Dyslexia and inclusion – moving though the phases of education and lifespan

Sheena Bell
Senior Lecturer SEN and Inclusion
The University of Northampton
• How can we best resource and encourage support which would enable people with dyslexia to reach their potential both within the education system and beyond?
Definitions

• ‘Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia usually experience difficulties with other language skills such as spelling, writing, and pronouncing words.’ (International Dyslexia Association 2013).
And more definitions....

• Continuing debate between researchers, and indeed educational practitioners, about the exact definition of dyslexia, and its causes and treatment (Tunmer and Greaney 2010 May/June, Vellutino et al. 2004)

• Existence of this discourse can be construed as unhelpful when communicating a clear picture for non-specialists, including educators and employers
Underlying difficulties include:

- Phonological processing (Snowling 2000, 2013)
- Visual processing (Stein 2001)
- Memory difficulties (Mcloughlin 1998)
Current understanding of dyslexia

• Increasing evidence from neurobiology for genetically linked brain differences (Peterson & Pennington 2012)
• ‘Brain science could transform special needs education by enabling us to design programmes that optimise learning for people of all needs and all ages’ (Frith 2005 p290)
• Pattern of difficulties (Miles, 1993, Rose, 2009)
• Non-literacy tasks such as organisation, short-term memory and word recall
• Persistence of these underlying difficulties and behaviours into adulthood (Rose 2009, Reid and Kirk 2001, Bartlett and Moody 2000) which makes the dimension of time highly important

• Dyslexic barriers can be mitigated by support, strategies and reasonable adjustments (Moore et al. 2011)
“Clever is when you come to a brick wall and you have got to get over it without a ladder”
Gavin: Adult with dyslexia (Bell, 2010)
Inclusion and dyslexia

• Education has a key role to play in social inclusion for people with dyslexia, but on a number of levels, and not simply in the context of childhood/youth and school.

• The effects of dyslexia are multi-dimensional and related to lifespans and changing contexts.
The Seven Ages of Man

‘And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.’ Shakespeare, As You Like It Act 2 Scene 7.
Dyslexia in current inclusive practice

• 21st century - formal education has taken a forefront for the first 20-25 years of life
• Complex system of qualifications is in place, relying heavily on the skills of reading and writing
• Dyslexia can have critical, negative consequences on development of literacy and other competences
• Social and emotional effects can be lifelong
Dimensions of dyslexia

- Ongoing underlying difficulties
- Appropriate skills and strategies
- Appropriate teaching and/or support
- Life phase of individual
- Well-being and self esteem
- Educational and workplace demands
A model to include time

• Impossible to represent
• Web of dynamic structures
• Dyslexia is not a static concept
Dyslexia and well-being

- Dyslexia - well-being throughout the lifespan
- Reading and spelling difficulties (etc) may persist

“I had a good think about business and finance and thinking “I still can’t spell very well, so if I need to speak to people over the phone and write things down”......it frightened me. It put me off.

Adult with dyslexia
Well-being for life

- Effects of earlier educational experiences continue to have an influence on adults with dyslexia

“I am a very negative person.... I had it drummed into me at school, you are thick and you are lazy and that is exactly the way I feel.” Gavin
Dyslexia and inclusion

• Labels such as dyslexia used to facilitate provision of support and special considerations for exams (Florian et al. 2006, Elliott 2005)

• Persistence of these underlying difficulties and behaviours into adulthood (Rose 2009, Reid & Kirk 2001, Bartlett & Moody 2000)

• So dimension of time highly important.
Structures in schools

• Ideally all schools should have a specialist teachers or dyslexia (Rose 2009)
• All teachers are considered to be teachers of SEN- the inclusive classroom
• Current government policy discourages labelling of SEN and encourages good quality teaching
• But does this mean that focussed individual support is not available?
• Early intervention is important and effective (Hartas 2005)
• Individualised teaching with a staged process of intervention
• Access to specialist teachers
• ‘Should good inclusive practice fall short of meeting the child’s needs there is a case for ‘well-balanced and individualized remedial intervention that would build upon the child’s existing knowledge base. The evidence suggests that a child’s response to this type of intervention would provide guidance as to his or her long-term instructional needs, regardless of the origin of his or her reading difficulties’ (Vellutino et al. 2004 p31)
Commitment to development

Current government commitment to ‘support teachers in giving every child the support they need to succeed – focusing on achievement not labels, funding additional training for teachers and building expertise by collaboration between schools.’ Introduction to Green Paper (DfE 2011)
Teaching and support

• Which contexts necessitate extra support?
• What sort of support is needed?
• Adult/community education classes:

“In those classes we would do things that would help us move on in life, get a better job, all of us. I bet, if you look back all of us have improved our jobs then. It is support, and you know it is there... your job is always evolving; everything you do in life evolves, doesn’t it?” Adult with dyslexia
What sort of support for adults?

• Needs are not always met by the support proposed in community education classes (Ade-Ojo 2012)

• Models of support and training for adults with literacy difficulties, many of whom are likely to have dyslexia, should be reframed and restructured in the light of a social inclusion agenda rather than one which is linked to narrow, measurable attainment in literacy skills (Bell 2011, Hearnden 2009)
Education

• Education has a key role to play in social inclusion for people with dyslexia, but on a number of levels

• Social model – education is not just to enable people with dyslexia to adapt to requirements of the institution

• Crucial that other members of society are also aware of the nature of dyslexia
The role of the employer: Who needs educating?

“There really isn’t any awareness. The HR [human resources] department need to understand it.” Adrian

Susan talks about employers: “It is sometimes very hard to get them to understand why you can’t do it. That is quite a problem.”
Education and training about dyslexia

Response to individual needs

The nature of the dyslexic continuum

Dyslexia as a barrier to social inclusion

The social model of disability

People with dyslexia

Politicians and policy makers

Teachers and education professionals

Employers and colleagues

Other members of the population

SOCIAL INCLUSION
Education - key topics

- Nature of dyslexia
- Skills and strategies
- Peer support
- Inclusive policies and protocols
- Training of supporters and teachers
- Legislation and rights
- Nature of dyslexia
Towards Inclusive Learning Environments (TILE) : The Roadmap for the Inclusion of Students with Special Educational needs in VET

www.tileinvet.net
The Roadmap

- Adopts ‘a far broader notions of ‘support’ as all activities which increase the capacity of a school to respond to student diversity’ (Booth & Ainscow, 2002)
- Uses the social model of disability, and so looks at the institution rather than the individual
- Can be adapted by end users for any purpose – except as an inspection tool!
• Dyslexia is a multi–dimensional continuum, so transitions and life paths for people with dyslexia are often difficult due to the interaction of impairment and social structures

• Identification of dyslexia is important at whatever life stage, but is not a simple matter of diagnosis and cure. Changing needs in changing contexts require a variety of supports and interventions which require changes in the wider attitudes in society and institutions rather than individual adjustments

• Dyslexia support or teaching by professionals should not be considered simply in terms of measurable outcomes concerning literacy acquisition: although dyslexia may have a direct effect on educational achievement, it also has long-term effects on well-being and opportunities for the person with dyslexia in their own context and in relation to their own goals and ambitions
• Teachers, specialist teachers and support staff need clear, unbiased information to enable them to make decisions in an increasingly complex educational market place

• Need, at all levels, for information regarding the underlying difficulties of dyslexia to be understood - implications for initial teacher training, professional development and the training and development of occupational and workplace professionals

• Adults with dyslexia, including those in teaching roles, have a significant contribution to make in terms of creating inclusive environments, and a shared dyslexic identity can contribute to this.
Some questions to ask ourselves:

- What are the *lifelong* effects of dyslexia in various contexts?
- How does the concept of inclusion transfer into the workplace?
- How can students with dyslexia and other SEN be best supported in their transition to employment?
Thank you for listening

WE ARE NORTHAMPTON.AC.UK

sheena.bell@northampton.ac.uk
• MCLOUGHLIN, D et al 1998 *The Adult Dyslexia: Intervention and Outcomes* Whurr


