# Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences

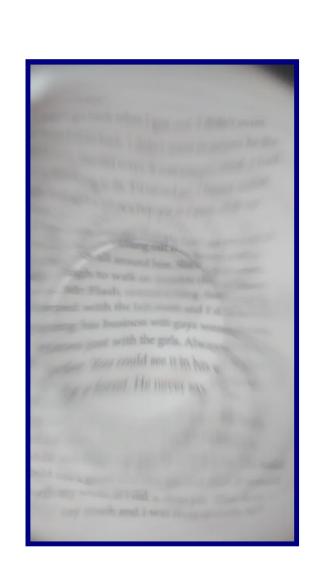


## Dyslexia in the Classroom: Accessing Support by Helen Ross, University of Bath

### Introduction

Here, I summarise interviews undertaken as part of a PhD project, with a parent, a student and a teacher at Hilltop View School during the Spring Term of 2015. The school is a successful, 11-18, state school with a low proportion of students eligible for free school meals or on the SEN register; it achieves 76% A\*-C (inc. Maths and English) at KS4, 95% of students gain at least 2 Alevels, and 5.9 % of pupils listed as having a Statement of SEN or School Action Plus (DfE, 2015).

Young people, whose dyslexia was documented on the school's SEN register, and their families were identified by the school AEN department. The young people's needs varied from those with a Statement of SEN to those whose needs were met in the classroom. Teachers were approached by the AEN department and the researcher regarding participation. Participants were asked about their understandings and effects of dyslexia on young peoples' experiences of learning, social relationships and identity. These are analysed through a Bourdieusien framework, in which 'levels of interaction' (Jenkins, 2008) are used to structure analysis of inter- and intra- personal/institutional interactions which inform the identity and social position of young people with dyslexia.



### What does dyslexia mean? Lottie (parent): "They learn Sophia (Teacher): "...so maybe in Lottie (parent): "It's not just differently but that doesn't mean a classroom they find themselves about reading, which is a that's a negative thing. They just a bit, lost, you know?" perception that it's reading learn differently, full stop." and um... short term memory is an issue, processing is an issue, learning Sophia (Teacher): "It varies a lot from person Dyslexia phonetically is an issue" to person... it's to do with brain structure" Sophia (Teacher): "They may be a bit Helen (researcher): "Is that where your kind slower to, um, grasp, or to be able to exof dyslexia hits home? On the reading side? press themselves... they just need more Alexander (student): Yeah. Yeah and spelling. time to think, to actually in an exam.

Dyslexia has a diverse range of characteristics, for both Lottie and Sophia. Their understandings of it align with Solvang's (2007) view, and allusion to phonological differences is also made by Snowling et al. (2003).

At an individual level, Alexander has viewed himself as a young person with dyslexia, bad at spelling/ reading, embodying that habitus in a classroom setting (Bourdieu. 1977; Smith-Lovin 2002).

### Lottie: "I think it's good to see Technology/In-class support other people... that are dyslexic Children's Voice Timing of assessment is and achieving" Teachers noted potential important according to Alexander felt empower through stigma attached to dys-Lottie: "Because he was Alexander challenged expectations use of an iPad: "It's just helpful for lexia assessment: discovered later. I think it when I'm using it. It's faster than through his 'support plan': "It's usu-Sophia: "Now some peo has really impacted on ally when teachers try to make you writing and easier to type... I don't ple don't want the label his self-esteem and confi do something and I go and I show have to read it back... I don't always do they?" read how it's mean to be." Use of effective measures Personalised support through the Self-Esteem (particularly technology) improved 'My Plan' was valued by Alexander: **Dyslexics:** Alexanders' independence: H- "has is been useful for you.. Hav-H— "How does it make you feel, not ing a 'support plan'?" Once is applied, the 'label' is per **Methods and Effects** having.. Miss sat next to you?" ceived as problematic by parents A- "Yeah, It's easier than like, telling A– "Better. It's just me being more Lottie: "... there is still a stigma teachers." of Identification and independent." attached to it". Support. Self-concept Alexander described other in-class Lottie noted that her son felt exsupport, which did not empower Alexander, Lottie and Sophia noted cluded from social time for interhim like technological interventions described the importance of per ventions, "he misses tutor time, "They printed off sheets, wrote my sonalised interventions that em which is really doesn't want to" work and that's all recently". powered young people as a means of improving their self esteem and view of themselves Self-concept Young person's social identity Having dyslexia can be viewed as a stigmatising characteristic, to be hidden from others or which carries shame (Goffman, Lottie described the difficulties 1963). In a school setting, it can construe young people as dependent on adults, unable to work independently (Smith, 2008; experienced by her son: Wyness, 2012). Young people are thus socially subordinate to adults. "He gives himself a very hard However, effective interventions can empower young people, supporting them to be independent social actors (Prout, 2002), time. He doesn't think he's good allowing them to interact more equally with adults. However, there is still a power imbalance. Thus, Uprichard's (2008) view of at anything." children as 'actors' and 'acted upon' seems appropriate for understanding the position of young people with dyslexia at school.

Parents suggest the 'label' can

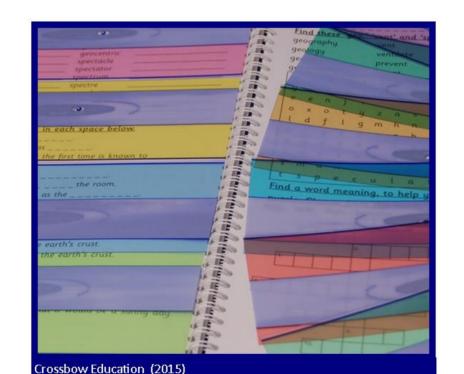
be positive.

Assessment processes

## **Systemic Considerations**

Dyslexia support is viewed as both problematic and successful by parents, teachers and young people. They were each asked what was problematic and how provision could improved. Themes arising included the following:

- Lack of information: In order to access the system, you have to have knowledge of it; in order to have knowledge of it, you have to be in it. This paradoxical position was described by Lottie, who had worked as a SenCo, "If I hadn't been in the system, the I wouldn't have known that you can pay to have them tested... I wouldn't have had enough information to make
- Young people's voice: Alexander was broadly happy with the technology he had. However, he couldn't add 'apps' to the iPad; he had to go through school staff in order to be able to do so.
- Parents' voice: Lottie felt that she would not have been listened to without the 'official' assessments for both of her children's dyslexia. She had to pay privately for them both.
- Lack of personalisation: Lottie argued that her son's reports were not differentiated. She viewed them as produced, based on progress models originating in central government, forcing schools to adopt unrealistic expectations of young people, leading to her son's own sense of failure.
- Delays in identification: Young people's dyslexia was not identified before the end of Key Stage 1 (year 2, aged 7) (gov.uk, 2015). Parents and teachers viewed this as detrimental to young people.
- Localised success: Lottie noted that Hilltop View School was very good with the implementation of support for her son, "From a parent's point of view, Hilltop View School is very good".
- Moving Goalposts: Threshold levels at which support is granted were viewed as inconsistent by parents, resulting in changeable support for young people.



## Conclusions

Parents felt that young accessing support for their children was dependent on knowledge of the system and whether they could pay for assessments in order to secure the 'diagnosis' of dyslexia. Powerlessness was felt by them, as they did not necessarily have the cultural/financial capital to secure the symbolic capital (assessment for dyslexia) required to access support for their children (Bourdieu, 1991).

Accessing learning

- Teachers were viewed as 'clerks of the state' with the capacity to allocate official categories, and subsequently roles, to individuals as requiring additional support or not (Barker, 2012; Hatcher,
- Young people felt disempowered when unable to access the curriculum, embodying the habitus of the incomplete person, with both childhood and dyslexia contributing to this status (Smith, 2007; Wyness, 2012).
- National Government pupil progress expectations were applied at local level to young people with dyslexia. Their self-esteem was negatively impacted through unrealistic, 'normalised' expectations; failure and disengagement with school perpetuates lower social status for lower academic achieve-
- Despite national-level constraints at local level, parents and children perceived Hilltop View School as removing barriers to learning, in particular with technology; thus young people were empowered, and less likely to adopt the role of 'acted-upon'. Rather they became active social agents within their setting (Proud, 2002). However, parents, young people and teachers were acutely aware of power differentials in their interactions, such that roles of 'parent', 'pupil' and 'teacher' were not systematically challenged. They were thus maintained (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970).

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