

FOREWORD

Professor Margaret Herrington

It is an honour to be asked to write a foreword to this collection of papers. Not having attended the conference, I experienced the set of papers entirely through their written (and visual) forms and so from the same vantage point as many future readers. However, though writing from the outside of the conference, I am not ‘outside’ many of the ideas discussed here and welcome the revisiting, re-questioning and re-tuning, as well as the new learning, which the collection offers.

For me, the collection represents a kind of intellectual, affective and sensory ‘space’ in, and through, which many voices are heard...some colliding...some bouncing off others...some agreeing...some in contest. It is a ‘conversational’ space in which dyslexic and non dyslexic listen and speak, bringing their own experiences and those of other thinkers and writers to the table, in a profoundly dialogic fashion. It is a conversation in which the unexpected jostles with the familiar, ‘messiness’ with clarity, and dazzling ‘glimmers’ of insight with ‘solid’ positions. This kind of ‘open’ space is rare in a field dominated by disciplinary boundaries and conventions.

The unifying themes within this dynamic are those of power and resistance. Who has the power to say that dyslexia exists or what dyslexia is/involves? Whose narratives are most highly valued? Who decides on methods of identification? Who determines how HE curriculum process, content and assessment will respond to dyslexia? Who decides on the nature of individual ‘support’? Who exercises the power to exclude these kinds of discussions from HE? Many of the answers to these questions have been created largely by non dyslexic people. They are now embedded in everyday practices and sometimes oppressive conventions, and are resisted in many of the pieces here. Participants also resist aspects of each other’s answers. As a reader I found myself resisting some of the narratives and claims here. This reflects the current ‘reality’ of multiple narratives about dyslexia competing for ‘authenticity’.

The value of having differing narratives from dyslexic writers themselves cannot be over-emphasised. The descriptions of cognitive and sensory processing provide key ‘insider’ qualitative evidence for the field and should be recognised and scrutinised as such. Non dyslexic teachers and researchers, who do recognise this, are well represented here.

The resistance is also evident within the more general intellectual explorations by dyslexic writers. At every turn the writers challenge existing paradigms and raise profound questions; within and across disciplines. Though usefully focused on shared intellectual processes across disciplines, the writers also problematise those very processes; many concepts of creativity, for example, are developed and critiqued here. This work thus makes an important contribution to current explorations about discipline specific responses to dyslexia in HE

The closing speaker at the conference-Professor Jack Whitehead- asked that the ‘life affirming energy’ within the conference be celebrated. I found this reference to energy important because it is so frequently sapped by oppressive practices. As a reader I feel that this collection of papers allows me to feel, enjoy and celebrate some of that energy.

INTRODUCTION

In 2001 a conference called ‘Cascade – creativity across science, art, dyslexia, education’ was held at the University of Bath. The aim of the conference was to disseminate the outcomes of the Dyslexia strand of the WEBB accessibility project which had been a three year collaborative project funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) under the first strand of disability funding that was aimed at developing access for students with disabilities to Higher Education. The three Universities participating were the Universities of the West of England, Bristol and Bath. The collaborative project disseminated and explored through the event was called the 3 I’s of Dyslexia: Identification, Intervention and Institutional issues, and one of the papers collected here is a comparative study of identification assessment methods for dyslexia by Dr Mary Haslum that resulted from the Project.

This three day event aimed to be fully accessible for dyslexia and therefore not all the presentations were in text. There were performance and music events, experiential workshops and an exhibition of painting, sculpture and ceramics. This book cannot fully do justice to the whole sense of the event, however the chapters by Ketaki Kushari Dyson and Andrew Henon aim to represent the exhibition and performance aspects, and some of the papers are accompanied by some examples of the visual art.

Much of the material from the conference was published on the cascade website (www.bath.ac.uk/cascade) but there was insufficient funding at the time to do justice to publishing the papers. It is unusual to find that there is a value in formally publishing these papers six years on, as conference events are traditionally rapidly superseded within research communities. There have been two further strands of HEFCE disability funding since this project completed, the last projects have recently completed and disseminated their work. Disability is now included within Widening Participation and Teaching and Learning agendas in Universities, there has been active representation of disability related issues and the new Disability Discrimination Bill requires the development of Disability Equality Schemes by all public institutions.

It would seem then that all the work towards inclusion for dyslexia is all done and these papers could represent a historical perspective into the exclusion of dyslexia in the past. Unfortunately this is not the case. One of the things that made this conference different was that this conference included dyslexic people speaking for themselves. Further, they were dyslexic academics who represented a variety of disciplines and who questioned whether the creativity associated with dyslexia should be confined to art education or whether the visual spatial skills dyslexic people often have, are used and indeed essential within all subject areas. Iain Biggs and Guy Saunders moved beyond creativity to models of imagination that are a prerequisite and central to the creative education process. Ultimately this was a conference celebrating the strengths of dyslexia and seeking to find ways to include these strengths within the academic community.

The Disability Equality Schemes which are now being developed require them to be informed by the experiences of disabled people. It is already clear from listening to dyslexic people that the experience of exclusion for people with dyslexia is far from over. I meet students who simply cannot find assessment strategies that do justice to their knowledge and understanding and who feel that their tutors do not take their difficulties within a text based academia seriously. I meet dyslexic members of staff who do not feel able or safe to disclose their dyslexia because of the sense of prejudice among their peers. Will Gosling, Alan Rayner, Mike Juggins and Iain Biggs describe the intense anger, frustration and grief associated with exclusion within academia and the sense of being an object to be studied and 'fixed' by those who work with dyslexia. David Pollak, Tim Miles and Ian Padgett describe ways we can begin to attempt to address this exclusion.

Several of the papers discuss the high representation of dyslexia within prison communities and challenge our education system to begin to address the exclusion within education that leads to so many disillusioned dyslexic people following this route towards social exclusion. The different styles and referencing of the papers reflect the different disciplines represented and reveal in themselves a contrast between traditional academic and the lived experience subjective writing referred to by Jack Whitehead in his paper "How can we enhance the flow of values that carry hope for the future of humanity?" Section 1 of the papers describes the study in computerised assessment for dyslexia funded by the WEBB Project. Section 2 focuses on intervention and the creative strengths of students with dyslexia. In Section 3 dyslexic writers explore creativity across science, art, dyslexia and education.

Jane Graves describes the power of imagination and creativity and the joy that is associated with the fleeting moment. She describes how sometimes this process can be excluded within our culture "However we define it I would see that play is our primary aesthetic experience, converting the painful into the pleasurable. Unfortunately, many adults have lost the capacity for imaginative play - possibly because our educational system knocks it out of us in favour of problem-solving - which is seen as more 'realistic'."

Ketaki Kushari Dyson's extraordinarily moving play Night's Sunlight has a vital message with regard to inclusion, yet, "The reluctance of people to take seriously a play translated from Bengali was quite noticeable. Wherever we went, we had small audiences only, and schools were regrettably the worst in persuading pupils and teachers to attend. As all our shows had to be one-off events in the venues concerned, there was no way we could lure the absentees back to the next show." The few of us fortunate enough to see this play at the Cascade conference found ourselves powerless to explain to others the quality of a message that is subtle, takes time to both say and be heard and has a depth that is central to our global culture.

Jack Whitehead's concluding comments describes the dialogue within the conference and carries the voice of attendees as well as presenters. There was a unanimous feeling that the conference needed to be heard more widely and since 2001 I have regularly received requests for more information about the event from around the world.

This collection aims to inform the many initiatives currently active in Higher Education that are questioning dialogues between art and science (eg. *Transdisciplinary Landscapes 2006*, www.projectdialogue.uwe.ac.uk), exploring visual and verbal communication (eg. www.writing-pad.ac.uk) and those seeking to develop access for a diverse learning community. It is for dyslexic learning support practitioners, for academics and artists interested in the relationship between dyslexia and creativity, for those involved in developing diversity in teaching and learning, for those interested in creative process and practice in academia and for those interested in hearing the voice of dyslexic people. These are uncomfortable issues that often ask us to sit in the difficult place between certainties, in between what often appear to be opposing magnetic fields. Witness the recent media outrage at Alexandra Davies' suggestion that Dylan Thomas may be dyslexic (*Daily Telegraph*, 1.09.06, British and Irish contemporary poetry conference, Oxford, St. Anne's College). Or the endlessly repeated fore and over the latest "cure" for dyslexia or praise for the potential limitation of the gene pool. Dr John Stein describes the dyslexic gene as having a survival value (*Behaviour Genetics*, 2005), and the collection of papers here suggest we need the abilities that are often associated with this dyslexia. Jane Graves describes the suffering of those who are dyslexic and identifies that despite all our initiatives access is actually becoming increasingly difficult to HE for people with dyslexia because of the increasing focus on exams to "protect" from plagiarism. She describes a student finding the right words to describe his experience of exclusion, "You have dyslexia and those who don't will make you suffer for it". (*Reverie and dyslexia*, papers www.writing-pad.ac.uk).

We have to ask ourselves how we can address this suffering. How in our 24x7 driven society we can embrace the time to find moments of stillness where qualities which may not be obvious and which take a long time to emerge can be held, empowered, understood and expressed, sometimes without words. In my work I often say that the work of dyslexic people takes four times as long to emerge as that of non dyslexic people, but that when it does it is four times as strong. Dyslexic people often "go to ground" when asked to commit to the written word. The concrete permanence of words casts difficulty on the fluidity and interconnectedness of the layers they are trying to express. Many dyslexic academics have commented on the value of their having had tutors with the patience and confidence in their ability to allow their ideas to emerge over time, sometimes significant time. This book of the proceedings of the conference has suffered from precisely this difficulty, and I hope you will find the papers collected here reflect the depth and process that has led to their publication. I am deeply grateful to my colleagues for their patience. I believe that the publication of the papers collected here has never been more timely and will provide hope and essential guidance for the true inclusion of dyslexic people and their creative imagination and visual spatial skills within academia.

Morag Kiziewicz, November 2007