AN EVALUATION OF A BOOKLET OF IDEAS TO SUPPORT TEACHERS IN THINKING ABOUT HOW TO INCREASE THE INDEPENDENCE OF DYSLEXIC CHILDREN.

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Abstract

Six primary school teachers and two secondary school teachers completed a questionnaire asking them to define dyslexia and to rate their confidence levels in supporting dyslexic pupils. Classroom observations were made in the primary classrooms to look at the strategies already used by teachers and teachers were able to comment on the strategies that they found useful. A booklet of ideas was provided and five of the primary school teachers completed a second questionnaire to evaluate its usefulness in guiding their classroom practice. A follow-up observation was made in two classrooms to compare the strategies being used. Teachers were found to define dyslexia using constructs that were different to those they used when considering pupils with reading or spelling difficulties. The booklet was found to lead to a significant increase in confidence amongst teachers (p=0.043) and to an increase in the number of strategies reported to being used. Observations revealed an increase in strategies used by teachers and an increase in pupil on-task behaviour in the two classes observed.

Introduction

Rationale

Dyslexia is a widely used term that conjures up many meanings for those who use it. At one level it seems like a diagnostic term, at another it is a political term – it all depends on who is using it and for what purpose. Even within the discipline of psychology, dyslexia is used to mean slightly different things and as such should be seen as an evolving concept. It is not surprising, therefore, that the term dyslexia evokes some anxiety and uncertainty for some teachers who hear it being used to describe a child with whom they have contact. Anecdotal examples of this from everyday EP practise include:

- One child had made tremendous progress on small step targets for literacy set on his Individual Education Programme (IEP), yet his class teacher continued to comment in a negative way about how he was not able to do any better in class. A very successful remedial programme had led to an increase in literacy skills yet somehow this was not seen as helpful to the teacher. What could be
done to lead to an improvement in performance in class? How could the class
teacher be helped to support the child more effectively in day to day classroom
work?

• Work with a child with reading difficulties had resulted in Statutory
Assessment being undertaken and a Statement of SEN had been produced
offering five hours learning support. A few days later the parent telephoned
me and was quite concerned; her son’s class teacher had made a comment that
she did not know anything about dyslexia. What seemed most perplexing was
that I had observed the child in class and the teacher had a wide range of
strategies that were supportive of him and helped to make the curriculum
accessible and allow him to record his ideas. What could be done to support
teachers and improve their confidence when working with dyslexic children?

This project sets out to explore whether EPs can contribute information and advice to
address questions such as those raised in the two examples given. It is based on the
assumption that learning and teaching are reciprocal and occur as a social interaction
in which the more competent teacher structures the learning environment and tasks of
the less competent pupil. This involves more than *delivering* a curriculum and
requires some thought as to how the teacher can help the learner to *access* the
curriculum. This reframing of teaching and learning leads to seeing children’s
learning difficulties as being teacher’s teaching difficulties. The level of intervention
changes from attempting to change children’s performance through remedial teaching
to trying to change children’s performance through inviting the teacher to engage in a
reflective process of self-change.
The DECP working party (BPS, 1999) defined dyslexia in a way that includes the following elements:

- a lack of accuracy in reading or spelling
- a lack of fluency when reading or spelling
- it is a problem at the ‘word level’ of the National Literacy Strategy
- the problem remains severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities

The definition offered is not universally accepted amongst psychologists with some preferring aspects of other definitions of dyslexia. Some suggest that dyslexia is organic in origin. Many definitions include an unexpected inability of the child to develop literacy skills despite good teaching (e.g. Brooks and Weeks, 2000; suggest that discrepancies should remain a part of assessment packages). Some definitions focus on the linguistic aspects (e.g. Heaton and Winterson, 1996). Others offer a definition that takes into account a core problem and a collection of associated difficulties (e.g. Turner, 1997).

For the purposes of this project, dyslexia will be considered to refer to all of the difficulties commonly associated with poor reading and spelling in the classroom. A tightly defined definition is not offered, but the ways in which teachers construe dyslexia and literacy difficulties is explored. This project will consider the types of difficulties that the target child in each classroom might have and the strategies used. These strategies could just as easily be used with children who might not be described as dyslexic.
Systemic Tensions
It would be reasonable to expect curriculum demands to match the abilities of the children for whom it is designed, ideally allowing the teacher to support learning by providing experiences in the zone of proximal development. In contemporary politics, education and teaching are not thought of in this way. There is the tendency to think of children as equal units to be processed in the factories of our schools to produce an educated ‘product’. The efficiency of the school is measured in terms of how well it can turn out pupils to the required ‘standard’. There is an indication that political agendas are stretching the expectations of pupils beyond the levels achieved for their age. An illustration of this is contained within the standardisation data of the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (Neale, 1997). Teachers were asked to measure reading ability using NARA-II and this was compared to scores on National Curriculum tests of reading ability. Form 2 standardisation data from the Neale Manual to convert raw scores to reading ages and this is shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Curriculum Level</th>
<th>Expected to be achieved in Year:</th>
<th>Age range of children in this year group</th>
<th>Accuracy Reading Age on the Neale</th>
<th>Comprehension Reading Age on the Neale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 to 6</td>
<td>&lt;6:01</td>
<td>&lt;6:01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 (End of KS1)</td>
<td>6 to 7</td>
<td>6:02</td>
<td>&lt;6:01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8 to 9</td>
<td>7:06</td>
<td>7:04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8 to 9</td>
<td>9:07</td>
<td>9:04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6 (End of KS2)</td>
<td>10 to 11</td>
<td>11:10</td>
<td>12:02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12 to 13</td>
<td>&gt;12:0</td>
<td>&gt;12:08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>9 (End of KS3)</td>
<td>13 to 14</td>
<td>&gt;12:0</td>
<td>&gt;12:08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Comparing actual ages with expected reading ages. Data has been converted by the author from pp 65 of the NARA-II Manual for Psychological Services. Raw scores are then converted to Reading Ages using tables on pp 107-109

By comparing the age range of children in each year group with reading ages required to achieve expected SAT levels, it can be seen that the National Curriculum requires children to read at a higher level than would be expected from the chronological age.
of the Neale standardisation sample (instances highlighted in bold). Although, this could be a weakness in construct validity of either the reading test or Standard Attainment Tasks or the construction of the National Curriculum itself, it effectively adds to the pressure on teachers to deliver the curriculum at a higher level and faster pace than is optimal for all children.

A competing political agenda also exists. There is recognition that children are different and that some are in danger of being educationally marginalized. These children need to be ‘included’ in an attempt to prevent the development of a socially disaffected ‘underclass’. This political agenda leads to pressure on the school to include those children who might be seen as being more difficult to educate and who might reduce the measured efficiency of the school. Effectively, this places the school in a double bind – work to ensure that all children reach a set standard (and perhaps an ever increasing standard), while at the same time including those who by definition will not reach the standard. In family systems, the double bind has been found to be associated with high levels of stress and in contributing to mental disorders such as schizophrenia (Minuchin, 1974; Bateson et al, 1956). If the double bind has the same effect on school systems then it would be expected that schools would find the need to include children with special needs as stressful. For some schools this will lead to them becoming dysfunctional as systems, unable to meet all of the demands placed upon them, operating as ‘sick systems’. Some schools prevent this effect by not accepting the double bind. A whole set of strategies exist:

- They refuse to take children with identified special needs. External pressures are brought to bear to address this type of exclusion through Equal Opportunities legislation (e.g. Education Act, 1996 could be changed through
The Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill, 2000) and Ofsted inspections that emphasise the need for inclusion (Ofsted, 2000a).

- They exclude as many as they can through processes such as Statutory Assessment to justify working outside of the classroom in SEN withdrawal groups;
- They exclude the children from school. Children with SEN represent one of the biggest groups permanently or temporarily excluded from school (Audit Commission, 1999).
- They develop systems for ‘passing on’ a child with problems. The class teacher passes the child to the SENCo. The SENCo passes the child to the LEA Special Educational Needs Support Service. They then get passed on to the EP. A Statement is produced and the child is then passed onto the Teaching Assistant. Somehow the teaching assistant deals with the problem child, leaving the class teacher to work with the rest of the class.

There is a tension between LEAs using their resources efficiently to meet the needs of all pupils and the parental pressure to have their children seen as special cases, needing additional and sometimes segregated provision (and often independent of the LEA) obtained through the Statutory Assessment process. The number of children with Statements rose by 35% between 1992 and 1998, accounting for 15% of money spent in schools (Audit Commission, 1998). In Staffordshire, the number of Statements for Specific Learning Difficulties rose by 200% in 5 years and this has been attributed to lobbying by parents and increase use of the Tribunal process (Staffordshire LEA, 2001). At the same time the proportion of children with Statements being educated in their local mainstream schools has risen (Audit
Commission, 1998; NAGSEN, 2000). In Staffordshire, most Statemented dyslexic pupils will attend a mainstream school with a combination of teaching assistant support and provision of sessional teachers (Staffordshire LEA, 2001). There is greater expectation from parents and from schools that more children are entitled to a Statement while at the same time the Audit Commission is calling for a need to reduce Statements. How can LEAs balance these competing needs? Croydon LEA has responded by setting tougher criteria for Statements to reduce entitlement. East Sussex LEA has adopted a more inclusive strategy (NAGSEN, 2000). Swansea LEA has introduced the notion of ‘dyslexia friendly schools’ (British Dyslexia Association, 2000). In all three cases, the result is the same – more pupils with SEN have access to mainstream schools. Consequently, this will mean that mainstream teachers are more likely to have to deal with the problems encountered by dyslexic pupils in their classroom on a day-to-day basis. Lam (2001) expresses the view that in an ever changing education system there is a need for teachers to keep up with learning. This means that with more emphasis on dyslexia there is a need for teachers to have access to information to maintain competence.

**Responding to curricular demands**

NAGSEN (2000) believe that there is a need to empower schools to meet SEN more effectively. When targeted training has been provided at Stage 3 it has been shown to be effective in Swindon LEA, reducing the number of Statements for dyslexia from 14% to 2% (NAGSEN, 2000). On the basis of this it can be argued that all teachers need access to training to improve confidence, skills and knowledge of specific needs to raise attainment for pupils with SEN.
Not surprisingly, teachers often attribute responsibility for lack of learning to factors within the child or outside of school and therefore beyond the teachers responsibility or control. (Bozic and Leadbetter, 1999). In order to deal with this effectively, EPs need to reframe the situation e.g. agreeing with the teacher that this child has a particular problem and therefore needs some special teaching strategies – this brings it back within the teacher’s sphere of operation and control. Several teachers encountered through casework have commented that they do not feel confident when being asked to teach a child who is diagnosed as dyslexic. Yet, when they are observed they already use many strategies that are beneficial. This presents the opportunity for working with the teacher to explore and reflect back what those strategies might be; how can the teacher make small changes to the classroom environment or to the way that they teach in order to improve the learning outcomes for the child. The focus remains on the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning.

The IEP

There is a need to devise individual education plans (IEPs) for pupils with SEN and these should inform daily practise. However, IEPs often exist in a vacuum, perhaps used for remedial teaching but frequently not used to inform classroom activity (Ofsted, 2000b). The purpose of the IEP has been taken to mean the remedial teaching element that is needed to enable the child to perform better (or catch up with peers) in order to access the teacher provided activities for the whole class. The function of using the IEP as a way of noticing what the child has difficulty with and then responding by adapting the learning experiences is somehow lost. This means that IEPs are not integral with general planning and add an extra administrative burden onto teachers (Ofsted, 2000b). Ofsted recommend that IEPs should, “operate within a
culture of effective and detailed educational planning.” However, they also recommend that IEPs consist of a short number of precise targets rather than more generalised strategies to outline support arrangements for children with SEN. This mixed message simply adds to the contradictions of daily practice and is extended in the common myths about the concept of ‘early identification’. This can help bring about beneficial responses to meeting children’s SEN and this is a feature of the proposed new Code of Practice (DfEE, 2000a), however, for some schools this is interpreted as fast tracking to statutory assessment. Perhaps IEPs should be written at different levels, with a section for ‘remedial teaching’ containing SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, resourced and timed) targets and another section for ‘classroom teaching’ to show how the child’s needs can be met through the adoption of strategies to support accessing of text and support recording of ideas.

Reading

Charlton (1992) argues that a child’s ability to access the curriculum is determined largely by their ability to read. He states that the older the child, the more crucial that skill becomes. On face validity this would seem to make sense: older children read harder books. However, this common sense assertion does not hold out to be true when compared with data collected by Sawyer et al (1994). The following table shows the reading ages needed to access texts used in the curriculum:
The range shows the different levels of texts found across the curriculum with higher reading ages tending to be found in humanities texts and the lowest in maths. The graph below shows how the reading ability of different populations of children compares to reading demands:

![Graph showing the gap between reading ability and curriculum texts](image)

**Figure 1:** The gap between reading ability and curriculum texts (Reading age is shown in months to make graphing easier using Excel). The ability scores derived from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centile positions were used to find reading ages using the *BAS-II Achievement Scales Monthly Age Equivalents* tables.
The graph shows that an average reader (50th centile child) would find most texts well within their capability. Data derived from the BAS-II manual (Elliot et al, 1996) has been used to show that even children at the top end of the SEN register would be able to read most texts across the curriculum. Children with Statements of SEN (2nd centile) would have greater difficulty but eventually reach the required reading level to manage to decode the text independently. Contrary to Charlton’s assertion; the gap between ability and curricular demands decreases.

This analysis is restricted in that it only considers the ability of the child to decode particular words that might be found in school texts. It does not take into account the child’s ability to do so fluently or with understanding.

Charlton (1992) does point to a factor that will become increasing important with age: the emotional response of the child. The experience of failure to read leads to demotivation or emotional blocking. This in turn leads to the child avoiding reading and reduces the expenditure of effort and persistence in trying to read. This then leads to a reduction in reading experience and less success compared to peers. The child sees the gap between themselves and their peers and this increases their emotional response further eroding self-esteem. The cycle continues leading to what Stanovich (1986) calls the Matthew effect: good readers get comparatively better while poor readers get comparatively worse. Poor progress for SpLD pupils in secondary schools in reading development has been attributed to poor self-esteem, low self-confidence and experience of failure with literacy in primary schools (Ofsted, 1999). Perhaps this is why working on self-esteem through counselling has been shown to be more
effective in improving reading skills than spending the same time on remedial
teaching (Lawrence, 1985).

**Recording ideas**

Woodward (2000) reports that while standards are generally improving in reading
there is a weakness in the teaching of writing. This agrees with the findings of an
earlier study looking at how children with SpLD are supported in mainstream schools
(Ofsted, 1999). At Key Stage 2 in 1999, 78% of pupils achieved Level 4 for reading
but only 54% achieved the same level for writing. A gender gap for writing exists
throughout the primary phase:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Stage and expected standard</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KS1 standard 2B</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS2 standard 4</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Table 3: Gender difference in writing measured by SATs**

Woodward calls for more time to be spent teaching how to improve writing rather
than allowing pupils to practice writing. He argues that skills taught in literacy lessons
are not transferred into other lessons that require writing. Woodward considers good
practice should include the reinforcement of the development of writing skills
throughout the curriculum. Emphasis is on intervention at the time point of
composition rather than the teacher proof reading and making suggestions afterwards.
Advice given in Woodward’s paper includes encouraging risk taking, particularly in
boys to improve writing skills.
Good Practice
Cooper and McIntyre (1993) found a number of commonalities between pupil perceptions and teacher perceptions of effective classroom practice. Some of these are relevant to supporting pupils with reading and writing difficulties:

- teacher discussions (recapping from previous lessons; story telling; leading class discussions; teacher explanations)
- supported reading (teacher reading out loud; pupils reading out loud)
- use of the blackboard (notes and diagrams as an aide mémoire)
- use of pictures and other visual stimuli
- structure for written work provided by the teacher

Ofsted (1999) surveyed over 50 schools across 10 LEAs to look at how pupils with Statements for SpLD were progressing in reading, spelling and writing. The survey had findings split into the 2 main areas:

1. Remedial education

- progress was better when children’s needs were identified earlier and Statements carried specialist support
- progress was made when additional focussed teaching was provided
- good progress in reading was linked to highly structured programme of teaching often involving a multisensory approach and a recommendation was made that this should be available at lower stages of the CoP. Programmes went beyond merely hearing the child read and included teaching the use of context to aid reading; discussion of the content to aid understanding; systematic teaching of word groups and the sounds of clusters of letters;
• pupils who learnt keyboard skills were more successful at using word processing programs to help with writing

• in secondary schools, children needed help to develop higher order reading skills such as skimming and scanning text to find information quickly, to look for meaning beyond the literal and to develop spelling writing and study skills

• Study skills were taught to some pupils and included:
  o Checking their writing in turn for
    a) spelling errors
    b) grammar
    c) meaning

2. Classroom teaching

• Teaching strategies used with the children who had Statements for SpLD were often used successfully for other children with more general learning difficulties

• Greater numbers of pupils experiencing difficulties in secondary schools compared to primary (13.7% in secondary compared to 4.6% for primary). This was attributed to later diagnosis of the pupil’s difficulties and less awareness amongst teachers in secondary schools regarding the nature of SpLD.

• Transfer of spelling skills occurred when systematic approaches for the tackling of spelling were used in all subjects.

• Independent writing in the secondary schools was more restricted with most pupils being able to complete worksheets that required single word answers or short phrases. Longer pieces of writing were completed more successfully
when writing frames were used to structure the writing. Often pupils were able
to give verbal accounts that could be transcribed by an adult supporting them.
Some pupils were taught specific strategies to help them organise their
thoughts and this was reinforced by support staff.

- Pupil’s responses were found to be better when teachers understood the
difficulties of the children and made allowances for this in the work presented
and the teaching style. Where the quality of teaching was unsatisfactory it was
because the teachers made unrealistic expectations of what the children could
read and would be able to demonstrate their understanding in writing. When
teachers received training and support they were better able to take difficulties
into account and plan appropriately for the pupils.

- When pupils were observed in mainstream classes they did better when the
teachers sought further information from the support teacher providing
withdrawal lesson support. It was found to be helpful to have the support
teacher in some lessons so that they could make suggestions to the class
teacher, providing a better understanding of the child’s difficulties and
improved planning and teaching approaches.

- Pupils in lessons without support did better and managed to make a good
contribution when the teacher did not rely too much on reading for example
using strategies such as:
  - Exposition by the teacher
  - Discussion by the class
  - Use of video material

- When text was used it was found to be helpful to pupils if:
  - There was group reading aloud
Discussion of the text prior to individual work

- ICT was found to be useful to help pupils separate the task of writing down their ideas from proof checking. It was found that some pupils were distracted by the spelling and grammar checking when they wrote and they found it helpful to have this feature turned off and to use it at a later stage in the process.

Research Questions

Schools will be expected to include dyslexic pupils in the mainstay of classroom activities. This means that teachers will need to notice differences in pupil performance and respond to them. They will need to know what to look for and to have a range of strategies that allow effective responses. Effective classroom support for pupils with dyslexia can be provided by teachers through an adaptation of their classroom practice by considering effective strategies for supporting children with SEN to access the curriculum in mainstream classrooms. This is likely to be without having to resort to Statements of SEN, but may involve LEA support agencies and efficient deployment of LEA resources.

Teachers are skilled professionals who already have a range of strategies. They may not be aware of the strategies because of the fast flow of lesson and this may lead to a lack of confidence in their beliefs about their ability to deal with dyslexic children. One role for EPs may be to validate what teachers do already. Another role would be to help teachers reflect and become more skilled when dealing with individual differences by considering alternative approaches to enhance their teaching skills. Stanulis and Russell (2000) stress the importance of conversation as a way of making
sense of teaching experiences and as a means of exchanging ideas and new ways to act in the classroom. However, EP time to schools is often limited and this means that other forms of communication need to be considered.

There are a number of questions to address:

1. What are teachers’ views about the nature of dyslexia? What are teachers looking for when they consider a child is dyslexic?
2. How does this differ from their views about other pupils?
3. What strategies are already in place in primary classrooms to support dyslexic pupils?
4. Can a booklet of suggestions that is left with teachers lead to improvement in teacher confidence and extension of good teaching practice?
5. Will the suggestions have benefits that ‘spill over’ to improve the classroom experience for other pupils? Will the suggestions have a beneficial effect on the class as a whole by improving independent on-task behaviour?

The following outcomes were expected:

- There has been an attempt to raise the awareness of dyslexia at the National and Local level (e.g. BPS Working Party document; DFEE leaflet on identification, Undated; Local Inset; Locally arranged LEA Stakeholder conferences on dyslexia). This suggests that teachers should have a good awareness of dyslexia and define it in terms that are similar to ‘common or garden’ reading and writing difficulties.
- Teachers will have a range of strategies to support dyslexic pupils in their classroom based on the principles of identified good practice.
- A booklet of ideas will lead to an increase in the number of strategies used and to an increase in teacher confidence in approaching children who may be dyslexic.

- Strategies that support dyslexic pupils are beneficial to other pupils and when used they will lead to an increase in on-task behaviour for all pupils.
Methodology
Recruitment of teachers

Farouk (1999) attributed teachers seeing EPs voluntarily to them needing some help and wanting to instigate some change in their practice. This seemed to be a good basis for recruiting participants and a letter was sent to primary schools on my ‘patch’ outlining the study and asking teachers to volunteer. It was carefully explained that this would not be part of a psychological assessment of the child – in fact notes about the child would not be made and that this study was about teaching. This was to avoid setting up an expectation that Statutory Assessment might follow. I was hoping for 4 teachers to reply in order to provide a reasonable case-study. Within a week I had been contacted by 7 teachers, each with a child that they thought might be dyslexic and who were looking for help in their day-to-day teaching.

Simple demographic information was collected about the teachers experience and role within the school:

- Age range taught
- Role
- Name

The background experience of the teachers was recorded but there is some evidence to show that length of teacher experience does not lead to higher levels of teacher confidence in the classroom (Nleya, 1999).

Overview

This is a study to evaluate the impact of a booklet of ideas and strategies aimed at teachers and designed to lead to a change in classroom practise. There is a
consideration of ‘before’ and ‘after’, leading to an A:B methodological design. The
design and approach is one that draws upon humanistic psychologies, inviting the
teacher to engage in an empirical way as a co-scientist to create meaning for
themselves from their involvement in the study. (This is a loose extension of the
principles of Personal Construct Psychology see Kelly; 1955).

A questionnaire was used with teachers to elicit views and feelings of confidence
before and after using the booklet. During the intervening period of 3 to 6 weeks, the
teachers were asked to read through the booklet and select out those strategies that
they wanted to try. They selected those that they thought would be helpful to their
teaching practice, while bearing in mind a particular target child. The teacher was
seen as being an equal partner and a committed professional who knows her
classroom and children best and as such she is able to reflect on her own practice.
Kullman (1998) argues that reflection will lead to greater awareness of what
‘constitutes appropriate pedagogic practice’ and this is supported by Bulsrode and
Hunt (2000) who argue that reflection encourages personal development. The booklet
is a catalyst for reflection as well as being a source of strategies.

Observations were made of 6 classes before and 3 classes after the booklet was used.

Part way through the project, 2 secondary teachers asked if they could try out the
booklet and completed the ‘pre-booklet’ questionnaire – they were not followed up or
observed.
**Teacher Confidence**

Measurements of teacher confidence are made using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 10. This is embedded into the questionnaires given before and after the booklet is used (see Appendix).

How confident do you feel in meeting the needs of dyslexic children?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not confident</th>
<th>Very confident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Changes in teacher confidence are detected as changes in the ratings given.

**Teacher constructs of dyslexia compared to literacy difficulties**

The first two research questions can be approached using a personal construct psychology methodology. One way of eliciting one pole of a construct is to use a technique called characterisation – the client is asked to write about themselves as a character (Dalton and Dunnett, 1992; Fransella and Dalton, 1990). The text is then used to abstract constructs about how the client sees themselves. This seemed like a reasonable starting point and the teacher could be asked to write about a dyslexic child that they know. The difficulty is that this is too open-ended. A modified approach was considered in which an open-ended question was asked; “There seems to be many different ideas and views of what is meant by dyslexia. What do you think it means?” The answers given by the teachers were then used to abstract emergent poles of constructs.

A comparison of similarities and differences was elicited by asking the teacher to consider different children in her class. This is similar to the methodology of triadic elicitation (Kelly, 1955; Dalton and Dunnett, 1992; Fransella and Dalton, 1990). The constructs were elicited by asking the teacher to consider how the children might be
the same and in what ways they are different. In triadic elicitation the children types would be arranged in 3s – two that are the same in some way and one that is different.

For this project, a less formal approach was used with the teacher asked: “I’d like you to think of 4 children in your class. One who is a good reader, one who is a good speller, one who has difficulties with reading and one who has difficulties with spelling.

In what ways do the children differ?
What weaknesses or strengths would you say the different children have?”

The analysis of the answers to the questions involves coding the constructs using a program capable of handling textual data such as NUD*IST in order to allow the relationship between the constructs to be seen (Richards, 1998). NUD*IST is an old program (although it is now in its fifth version) and there are newer ways of doing the same thing. I chose to use mind-mapping software called Mind Manager to show the links. Like NUD*IST it allows the relationships between the constructs to be changed easily, while the author reflects on the different aspects of descriptions. However, it has the advantage of being very visual and the output does not have to be linear. Text can be cut and pasted straight from Microsoft Word and slid from one branch to another until meaning is created from the material.

**Teacher strategies already being used**

An open ended question was added to the questionnaire to elicit the strategies that teachers had found useful in working with children.

“What kinds of things do you think are helpful to children who are having difficulty learning to read or spell on an everyday basis in the classroom?”
This was further supported by observing lessons before giving the booklets and using a checklist of strategies already being used (see Appendix).

**New strategies used by the teacher**

In the post-booklet questionnaire, open-ended questions were added to find out which strategies had been used by the teachers and what problems had been encountered in trying out the different suggestions.

“In what ways was the booklet useful to you? What problems or difficulties did you encounter when trying out some of these suggestions?”

Follow-up observations were intended for all classes but only carried out in 3 classes. This was intended to provide some verification of teacher views and provide a means of data triangulation.

**Spill over effects**

Open ended questions were included in the post-booklet questionnaire to find out if there had been a benefit to other children.

“Did anyone else in the class benefit? If so, in what ways?”

A measure of pupil behaviour was achieved using time-sampling of on-task and off-task behaviour. Each pupil is observed briefly in strict rotation and their behaviour at a given time point is recorded on a classroom observation sheet (Squires, 1996).

**Material improvements**

Teachers were encouraged to think of the booklet as a ‘first attempt’ and something that could be improved upon with their help. This continued the philosophy of seeing them as joint co-researchers and a question was added to the post-booklet questionnaire, “How could the booklet be improved?”
Results
Teacher Confidence

The change in teacher confidence was measured using this question before and after the booklet was used.

How confident do you feel in meeting the needs of dyslexic children?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not confident</th>
<th>Very confident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ratings for teacher confident before and after having the booklet were found to improve:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Confidence Before</th>
<th>Confidence After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YR 5 First year of teaching</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YR 5 Experienced SENCo</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YR 6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YR 4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YR 3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YR4 First year of teaching</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Value</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>σ</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>6-8.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Changes in teacher confidence
This is non-parametric self rating data and has been subjected to a Wilcoxon Ranked Sign Test using SPSS. This gives the probability of these results being due to chance to be \( p=0.043 \), allowing the null hypothesis to be rejected.

**Teacher constructs of dyslexia**

The constructs used by teachers are shown in Figure 1 and in Figure 2. At first glance it seems that teachers use different constructs when thinking about dyslexia compared to thinking about literacy difficulties. Perhaps this is one reason why they do not feel very confident in thinking about strategies to support dyslexic children in their classroom.

![Figure 2: Changes in teacher confidence](image-url)
A collection of difficulties

Specific difficulties

Concentration

"Trouble with reading, writing and spelling."

"Many aspects"

"There are different types of dyslexia."

"I feel the term dyslexia is too much of an umbrella term. I can see traits of it in all the children in my class - so it is not very useful."

"Problems with rote learning number bonds."

"Problems with concentration (but not behaviour)."

Decoding

"Not being able to decipher symbols."

"Disruption of symbols (letters/numbers) in a set order."

"Confusion with numbers and letters."

"Jumbling reading, spelling and number - in columns and in words."

"...confusion with reading, writing and number work."

"Letterforms can be reversed and in the wrong order."

"Getting letters backwards or having the wrong order to letters."

Memory

Confusion

"Quite intelligent (but not all dyslexics are)."

"Children may be really good academically and in conversation but experience problems with writing coherently."

Intelligence

"Problems with processing information."

"Difficulty with words based on neurological processing which differs from that of non-dyslexic pupils."

Processing

Recording

"Recording problems."

Trouble with reading, writing and spelling.

Confusion with numbers and letters

Jumbling reading, spelling and number - in columns and in words.

...confusion with reading, writing and number work.

"Letterforms can be reversed and in the wrong order.

"Getting letters backwards or having the wrong order to letters."

"Not being able to decipher symbols."

"Disruption of symbols (letters/numbers) in a set order."

"Problems with rote learning number bonds."

"Problems with concentration (but not behaviour)."

"Quite intelligent (but not all dyslexics are)."

"Children may be really good academically and in conversation but experience problems with writing coherently."

"Problems with processing information."

"Difficulty with words based on neurological processing which differs from that of non-dyslexic pupils."

Figure 3: Construct Map for Question 2 on the pre-booklet questionnaire
Poor readers

- "lack of reading experience at home"
- "In their ability to arrange letters in the correct format"
- "less confident than good readers"
- lack of confidence before opening book, hard to motivate
- "inability to cope with reading questions or tasks"
- "difficulties encountered when doing independent researching for units of work"
- "more teacher dependent - they need lots of reassurance to carry out tasks"
- "doesn't know that their spellings are wrong"
- "seem easier to help with"

Poor Spellers

- "lack of phonological skills"
- "In their ability to arrange letters in the correct format"
- frustrated by his inability and this affects behaviour
- "often believe they are 'doing wrong' because they do not feel able to cope with reading questions or tasks"
- "may not progress as quickly - need more help with research"
- "more teacher dependent - they need lots of reassurance to carry out tasks"
- "won't use a range of vocabulary in stories"
- "not reinforced phonic sounds"
- they are prepared to ask for help, they try to self-check
- "gets down heartened, more so than with reading"
- "more teacher dependent - they need lots of reassurance to carry out tasks"
- "often believe they are 'doing wrong' because they do not feel able to cope with reading questions or tasks"
- "don't attempt a word"

Good readers

- "more aware and experience of reading"
- Good reader better at writing than the poor readers
- good at recognising symbols in their correct format
- very poor orally but reads avidly
- "more confidence in getting on with tasks"
- "more confidence than poor readers"
- "more confidence with comprehension and copy from board"
- "more confident and cope better"
- "more confident and work with greater understanding and speed"
- "They have more self confidence and will attempt new ideas more readily"
- "are independent, have more self-reliance and their quality of work is better"

Good Spellers

- "more confident and cope better"
- "confidence with story/sentence writing"
- "more confidence in getting on with tasks"
- "have a go at a word"
- "more confident and work with greater understanding and speed"
- "more self confidence and will attempt new ideas more readily"
- "variety of language and use of words, confidence with words"
- "is able to use a larger vocabulary and can write good sentences"
- "do not need help and have better self-esteem, do not need additional support"
- "are independent, have more self-reliance and their quality of work is better"

Confidence

- "more confident and cope better"
- "more confidence with comprehension and copy from board"
- "more confident and work with greater understanding and speed"
- "They have more self confidence and will attempt new ideas more readily"
- "set themselves challenges and are more adventurous"
- "more teacher dependent - they need lots of reassurance to carry out tasks"
- "do not need help and have better self-esteem, do not need additional support"
- "are independent, have more self-reliance and their quality of work is better"

Independence

- "more confident and cope better"
- "confidence with story/sentence writing"
- "more confidence in getting on with tasks"
- "have a go at a word"
- "more confident and work with greater understanding and speed"
- "are independent, have more self-reliance and their quality of work is better"

Language Use

- "more confident and cope better"
- "confidence with story/sentence writing"
- "more confidence in getting on with tasks"
- "have a go at a word"
- "more confident and work with greater understanding and speed"
- "more self confidence and will attempt new ideas more readily"
- "variety of language and use of words, confidence with words"
- "is able to use a larger vocabulary and can write good sentences"
- "do not need help and have better self-esteem, do not need additional support"
- "are independent, have more self-reliance and their quality of work is better"

Affective

- "more aware and experience of reading"
- Good reader better at writing than the poor readers
- good at recognising symbols in their correct format
- very poor orally but reads avidly
- "more confidence in getting on with tasks"
- "more confidence than poor readers"
- "more confidence with comprehension and copy from board"
- "more confident and cope better"
- "more confident and work with greater understanding and speed"
- "They have more self confidence and will attempt new ideas more readily"
- "set themselves challenges and are more adventurous"
- "more teacher dependent - they need lots of reassurance to carry out tasks"
- "do not need help and have better self-esteem, do not need additional support"
- "are independent, have more self-reliance and their quality of work is better"

Figure 4: Construct Map for Question 3 on the pre-booklet questionnaire
Further analysis has been done by paraphrasing the emergent pole from teacher responses and donating a contrast pole to produce bipolar constructs to show the extent of construct overlap:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyslexia Concept</th>
<th>Overlap</th>
<th>Literacy Difficulty Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• many aspects/traits $\leftrightarrow$ single difficulty</td>
<td>• Trouble with reading, writing and spelling $\leftrightarrow$ skilled at reading, writing and spelling</td>
<td>• lack of experience of reading $\leftrightarrow$ good experience of reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• different types of dyslexia $\leftrightarrow$ single types of literacy difficulty</td>
<td>• Not being able to decode symbols $\leftrightarrow$ effective symbolic decoding</td>
<td>• poor phonological skills $\leftrightarrow$ good phonological skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• problems with rote learning $\leftrightarrow$ rote learning effective</td>
<td></td>
<td>• poor behaviour due to frustration $\leftrightarrow$ not frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confusion with textual information $\leftrightarrow$ success with textual information</td>
<td></td>
<td>• low confidence $\leftrightarrow$ high confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sequencing difficulties $\leftrightarrow$ success with ordering letters</td>
<td></td>
<td>• independent $\leftrightarrow$ dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intelligence $\leftrightarrow$ lack of intelligence</td>
<td></td>
<td>• self-reliant $\leftrightarrow$ teacher reliant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Neurological processing difficulty $\leftrightarrow$ neurological processing efficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td>• good quality of work $\leftrightarrow$ poor quality of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Good oral/aural $\leftrightarrow$ poor written</td>
<td></td>
<td>• slow $\leftrightarrow$ fast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poor concentration $\leftrightarrow$ good concentration</td>
<td></td>
<td>• does not need reassurance $\leftrightarrow$ thinks everything is wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• hard to motivate $\leftrightarrow$ well motivated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• extensive vocabulary in writing $\leftrightarrow$ restricted vocabulary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Constructs used by teachers

There appears very little overlap between the two concepts being construed by teachers.
Change in the number of teaching strategies observed and effect on pupil on-task behaviour

The original plan had been to observe classes before and after being given the booklet and compare the strategies used against the checklist of items devised for this study. Pupil on-task behaviour was also recorded using fixed interval time sampling of behaviours (Squires, 1996). Three of the classes were in one school and the link teacher became ill, this meant that a follow-up observation could not be arranged. Three classes were observed under both conditions. One of these lessons was a really good lesson but no independent work was carried out. This reduced the sample size to 2.

Data are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>On-task Items ticked on checklist</th>
<th>Before (%)</th>
<th>After (%)</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YR 5 First year of teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td>83.15</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>σ 27.73</td>
<td>σ 12.45</td>
<td>n=19</td>
<td>n=20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YR 5 Experienced SENCo</td>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>σ 18.99</td>
<td></td>
<td>n=28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YR 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>81.896</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>σ 16.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>n=29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YR 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>σ 28.09</td>
<td></td>
<td>n=28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YR 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>83.32</td>
<td>93.85</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>σ 16.52</td>
<td>σ 10.77</td>
<td>n=24</td>
<td>n=26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YR4 First year of teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td>83.33</td>
<td>Not</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>σ 26.87</td>
<td>appropriate</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not appropriate (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n=24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td>80.271</td>
<td>94.43</td>
<td>8.17</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Changes in the classroom
All teachers were found to be using some strategies identified as being supportive of dyslexic pupils.

The comparison of changes in on-task behaviour and strategies used by teachers in the 2 classes observed during the follow-up look promising – but this is too small a sample size to say whether or not they are significant:

![Figure 3: Mean on task behaviour for class](image)

Both teachers seem to have improved the whole class on-task behaviour by about the same amount.

![Figure 4: Number of strategies used by teacher](image)

Both teachers have increased the number of strategies that they use that are supportive of children with literacy difficulties.
What kinds of things do you think are helpful to children who are having difficulty learning to read or spell on an everyday basis in the classroom?

This question led to teachers listing the things that they do. They have been grouped together and linked to the checklist areas in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies reported to be used by teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accessing Text</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “lots of language is on the walls”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “using spelling lists”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “having word cards around the room”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “personal word banks”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “spelling words before writing them in glossary in art book e.g. picture”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “key words for each lesson on white board”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “diagrams of objects around with words underneath”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “it is easier to copy notes from a book/paper, rather than the board or OHP”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “laminated sheets of high frequency words in alphabetical order”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “getting pupil to copy the correct spelling”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recording ideas</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “a partner to help in reading instructions”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “sitting next to a more able child”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer support</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “sitting next to a more able child”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “sit near the teacher when I am delivering the lesson (either at the board or on the carpet)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “in reading there is group reading so the target child is not the only one, children are grouped in ability so they can have the same level book”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seating</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “uses a multiplication square to support work on x and divide”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “when learning times tables, he usually only learns 2 or 3 facts”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 7: Strategies reported to be used by teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technological aids</th>
<th>Adult support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“1:1 reading support”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“others benefit from group reading and 1:1 with adult”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“helping with spelling on an individual basis”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“read through written feedback together so he is aware of the comments made by the teacher”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“spelling out words and helping with reading written comments in book”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“repetition of significant points of the lesson in different forms e.g. questions (verbal) and discussion”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“use a variety of approaches – not repetition – using different angles to get the same point across”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“assessment in science and foundation subjects is done orally”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“regular reinforcement of new skills/knowledge”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Emotional Support  | “they need to be given confidence and assurance from the teacher for their efforts” |

| Other              | “low noise level in class”                                                      |
|--------------------| “small tasks but high expectations are set”                                     |
|                    | “small steps with success built in”                                            |
|                    | “having concrete things that can go on a table”                                 |

| Remedial teaching  | “spelling logs daily”                                                           |
|--------------------| “encourage use of dictionaries”                                                  |
|                    | “give poor spellers fewer spellings to learn”                                   |
|                    | “focussed teaching of reading/spelling”                                          |
|                    | “parent to help with reading”                                                    |
|                    | “daily reading at home – mum has bought a range of story tapes so he can listen and follow the text” |
|                    | “special reading session on 1:1 basis”                                           |
|                    | “using a 1 min word challenge – having 3 words to read – how many times can they be read in 1 minute. Spend the week trying to beat the score.” |
|                    | “words for spellings to be in letter strings or word families”                   |
|                    | “a few have reading diaries so they can practise 3 words to read/spell each week” |
All teachers were able to cite some examples of strategies that they use to support dyslexic pupils. Over the nine classes, it can be seen that teachers have a range of strategies that they use to support pupils with literacy difficulties. There appears to be areas in which skills could be extended.

Post Questionnaire

In what ways was the booklet useful to you?

- “I was able to find some strategies to try
  - different colours to segment different areas of text
  - changing worksheet structure”
- “Helped me recognise strategies that I use already”
- “I noticed what I am already doing more and how this helps”
- “I tried the idea of using different colours on the board”
- “Realizing what I do already”
- “Helped me think a bit more about reading and spelling”
- “Consider children becoming over-reliant”
- “Layout of work and think about alternative ways to record ideas”
- “Confirmed to me some good practise already in use”
- “Gave some new ideas to try”
- “A useful distillation of points to consider when supporting a dyslexic child.”
- “Handy format – I highlighted what I needed to concentrate on and it served as a good reminder”
- “Good section on differentiation”

How did the target child benefit?

- “More confidence with writing, more willing to have a go – particularly with smaller pieces of writing”
- “Not sure”
- “Making use of ICT in ALS has helped the target child”
- “Found it easier to follow text on the board when necessary”
- “More confidence in child (+ teacher)”
- “More interaction with me has improved the relationship between child/teacher.”
- “He volunteers conversation now and expresses the need for help with less anxiety.”

Did anyone else in the class benefit? If so, in what ways?

- “Using mind-mapping helped everybody”
- “A group of 8 children have had worksheets using the ideas in the book”
- “Several are now using the plastic ruler to guide reading”
- “Yes, those who find it more difficult to read found some strategies of use”
• “Two other children have shown an increase in concentration, due I think to the use of the strategies for the target child.”

What problems or difficulties did you encounter when trying out some of these suggestions?
  • “We tried using the tape recorder but it was a distraction for the other children trying to listen to the child using it”
  • “Getting enough time to plan worksheets…. but we could build up a bank of worksheets”
  • “Some strategies not relevant to this group – sitting at the teachers desk – I don’t have one. We don’t do much writing on the board”.
  • “Having regular access to ICT”
  • “Remembering to change coloured pens!”
  • “There are a lot of suggestions and the difficulty was deciding which ones to focus on – all are necessary but it is not possible to carry out all of the suggestions all of the time. It would be possible to use more strategies if classroom support was available.”

How could the booklet be improved?
  • “Take out the reading ages table…. its you doing the psychologist bit, it doesn’t really tell me anything”
  • “Some bits are too obvious”
  • “Could do with some suggestions about how to improve motivation”
  • “Too much writing!”
  • “For me it would be better if all the information could be together and the strategies listed as short sharp suggestions.”
Discussion

The results show that:

- Teachers use different constructs to think about dyslexic pupils than to think about children with literacy difficulties.
- The provision of the booklet leads to an increase in teacher confidence when working with dyslexic pupils.
- There is an increase in strategies used by teachers following the provision of the booklet.
- In the classes observed, there is an increase in pupil on-task behaviour, following the provision of the booklet.

Each of the research questions will now be considered in the light of these results.

What are teachers’ views about the nature of dyslexia? What are teachers looking for when they consider a child is dyslexic? How does this differ from their views about other pupils?

These questions about teachers’ views of dyslexia and the construction of dyslexic children compared to ‘common garden’ poor readers/spellers led to a surprising answer. My belief that teachers would construct dyslexia in a similar way to how they construct ‘common or garden’ reading and spelling difficulties was not supported. Although there was a little overlap, teachers seemed to be using very different constructs for each group of children. This means the range of convenience of either does not suitably cover the other. It is not surprising then that when teachers define a child using one concept (dyslexia) they do not feel confident using strategies that they have for children defined using a second construct system (literacy difficulties).

Similarly, teachers are used to working with children who are learning to read and
spell and can construct them using terms that help to identify what to do next.

‘Dyslexia’ is presented as being different and as being mystical – the DfEE leaflet for instance, suggests that teachers should consult with their SENCo as the course of prescribed action. This tends to place dyslexia outside of the teachers construct system and can lead to some anxiety when teachers encounter it (Fransella and Dalton, 1990).

One of the first things the booklet does is to define what is meant by dyslexia. Originally this was done because there are many definitions around and I wanted to have a common understanding established about what the term meant in the context of the booklet. The definition chosen was fortuitous because it included the broad BPS Working Party definition that focuses on the literacy difficulty, and also included the concept of associated difficulties included in definitions used by many other authors. In effect, it means that all children with literacy difficulties can be described as being dyslexic. This leads to the possibility of bringing the two concepts being construed by teachers into closer alignment rather than being left as two separate concepts. The range of convenience of ‘literacy difficulties’ is now extended to include ‘dyslexic’ Consequently, this means that strategies that teachers are comfortable using with children with poor literacy skills must be suitable for children described as being dyslexic. This new hypothesis remains untested and could be explored by asking teachers who have used the booklet to complete the questions asking them to define dyslexia and to describe the differences between poor and good readers and spellers. If a change in the degree of overlap of constructs occurs then this would have implications for delivery of LEA based Inset and an impact on how dyslexia is defined in publications to teachers and through conferences. It would also give more importance to the definition chosen by the BPS Working Party.
The comment made by one teacher that “It would be possible to use more strategies if classroom support was available” suggests that some anxiety remains. This may be evidence of the effects of systemic tensions and the teacher dealing with the stresses produced by looking to pass the child to someone else.

**What strategies would teachers already have in place?**

My belief that teachers would already be using strategies to support dyslexic pupils was supported with all teachers observed having some strategies in place. Further support came from the teacher comments about strategies that they use, particularly the comment, “Some bits are too obvious”. This supports the ideas that the strategies are drawn from good classroom practice. It also suggests that teachers are noticing difficulties that some pupils have and are responding to those difficulties in order to mitigate the effects when pupils are accessing the curriculum or recording ideas. There were some gaps in the strategies mentioned by teachers (accessing text and using technological aids). This is an area that could be focused on through further interventions with schools.

**Can a booklet of suggestions lead to an improvement in teacher confidence and extension of good teaching practice?**

The booklet of ideas led to an increase in the number of strategies used is supported for the two classes observed. This is a small sample so the results should be treated with caution, none-the-less the effect looks promising. Further support comes from teacher comments in which new strategies are reported to have been tried out and found to be useful.
The hypothesis that the booklet would lead to an increase in teacher confidence when approaching dyslexic children is supported, with all teachers reporting an increase in confidence ($p=0.043$). This supports Nleya’s (1999) view that the length of teaching experience is not important when it comes to confidence. There are a number of reasons why confidence could increase. Firstly, it could be because teachers realise that they already have skills that are useful and transferable from children with general literacy difficulties to those with dyslexia. Secondly, it could be the result of bringing the different construct systems closer together. Thirdly, it could also be because the booklet validates strategies that the teachers know that they already use. Fourthly, it could be that new strategies are presented and the teachers are able to find things that they can do – the booklet is empowering. Teachers have commented on how the new strategies have led to improvements in their target child.

**Will the suggestions benefit other children in the class?**

The booklet would lead to spill over effects and would lead to an increase in on-task behaviour for all pupils in the two classes observed. This is a small sample. Further support comes from the open-ended questions in which teachers have described benefits for other children in the class e.g. “a group of 8 children have had worksheets using ideas in the book”, “Two other children have shown an increase in concentration …”
The chosen methodology was one that invited teachers to engage in a process of reflection supported by a booklet of ideas and strategies. This was seen as being an alternative to the more usual centrally planned INSET courses. Newell (1996) argues that reforming schools and classroom practice requires reforms in teacher education and the best way to bring about significant change is to give teachers the opportunity to interact by holding conversations about theory and classroom practice. There is a need to consider direct experience and reflection of experience through collaboration providing the social support for reflection. There is some evidence from other researchers to support this view and that what teachers learn in workshops and centrally provided INSET does not always translate to classroom practice (Lam 2001).

A better approach to teacher training is one that involves mentoring or coaching. In Lam’s Hong Kong study, 75% of teachers who received coaching over a 3 month period for training on a specific skill transferred the skill to classroom practice compared to 15% who did not receive coaching. This role of coaching is developed by Harvey (1999) who argues that it could occur in the continuing professional development of beginner teachers to support the development and mastery of new skills. He contrasts central based INSET with coaching that is classroom based with the latter providing the opportunity to support the teacher in the zone of proximal development in the social context in which future performance will occur. He stresses the importance of making knowledge useful by allowing it to develop in the situations in which it is needed. For Harvey, coaching is based on Vygotskian ideas and stresses the importance of the social dimension to learning, in which the learner is scaffolded by a more skilled worker. In the context of the present project, there is insufficient
time to act as a mentor and work with teachers over repeated visits and scaffolding is therefore provided through the booklet and by encouraging teachers to compare their skills.

The booklet acts as a ‘halfway house’ between INSET and coaching and goes someway to helping teachers to become reflective of their classroom practice. However, some of the comments made by the teachers such as, “Some strategies not relevant to this group …” and “There are a lot of strategies and the difficulty was deciding which ones to focus on …” lead me to the view that this could be done in a better way. One change made to the booklet was to write an introduction that describes the purpose of the booklet as being one that asks the teacher to reflect on what they do, what difficulties they have noticed with children in their classroom and what strategies they might want to adopt. This was developed further by having three boxes next to each strategy for the teacher to tick:

- I do this already – Do Already
- This might be worth trying - Try
- Want to find out more about this one – Find Out More

The ‘find out more’ column then provides the opportunity for further work with the teacher, perhaps engaging as a mentor or coach.

The use of the booklet in this study looks like it is an important way that psychologists could intervene in changing classroom practice. It meets Lam’s (2000) aim of helping to keep teachers up to date about dyslexia in a changing context that will result in fewer statements for dyslexia and more children having their needs met in mainstream classrooms. The scope of the booklet was limited to dyslexia but one
teacher has already hinted that others might be needed; “Could do with some suggestions to improve motivation”. Other high agenda areas at the moment are Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder. The methodology used in evaluating the current booklet could well be used in developing more resources.

How the booklet is used remains an area for consideration. All of the teachers in this study were motivated to use the booklet and this fits in with Farouk’s (1999) suggestion that teachers consult when they want to change their practice. This suggests that the booklet should be available when teachers ask for it. It could be that the presence of the booklet by itself is sufficient to produce the changes reported in this study. However, it might be that teachers involved in this study knew that I would be going back to talk to them and possibly observe their lessons. This will have motivated them to act and reflect on the suggestions. This leads to some pragmatic questions:

- Should follow-up be a planned condition of having the booklet?
- How much follow-up is needed? Is it sufficient to simply ask ‘how’s it going?’
- Should the teacher decide on what follow-up is needed? How will it be negotiated?
- Would the booklet be as effective without follow-up?
- How will teachers know the booklet is available? A contrasting approach is to circulate the booklet to all schools – whether they want it or not. This would not be a sound psychological intervention since the involvement of the recipient is not established. It is hardly a humanistic approach involving the other person as a co-scientist practitioner (Kelly, 1955) and for the majority of
teachers it will not lead to active reflection since they will not be motivated to read it.
References


DfEE (Undated) *How can I tell if a child may be dyslexic? Handy Hints for Primary School Teachers.*


Elliot, C.D., Smith, P. and McCulloch, K. (1996) *British Ability Scales (BAS-II) Administration and Scoring Manual* Berkshire: NFER. Note – the ability scores derived from the 2nd and 20th centile positions were used to find reading ages using the BAS-II Achievement Scales Monthly Age Equivalents tables.


Ofsted (2000b) *The SEN Code of Practice: Three years on. The contribution of individual education plans to the raising of standards for pupils with special educational needs.* London: Ofsted Publications Centre


Staffordshire LEA (2001) *Appendix 1of the Scrutiny Committee report on Specific Learning Difficulties*.


**Computer Software referred to:**


Mind Manager V3.5.10 produced by Mindjet LLC (1999) This program allows the construction and manipulation of mind maps. Details are available from the company websites http://www.MindManager.com and http://www.eMindMaps.com

Appendix

Teacher semi-structured interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range taught</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How confident do you feel in meeting the needs of dyslexic children?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not confident</td>
<td>Very confident</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There seems to be many different ideas and views of what is meant by dyslexia. What do you think it means?

I’d like you to think of 4 children in your class. One who is a good reader, one who is a good speller, one who has difficulties with reading and one who has difficulties with spelling.

In what ways do the children differ?

What weaknesses or strengths would you say the different children have?

What kinds of things do you think are helpful to children who are having difficulty learning to read or spell on an everyday basis in the classroom?
Post intervention questionnaire

Age range taught          Role          Name

In what ways was the booklet useful to you?

How did the target child benefit?

Did anyone else in the class benefit? If so, in what ways?

What problems or difficulties did you encounter when trying out some of these suggestions?

How could the booklet be improved?

How confident do you feel in meeting the needs of dyslexic children?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not confident</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>Very confident</th>
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</table>

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Classroom Strategies to Support Dyslexic Children Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accessing Text</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reading age matched to child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Layout</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adult Cueing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Worksheet design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Visual support for text (pictures, diagrams, flow charts)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Text blocked and boxed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Questions close to information rather than chunked at end</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Typed (not hand-written)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sentence length appropriate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Active verbs rather than passive verbs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent reading strategies taught</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Word-segmentation and blending</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Syntactic checking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Semantic checking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-reading of text is done prior to independent reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• with adult prior to lesson (volunteer helper, parents, teacher, classroom assistant)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• the class or group reads the text together aloud</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• there is discussion of the text prior to individual work</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Recording ideas</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Worksheet design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cloze procedure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Single word answers allowed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Short answers or phrases required</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sheet is final copy, child writes on sheet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sentence Makers used</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Disrupted information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Different coloured chalk to aid tracking</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alternative formats (mind-maps, flow diagrams)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key words to act as model for child (board, cupboards or subject dictionaries)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloze procedure (worksheets, board work etc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sentence completion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personalised dictionary</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACE dictionary</td>
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<td>Copy-writing models</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing frames used to structure ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spelling is taught in all subjects as an integral part of lesson</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teach children to check their work in this order:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• spelling</td>
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<tr>
<td>• grammar</td>
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<tr>
<td>• meaning</td>
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<thead>
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<th>Peer support</th>
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<td>Paired reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scribe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Checker</td>
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<td>Tester</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sat near to teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat near to board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat facing board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat with supportive peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat with academically able peers</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternative teaching strategies that do not rely on reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exposition of ideas by the teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of video material</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of computer/CDROM material</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technological aids</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alphabet line</td>
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<td>Ruler for tracking</td>
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<td>Text Masks</td>
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<td>Enlarged text</td>
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<td>Coloured overlays</td>
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<td>Electronic spellchecker</td>
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<td>Tape recorder</td>
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<td>• of class text</td>
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<tr>
<td>• own voice</td>
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<td>• with word cards</td>
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Page 51
<table>
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<th>ICT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• laptop with spellchecker</td>
<td>• Starwriter</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Dictation/voice recognition software</td>
<td>• Mind-mapping software</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Keyboard skills</td>
<td>• Script reader</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Scanner with OCR software</td>
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<th>Adult support</th>
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<td>Teacher circulates</td>
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<td>• short duration</td>
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<td>Teacher pre-reading with class</td>
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<td>Adult pre-reading prior to lesson</td>
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<td>Direct support</td>
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<td>• assisted writing</td>
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<td>• modelling that it is okay to make mistakes</td>
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<td>• confidence rating</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• exploration of problems without a right answer</td>
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<td>Learned Helplessness</td>
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<td>• process flow charts</td>
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<td>• faded adult support with expectation of child’s success</td>
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<th>Other</th>
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<td>• Metacognitive</td>
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