

Introduction

Who is this book for?

Although concepts and theories of dyslexia continue to be challenged by critics, it remains necessary to meet the learning needs of students in further and higher education (FE and HE). This requirement extends beyond the domain of specialist support; it is a responsibility for all members of staff in all institutions. The challenges set by the government mean that there will be more learners being identified as experiencing dyslexia. This book is written not only for educators who are already knowledgeable in this area but for regular practitioners who want to understand more about dyslexia to improve their practice, to help their students to achieve satisfactory outcomes, and to make sure that students' expectations, requirements and rights are met.

There has been a number of items of legislation, Codes of Practice and sets of standards governing the expansion of further and higher education to include learners with disabilities and/or difficulties. One significant Code that is considered throughout this book is the Disability Rights Commission revised *Code of Practice for Post-16 Education* (DRC, 2007). Other Codes also give important guidance, such as the Quality Assurance Agency *Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education, Section 3: Students with Disabilities* (QAA, 1999), which is currently under revision, (QAA, 2009), and the Department for Education and Skills' *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice* (DfES, 2001). Of considerable importance too is the Code of Practice resulting from the 2005 amendment to the Disability Discrimination Act, *The Duty to Promote Equality of Opportunity* (DRC, 2005). Together these provide necessary guidance for current UK practice.

We argue that the best way of meeting the duties for students who experience dyslexia, including the anticipatory duty, the duty to make advantageous arrangements and the duty to promote equality of opportunity, is to adopt a dyslexia-friendly perspective, not only among specialists but among all members of staff in FE and HE. Such an approach ideally would include attention to administrative as well as pedagogic processes.

The trajectory of this book moves from the social to the psychological perspective in dyslexia discourse. However, the direct focus of this book is upon dyslexia-friendly teaching and learning in FE and HE. Its purpose is to offer a text that will support relevant inclusion and specialist study, but also to offer guidance and activity that will inform mainstream, academic-related programmes and in-service training.

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Defining dyslexia

There are very many different definitions of dyslexia. Educators continue to seek the precise wording to describe their particular understanding of dyslexia, whether it is perceived as a difficulty, disability or disorder. For the purpose of this book the British Dyslexia Association's (BDA) definition, available at www.bdadyslexia.org.uk, is considered to offer a standard. It is probably the most frequently used and most easily reached by interested parties. The BDA states that:

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills. It is likely to be present at birth and life-long 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 (Singleton, 2008).

This portmanteau definition embodies the current understanding of dyslexia, from a psychological, individual deficit view. However, from viewed from the perspective of the social model of disability, Ross Cooper's 2006 summation may be preferred:

We would argue that dyslexia is an experience that arises out of natural human diversity on the one hand and a world on the other where the early learning of literacy, and good personal organisation and working memory is mistakenly used as a marker of 'intelligence'. The problem here is seeing difference incorrectly as 'deficit' (Cooper, 2006: 24).

How to use this book

This book is structured to cater to readers' diverse needs. Each chapter includes a discursive section, followed by relevant features informing pedagogy and practice. In addition to being read in their conventional themed format, the chapters can also be read across their explanatory sections or across their features. Finally, the appendices provide tools to support dyslexia-friendly practice.

Each chapter opens with an overview expressed in graphical terms, using software that is available to students receiving dyslexia support in FE and HE, and concludes with a summary of three key points and a student's view. Each chapter contains an exploration of its main theme and a key technique that can be used by non-specialists to support dyslexia-friendly teaching and learning, plus a focus on current debate.

Following on from this, the chapters contain guidance from the 2007 DDA Code of Practice and a case study. Specialist tutors in FE and HE provide advice,

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linking their specialist knowledge of dyslexia with real examples drawn from non-specialist experience. The case studies can be used for enquiry-based learning. Suitable questions are provided to stimulate discussion and the actual outcomes are described. The chapters close with a summary and suggestions for further reading, along with details for accessing the software illustrated at the start of the chapter.