responding to different learning abilities, rhythms and styles.
<b>La Rioja</b>	Emphasis on attention to diversity in students, on the prevention of learning disabilities and on the initiation of reinforcement mechanisms as soon as LDs are detected. The Education Dept. will establish the measures necessary for attending to all students, and in particular to those presenting specific need of educational support.	Programme for curricular adaptation in groups for students with severe learning disabilities. Plan for attention to diversity.
<b>Madrid</b>	The plan for attention to diversity will incorporate measures for the prevention of LDs and their early detection.	Measures for support in ordinary groups, of an organizational and methodological nature, for students with LDs: reinforcement, individual and in ordinary groups, and flexible grouping.
<b>Murcia</b>	Regulation of specific learning disabilities, indicating time of educational response.	Curricular diversification. Specific reinforcement programmes in instrumental areas and Curricular Diversification Programmes.
<b>Navarra</b>	To prevent LDs, acting as soon as they are detected via the reinforcement mechanisms and organizational and curricular measures necessary.	Guidance initiatives to guarantee student monitoring, prevent and detect difficulties and respond to individual needs. Curricular adaptations; School Accompaniment Programme for students with learning difficulties and problems; Secondary Education Reinforcement and Support Programme for LD students.
<b>País Vasco</b>	The Dept. of Education, Universities and Research shall regulate the procedures for prevention, detection and intervention in relation to LDs and for implementing actions to help schools put them into practice. In the Basic Education context, the priorities will be attention to student diversity, the detection and treatment of LDs as soon as they are detected, educational guidance and counselling, and relations with students' families to remove obstacles to learning.	Specific support measures in ordinary groups, flexible grouping, curricular adaptations and specific reinforcement in some areas.
<b>Valencia</b>	Special emphasis will be placed on attention to student diversity, on individualized attention and on the prevention of LDs.	Measures necessary for attention to students, particularly those with specific need of educational support. Reinforcement mechanisms as soon as LDs are detected.



exemplified by the Order (EDU/849/2010) regulating, among other aspects, comprehensive educational attention to students with need of educational support – also lack a specific chapter devoted to students with specific learning difficulties, in contrast to what occurs in the case of other types of educational support needs, such as SEN or intellectual giftedness. At the same time, it is also significant that among the measures for attention to diversity proposed, it is specifically those referred to as “ordinary” that are aimed at students with LDs, addressing aspects such as the prevention and detection of LDs, the application of reinforcement and support mechanisms, etc.; as against the category of measures referred to as “extraordinary” aimed at students with special educational needs or high intellectual ability. This may be reflecting erroneous conceptions of LD, found also in previous legislation, which appear to establish a continuum of specific needs for educational support, whereby needs such as those derived from the presence of LDs would demand an “ordinary” type of attention, whilst other needs, such as SEN derived from sensory, motor, mental or physical deficits, or due to high ability, would demand other measures of attention to diversity deemed “extraordinary”. This, in turn, may imply the assumption of greater necessity, impact or transience in some cases than in others.

However, in contrast to such shortcomings, we should highlight, on the positive side, the initiative of two Regions – the Balearic Islands (*Baleares*) and the Canaries (*Canarias*) – that have proposed specific action plans for the appropriate treatment of LDs, while another Region, the Basque Country (*País Vasco*), has reviewed the appropriateness of tests for LD students’ access to university.

In Canarias, the regional government has supported the development of the *Programme for educational attention to students with specific learning disabilities*, whose main objectives can be summarized as follows: i) to respond to the requirements of the LOE on incorporating learning difficulties as the object of early detection, identification and intervention, ii) to meet the demands of families for the improvement of educational attention to students with specific learning disabilities, iii) to improve the training and effectiveness of teaching staff, of guidance teams and of school inspection services, iv) to employ instruments, strategies and resources for early detection and for adapting the educational response to the needs of these students, v) to channel all research and intervention

programmes on the basis of the principles and guidelines set down by the educational authority, and finally, vi) to introduce specific regulations on the early detection and identification of these students and intervention with them. The programme also provides useful guidance in relation to the assessment and identification of LDs and to intervention with these students, and offers material and activities of great utility for professionals, as well as counselling for families and for the students themselves.

Baleares has also introduced specific measures for students with LDs. This regional authority has made some minor adaptations to the curriculum which help students attain the minimum requirements of their school year. At the same time, advice is provided to teachers about the need to adapt the quantity and form of expression of learning and assessment activities, making them easier to understand, and about making task deadlines more flexible and diversifying the types of assessment used with these students. There are also proposals for applying these measures to tests which give access to higher education (both academic and vocational).

But several other Spanish regional authorities have also incorporated initiatives in this direction in their new legal guidelines. Among these is the proposal in Murcia for the creation of a committee of experts from the fields of psychology, pedagogy, psycholinguistics, hearing and language, charged with carrying out a nationwide study to identify dyslexic students in school, analyze their situation and make proposals for intervention at the school and community levels. In Aragon, the Aragonese Dyslexia Association has demanded special attention to children with LDs, supported by a charter of rights drawn up by these students and a draft action protocol, while the dyslexia association in Asturias has requested that the education system in their Region make the adaptations necessary for the prevention of LD problems. In Baleares, apart from measures already adopted, there is a request for the development of a protocol enabling paediatric services to diagnose dyslexia more swiftly, as well as a demand for improvements in the relevant training of education professionals. For its part, the Cantabrian dyslexia association, ACANDIS, has called for adaptations related to two main aspects: on the one hand, the assessment of students with LDs; and on the other, the methods recommended for use by teaching staff. In Catalonia, various pressure groups and associations have demanded that future legislation for this Region cover all specific LDs. As a final example, the dyslexia association





of Valencia, AVADIS, proposes a specific action protocol in relation to LDs. As occurred in the USA, the future development of the LD field in our country is closely linked to the social pressure brought to bear by the associations (Hallahan & Mock, 2003; Lerner & Kline, 2006).

As regards the second analytic dimension, referring to the training of the different professionals working in the educational context with students with LDs, our review revealed that, up to now, scarce resources have been made available to guide or support such professionals in providing adequate attention to these students. Nevertheless, there is a small body of literature on the subject (see Rodríguez, 2004; Luque & Rodríguez, 2006; Romero & Lavigne, 2005; 2006; Román, 2008; Vila & Neus, 2008), and some training activities have been organized, such as courses, conferences and workshops. Even so, activities and materials provided by the Regions for the training of teaching staff in relation to attention to students with LDs (except in the case of Canarias) are still thin on the ground and in need of development – and support should come not only from the LD associations, where a good deal of positive work is being done, but also from the educational authorities themselves, if indeed there is a desire to produce highly competent professionals in the area of attention to students with LDs.

#### **THE FUTURE OF LEARNING DISABILITIES IN SPAIN: EDUCATIONAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

From the analysis at a normative level, some basic conclusions emerge about the educational and practical implications of the decisions taken, and therefore about the foreseeable future of the LD field in our country. First, analysis of the LOE legislation clearly reveals the importance given to the instrumental areas of reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematical reasoning, and especially reading, as a cross-over subject. Second, significant among the pedagogical principles in Primary Education is the prevention of LDs and the initiation of reinforcement mechanisms as soon as they are detected. Also significant is the emphasis on attention to diversity throughout the different stages of compulsory secondary education. Third, a relevant step forward is the inclusion of basic competences as referents for the diagnostic assessment of the learning and basic abilities students should attain, and the specific inclusion of competence in linguistic communication and mathematical competence; this aspect may prove key for the detection and diagnosis of specific learning disabilities in students.

However, in relation to these aspects, some potential limitations should be pointed out. On the one hand, the description of the basic competences is too general and of scant operational value, making it difficult to identify the criteria on which assessment is based, and hence to determine the appropriate level of acquisition at the assessment points (at the end of the fourth year of Primary Education and of the second year of secondary school). This is a serious shortcoming in relation to the assessment or diagnosis of LDs. Furthermore, there are no clear definitions or guidelines to follow with regard to methodological principles for each educational stage that facilitate the attainment or development of basic competences, and nor is much detail provided on the lines to follow in the area of attention to students with LDs.

Such shortcomings should be addressed by the Education Authorities of the different Autonomous Regions. But with the exception of some Regions which have indeed used their powers to implement specific measures in the field of LD, mainly Canarias and Baleares, the remainder, while in principle assimilating the guidelines of the LOE, have failed –as we saw – to put them into practice. In some cases they have even omitted to take into account basic and essential aspects, such as the principle of prevention and early detection of LDs. Nevertheless, this situation should not give too much cause for concern, since much of the legislation analyzed is still at the draft or proposal stage, so that we can expect changes to be made in due course.

Even so, and worryingly, the lack of a more thorough application of certain measures by Educational Authorities in the different Regions clearly has the potential to bring about a chaotic situation such as that of the USA, where there is inconsistency among the different states (Reschly & Hosp, 2004). This might occur in the case of some Autonomous Regions legislating in accordance with the central government guidelines for the prevention and diagnosis of LDs and the appropriate treatment or educational response while others continue to lag behind, maintaining the traditional conceptualization of this diagnostic category as referring to those SENs of a more transitory nature, thus requiring less attention and specialized educational response. This would clearly be an unsatisfactory state of affairs.

In this regard, and following the general lines of the LOE, the measures to be implemented in relation to the field of LD would include the following. First, in accordance with an emphasis on the prevention and early detection of LDs, it is



recommended to employ *response to intervention* as the criterion on which to base educational decisions in the field of LD (Deshler et al., 2005; Mellard, Byrd, Johnson, Tollefson, & Boesche, 2004; Vellutino, Scanlon, Small, & Fanuele, 2006); this is indeed the criterion currently in use internationally (IDEA, 2004; OSERS, 2006). This is in support, in general, of the idea that LDs cannot be diagnosed without evidence that the student has received effective teaching, also on the basis of scientific evidence. The response to intervention criterion involves: a) evidence that the student has received specific instruction in relation to the particular academic area, and, b) regular monitoring of responses to teaching that may indicate LD. A diagnosis of LDs or their absence will be based on these two aspects. In such a scenario, emphasis falls on the important role of teaching in the prevention of LDs, and also for their identification, as against previous diagnostic criteria which have received criticism, such as IQ-discrepancy (Siegel, 2003).

Second, the use of this criterion requires the design and validation not only of assessment instruments but also of procedures for the early detection and identification of LDs, as well as intervention programmes addressing the whole range of LDs, to be applied in schools by the various relevant professionals. It should be borne in mind in this regard that such educational measures in response to LDs must be based on solid scientific foundations, at both the theoretical and empirical levels (Gersten, 2001; 2005; Lyon, 2005), provided by cognitive psychology and the information processing perspective. Numerous recent studies focus on the identification of key cognitive processes in the explanation of academic learning difficulties with reading, writing and mathematics, as shown in the review of the field by Fletcher and cols. (2007). The assumption, following this cognitive perspective, is that training in such key cognitive processes, as they relate to the specific domain of learning and contextualized in the school setting, has a positive effect on academic performance in the specific academic area; this hypothesis has indeed been widely corroborated in research on LD intervention (Fletcher et al., 2007; Fletcher, Morris, & Lyon, 2003).

On the basis of these requirements, a key aspect for optimum development in the LD field would seem to be the setting up of multi-professional teams from the educational, university and research contexts, in line with the proposals in the Basque Country or Murcia, to channel decisions on the relevant educational measures. It is a fact

that on university courses and in research in Spain, the restrictive conception of LDs has been the norm for several years (García, Fidalgo, & Arias, 2006), having been developed at the empirical and applied levels, as corroborated through the content analysis of scientific research in the psychology of education and development (García, Caso, Fidalgo, & Arias, 2005). The implementation of measures to the field of LD should not overlook the body of scientific knowledge amassed over all these years in our country.

At the same time, there is an obvious need for interdisciplinary teams at the applied level in the school context, founded on collaboration between teaching staff and professionals from the different types of educational guidance services, working effectively (Gil, Rico, & Sánchez, 2008) in response to demands related to the prevention and detection of LDs and intervention with those affected. This of course requires high levels of competence in the professionals involved, with ongoing training programmes in the field of LDs in order to ensure its optimum development. Indeed, among the legally-recognized functions of educational guidance services (Farrel, 2009) are those of support and consultancy for the educational community in matters of the prevention and detection of LDs, the planning, development and assessment of measures for attention to LD students, and coordination of the design, adaptation and distribution of materials and instruments for assessment and intervention with students in need of educational support. All of this is reflected in the legislative measures from the Ministry of Education, as far as the area of its jurisdiction is concerned. Consequently, educational guidance services will clearly play a key role in the present and foreseeable future of LDs in our country – even more so bearing in mind that in many cases the legislation devolves to schools themselves the responsibility for adequate attention to these students, even if it is made explicit that the work of adaptation in schools will be carried out with the help of the education authorities. Therefore, the training of teachers and other educational professionals is essential for the correct implementation of measures addressing the needs of students with LD, as one of the professional challenges in the field of educational psychology.

In sum, the acknowledgement at a legislative level by the educational administration of the category of specific learning difficulties already represents a great step forward in our country. Nevertheless, it will be necessary to ensure the introduction of further legislation to follow



this up, based solidly on the latest theoretical and empirical developments in the LD field. In the future, research will take on substantial importance, not only as regards the understanding of LDs, but also for the rigorous empirical validation of effective intervention strategies and models providing appropriate responses to the needs arising from them, at both the preventive and treatment levels. This emphasis on teaching research stems from the assumption in the LD field of a diagnostic model based on students' response to intervention (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003), which demands curriculum-based measures that provide information on such responses (Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2005), as well as measures assessing the quality of the teaching approach (Evans & Walberg, 2004); and all of this taking into account the heterogeneity of students with LDs and the need for effective intervention models adapted to such heterogeneity.

Finally, we should stress that it must be scientific research that underpins practical, educational, legislative and training-related decisions in the field of LDs, with a view to the optimum development of students with these disabilities, building on this first encouraging step toward the recognition, specification and appropriate educational treatment of this group of students in Spain.

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