

Defining Dyslexia

Some current descriptions

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## Defining Dyslexia

Dyslexia is evident when accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely or with great difficulty. This focuses on literacy at the word level and implies that the problem is severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities.' (1999) **Dyslexia, Literacy and Psychological Assessment, Report of the Working Party of the DECP of British Psychological Society (BPS)**

'Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty which mainly affects the development of literacy and language-related skills. It is likely to be present at birth and to be lifelong in its effects. It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities. It tends to be resistant to conventional teaching methods, but its effects can be mitigated by appropriately specific intervention, including the application of information technology and supportive counselling.' **British Dyslexia Association (BDA)**

'Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that mainly affects reading and spelling. Dyslexia is characterised by difficulties in processing word-sounds and by weaknesses in short-term verbal memory; its effects may be seen in spoken language as well as written language. The current evidence suggests that these difficulties arise from inefficiencies in language-processing areas in the left hemisphere of the brain which, in turn, appear to be linked to genetic differences'.

### **Dyslexia Action**

Dyslexia causes difficulties with learning to read, write and spell. Short-term memory, mathematics, concentration, personal organisation and sequencing may also be affected. Dyslexia can occur at any level of intellectual ability. It is not the result of poor motivation, emotional disturbance, sensory impairment or lack of opportunities; but it may occur alongside any of these. Dyslexia usually arises from a weakness in the processing of language-based information. Biological in origin, it tends to run in families, but environmental factors also contribute. The effects of dyslexia can be largely overcome by skilled specialist teaching and the use of compensatory strategies. People may be born with dyslexia or acquire it through accident or illness. **Inclusion Development Programme 2008**

### **DYSLEXIA – DIFFICULTY OR DIFFERENCE?**

The accepted view of Dyslexia as a specific learning difficulty may have been a major cause of under achievement among learners and low expectations among teachers for the past two or three decades. A learning difficulty implies that something is “wrong” with the learner, leading to a focus on identifying weaknesses rather than celebrating strengths..... Acknowledging SpLD as a Specific Learning Difference, however, places the focus firmly on how all lessons are planned, resourced and taught and also on the way teachers are supported through

school policy, practice and ethos. This position offers real opportunities for an emphasis on inclusive mainstream strategies which are designed to empower all learners to be the best they can be. For the purpose of this book, therefore, Dyslexia will be defined as: “A specific learning difference which may cause unexpected difficulties, at any given level of ability, in the acquisition of certain basic skills”

**Removing Dyslexia as a Barrier to Achievement (Neil MacKay 2006)**

A key issue is to arrive at a description of dyslexia that resonates with classroom practitioners. Presenting dyslexia as a specific learning difficulty is not helpful – in secondary schools this often leads to it being seen as a problem which is the responsibility of someone with “special training”..... Now, as teachers strive to adopt new techniques such as personalised learning and assessment for learning, a new description – dyslexia as a learning preference – is beginning to have a significant impact internationally.

The case for this paradigm shift is seductive and compelling; if dyslexia is a learning preference it means that there is nothing intrinsically “wrong” with the student as implied through terms such as specific learning difficulty or even disability. Instead student learning needs are defined by preferred ways to access, process and present knowledge, skills and concepts. **Neil Mackay 2009 “The Dyslexia Aware Secondary School” in The Routledge Companion to Dyslexia (Reid and Elbeheri 2009)**