

 Cross-Curricular

Achieving
QTS

Dyslexia-friendly Practice in the Secondary Classroom

Tilly Mortimore
Jane Dupree



www.learningmatters.co.uk

Achieving
QTS

**Dyslexia-friendly
practice** in the
**secondary
classroom**

This page intentionally left blank

Achieving
QTS

**Dyslexia-friendly
practice** in the
**secondary
classroom**

Tilly Mortimore and Jane Dupree

First published in 2008 by Learning Matters Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from Learning Matters.

© 2008 Learning Matters Ltd

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978 1 84445 128 9

The rights of Tilly Mortimore and Jane Dupree to be identified as authors of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Cover design by Topics.

Text design by Code 5 Design Associates Ltd.

Project management by Deer Park Productions, Tavistock

Typeset by PDQ Typesetting, Newcastle under Lyme

Printed and bound by Cromwell Press Ltd, Trowbridge, Wiltshire

Learning Matters Ltd

33 Southernhay East

Exeter EX1 1NX

Tel: 01392 215560

info@learningmatters.co.uk

www.learningmatters.co.uk

Contents

The Authors	vii
Introduction	1
Part 1: What is dyslexia?	
1 Definitions and theories. What is dyslexia?	5
2 Behaviours – what might you notice?	16
3 How might you ‘measure’ dyslexia?	29
Part 2: The role of the teacher	
4 The dyslexia-friendly classroom	38
5 The dyslexic reader and writer and the secondary curriculum	52
6 Personalising the teaching and learning environment across the curriculum	64
7 Working with number and mathematics	79
8 Study skills	91
Part 3: Spreading the load	
9 Working as a team	103
10 Managing behaviour	114
11 The dyslexia-friendly school	124

Appendix 1: Definitions of dyslexia – which one would you choose?	130
Appendix 2: Checking readability of a text using Word	133
Appendix 3: One example of a time line	134
Appendix 4: Situation, Problem, Solution, Outcome (SPSO)	135
Appendix 5: The BUG technique	136
Appendix 6: Conflict prevention chart	137
Appendix 7: Dyslexia-friendly schools	138
References	140
Index	145

The Authors

Tilly Mortimore

Tilly Mortimore is a senior lecturer in Education Studies in the School of Education, Bath Spa University. She taught English and drama in a comprehensive school before setting up English departments in specialist schools for dyslexic learners. She has worked individually with dyslexic students of all ages and provided consultancy support and training for teachers on dyslexia, literacy and learning style in a range of international educational settings including schools and colleges. She completed a PhD and joined the School of Education at Southampton University to lecture on PG MSc courses in dyslexia and inclusion for teacher education. She has published *Dyslexia and learning style: A practitioner's handbook* and articles on dyslexia, learning style, inclusion and support services. She researches in dyslexia, inclusion and vulnerable learners.

Jane Dupree

Jane Dupree is an education consultant who is an experienced trainer and practitioner in the development of literacy skills, thinking skills and study skills. Jane has worked with a wide range of schools delivering in-service training as well as developing programmes for Summer Literacy Schools. She is currently working as a consultant with Dyslexia Action, having previously worked as course director and tutor for those studying for the Post Graduate Diploma in Dyslexia at Masters Level. Jane was responsible for the development of the first Dyslexia Unit within Essex Local Authority for secondary school students, a fully inclusive and successful unit. In 2005 Jane published a practical study skills book, *Help students improve their study skills*. She was part of the development team for the new 6th edition of the highly-respected teaching manual *Alpha to omega* by Bevé Hornsby, published in January 2007. She contributed to the Channel 4 Dyslexia Awareness Week and has written articles for *Dyslexia Contact* on Mind Mapping. In addition, she tutors students using a range of programmes, both from her base in Suffolk and more recently nationwide using interactive video tuition over the internet, as presented in her paper at the 2008 International British Dyslexia Association Conference.

Jane Dupree runs accredited study skills courses using on line learning through her website www.brainwaveseducation.com

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

This book aims to help you to ensure that your classroom and your institution offer the best environment and support for vulnerable learners, such as people with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)/dyslexia. It will offer support in the development of the understanding and skill which will help you to provide strategies appropriate for learners with a range of learning disabilities. However, it is important to appreciate the broader context and climate within which you develop your practice. What is the current understanding of SpLD/dyslexia, disability and inclusion and how does this influence educational practice?

Disability and inclusion

Disability has been defined in Article 14 of the Human Rights Act 1998 as

a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse impact on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

People with dyslexia or SpLD are thus considered to have a disability. For centuries throughout the Western world, disability had been placed within a 'medical' framework which depicted it as rooted in the individual's personal biological or cognitive impairments and placed the emphasis upon personal tragedy, with diagnosis by experts and specialised separate facilities. People with disabilities were seen as dependent and different from the 'norm'. The latter years of the twentieth century witnessed radical changes in attitudes towards disability and an attack upon this medical model of disability which was seen as oppressing people with disabilities in that it involved relations of dominance and absence of choice, encouraged discrimination and excluded people from the material benefits of education and society (Barton, 1996).

This challenge, driven by people with disabilities, arose out of the same human rights agenda that achieved equal opportunities for women and ethnic groups in the late twentieth century (Oliver, 1990). It led to the development of a new model of disability, termed the 'social' model, which takes the focus away from the disability, removes the 'problem' from the impaired individual and locates it firmly within the ways in which society establishes physical and conceptual barriers which oppress people with disabilities. This social model has radically changed the way in which we expect to work with a range of vulnerable learners and informs much of the thinking in this book. Until comparatively recently, much of the thinking about SpLD/dyslexia arose from the medical model which suggested that responsibility lay with the individual him or herself and with the 'experts' who provided diagnoses and remedies. The social model, however, suggests that we are all responsible for identifying and removing the barriers our classrooms and systems might set in the dyslexic student's pathway, and this spirit informs the concept and development of the inclusive classroom and the 'dyslexia-friendly school' (Mackay, 2004).

The Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 aimed to reduce the social exclusion linked with disability, to ensure social fairness and equal shares for all in the country's resources. The application of the Act to education in 2001 (Special Education Needs and Disability Act –

SENDA) established the right of all students to be educated together in mainstream schools. Inclusion therefore refers to being in an ordinary school with other students following the same curriculum at the same time, in the same classroom, with the full acceptance of everybody involved in the process, and in a way that makes the student feel no different from other students. It is not an easy option. It is not simply a matter of locating a child in a mainstream school and expecting him or her to change and adapt to school life. It is a radical concept which demands we rethink the ways in which the life of the school, teaching and the curriculum is organised and delivered, to create suitable learning support for the whole student population. It affects everyone in the school.

How has inclusion affected teachers?

You are probably aware that inclusion has caused controversy among many groups including parents, policy makers, teachers and learners (Nind, 2005). There is considerable anxiety amongst mainstream classroom teachers, many of whom feel ill-equipped to take on the responsibility of identification and the provision of appropriate support for individuals with specific learning difficulties. Many PGCE students feel anxious that they have received minimal training in special needs. There is, however, one way in which the move from a medical to a social model of disability may help to reduce this fear. The social model of disability emphasises the identification and removal of barriers to learning rather than focusing upon deficits within an individual. Chasty (1985) stated 'If they don't learn the way we teach them, we must teach them the way they learn', and this encourages us to consider how we might identify and adjust those approaches and environments which might cause learners with SpLD/dyslexia to fail. Nind (2005) has suggested that we must move away from a model which focuses upon the 'special' student's need for diagnoses and individualised programmes towards ways of adapting our instructional goals, arrangements, lesson formats, materials, delivery style and classroom environment to help the vulnerable learner to participate successfully. This way our classrooms can become inclusive and the risk of failure be reduced.

Nind suggests that inclusion is a journey and we are all at different stages along the way. Booth and Ainscow published an Index for inclusion (2002) which stresses the need for an inclusive culture – a culture where all are welcome, where staff, students and carers collaborate with each other and where differences are acknowledged and respected. Does this mean that there will be no need for assessment or individualised programmes? This would have theoretical, strategic and financial implications and is contested by those advocates of dyslexia-friendly schools such as Reid (2005) and MacKay (2004), who point out that individual provision for particular learners will remain appropriate. One requirement for gaining dyslexia-friendly school status is the existence on the staff of appropriately trained people who can assess individuals and deliver programmes. This is not, however, the role of the newly qualified teacher.

Establishing a dyslexia-friendly inclusive environment

The aim of this book is to develop your understanding of the strengths and weaknesses experienced by learners with SpLD/dyslexia and the theory that underpins both the suggested dyslexic 'profile' and the types of strategies that might help these learners. It will suggest ways in which you, as a non-specialist subject teacher, can enable dyslexic

learners to succeed within your mainstream classroom without placing too heavy a burden upon yourself and to show you how you can introduce these practical measures right from the start of your teaching career. It will take you through a number of activities designed to help you understand and reflect upon the implications of your practice upon everyone within your classroom. Do take the time to share these activities with your colleagues and fellow students – this will help to spread awareness and inclusive attitudes which will contribute to the dyslexia-friendly environment.

With an estimated incidence of between 4 and 10% in the population (Singleton, 1999), dyslexia is arguably one of the most common learning differences that you are likely to encounter in your classroom and therefore it is vital that you should know how to support these learners. The first part of the book explores definitions and theories of SpLD/dyslexia and how these are expressed in behaviours and learning needs. The second part explores the nature of the inclusive classroom, ways in which teachers can develop inclusive teaching practices and the implications for supporting dyslexic learners in the development of appropriate skills across the curriculum. The final part goes beyond the classroom to examine how the school team can co-operate to ensure that the dyslexic learner is supported in a holistic and consistent way.

The Professional Standards

The **Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status** include three areas:

1. *Professional attributes* – defined as the attitude, relationships and commitment to practice and development expected of anyone qualifying to be a teacher.
2. *Professional knowledge and understanding* – defined as the authoritative knowledge of the subjects being taught, and understanding of the ways in which the full range of learners should be managed, monitored and assessed.
3. *Professional skills* – defined as the skills involved in planning, delivering, managing and monitoring the development of the whole learner and collaborating with others to ensure a productive learning environment.

The **Core Professional Standards** provide a framework for a teacher's career and clarify how it might progress through maintaining and building on existing professional attributes, knowledge and skills. All the standards are underpinned by the five key outcomes for children and young people identified in *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003) and the six areas of the Common Core of skills and knowledge for the children's workforce.

This book aims to support you through the progression from teaching practice to the gaining of Qualified Teacher Status and then through the Induction period, prior to achieving the standards underpinning Core status. As you read, you will realise that all the approaches described relate to many of the standards. The following standards are addressed consistently throughout the book.

Qualified Teacher Status:

Q1, Q3a, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q9, Q14, Q19, Q21b, Q23, Q25, Q28, Q29.

Introduction

Core:

C1, C3, C4, C5, C6, C9, C14, C19, C27, C28, C29, C30, C31,
(see www.tda.gov.uk/standards)

However, the opening of each chapter will guide you in your understanding of the specific Standards that it covers.

PART 1

WHAT IS DYSLEXIA?

1

Definitions and theories. What is dyslexia?

Chapter objectives

By the end of this chapter you should:

- **have begun to develop a reflexive approach to your activities within the classroom;**
- **be able to justify your choice of the most appropriate approaches for the dyslexia-friendly classroom;**
- **be provided with some research-based answers to these questions.**
 - **What is dyslexia?**
 - **What causes dyslexia?**
 - **How might knowledge gained from research affect what I do in my classroom?**

This chapter addresses the following Professional Standards for QTS and Core:

Q18, C18

Introduction

Most experienced – or hardened – teachers will admit, when pressed, that they struggled through their teaching placement, and often the first year of teaching, living only to sleep and wonder if things would ever get any easier. Luckily for teachers, and for our children, they usually do. Teachers survive and develop skills and strategies which become so automatic that, if asked, they often cannot tell you exactly why their classrooms tick over successfully and how they have managed to avoid conflicts, build relationships and help their students to enjoy their learning. During the first years of the job, however, these skills and strategies need to be spelled out, reflected upon and consciously put into practice. It is challenging enough for a new teacher to deal with the needs of average learners – it is often daunting indeed when you realise that you are also likely to be responsible for the progress and fate of learners with differences such as SpLD/dyslexia and that this responsibility is enshrined within the disability legislation as expressed by the Disability Discrimination Act and the Code of Practice (2001). Before you start to panic, think about how much you know already.

REFLECTIVE TASK

Think about your existing knowledge of SpLD/dyslexia and make a list of your most pressing unanswered questions.

A group of trainee teachers undertaking a special interest study on SpLD/dyslexia came up with the following. No doubt they bear some resemblance to your queries.

Commonly-asked questions about SpLD/dyslexia

- What is dyslexia?
- What causes dyslexia?
- Is dyslexia a middle-class myth?
- How might I spot a learner with dyslexia?
- How many students with dyslexia might I come across in a class?
- How will dyslexia affect my subject?
- How does dyslexia affect a student's behaviour?
- Will I have to teach in a different way?

Dyslexia – controversies and disagreements

You will no doubt be aware that dyslexia is a hotly contested topic. Estimates of incidence in the general population vary from one child in ten (Dyslexia Action, 2007) to the suggestion that dyslexia exists purely as a middle-class myth. There is disagreement over definitions to the extent that Rice and Brooks's (2004) review of dyslexia in adults identified over 70 definitions in current use. There was also controversy over whether the term *specific learning difficulties* or *dyslexia* should be used to describe the pattern of learning differences seen to characterise the syndrome. Dyslexia was the first of the specific learning difficulties to be recognised and the term *specific learning difficulty* historically was often used instead of *dyslexia*. Local Authorities (LAs) have adopted a range of different definitions and, in some LAs, you will still find a reluctance to use terms such as dyslexia, with the more generic term of *SpLD* written on Statements of Special Educational Need (see Chapter 9). However, dyslexia is only one of several specific learning difficulties, with overlapping behavioural characteristics and profiles of strengths and weaknesses that differ. These include dyspraxia and dyscalculia. Since they often present together in a learner, SpLDs are said to be comorbid, that is they can occur together (Deponio, 2004). Chapter 7 provides more information about these.

Historical references to SpLD/dyslexia date from the seventeenth century. The earliest reference to intelligent learners with surprising difficulties in literacy came in 1672 from Thomas Willis, a tutor of young gentlemen (Ott, 1997). In 1877 a German physician, Kussmaul, coined the term 'word-blindness' (Critchley, 1970) and by 1896 the term 'congenital dyslexia' had appeared in a paper published in the *Lancet* by Pringle-Morgan. This term was linked with Percy F, an exceptionally talented 14 year old mathematician who experienced huge difficulties with reading and writing. James Kerr, Medical Officer of Health in Bradford, was simultaneously writing about the children he observed with difficulties in reading and writing but no other cognitive deficits (Pumfrey and Reason, 1991). These two papers laid the foundation for the next one hundred years of research and controversy and set the pattern for the close involvement of the medical world alongside teachers and psychologists. The

British Dyslexia Association and Dyslexia Institute were founded in 1972 and the later years of the twentieth century saw the establishment both of university research departments focusing upon SpLD/dyslexia and a network of Dyslexia Associations around the UK. This did not, however, prevent Professor Julian Elliott from proclaiming the death of dyslexia in 2005. The resulting furore would indicate that this was premature. Why is there so much controversy and disagreement?

There are at least four answers to this.

- It cannot be disputed that we have become an increasingly literacy-based society and that difficulties in this area exclude people from work opportunities and make it more likely that they will suffer from some of the factors associated with poverty. The acquiring of literacy has thus become central to economic survival.
- Another reason (explored further in Chapter 9) is that so much emotion is invested in a 'diagnosis' of dyslexia – failure to learn is highly charged for the learner, the family and the school.
- Another answer is tied in with finance – the notion that a diagnosis of SpLD/dyslexia will open the door to extra support or equipment that is not available to learners with a general learning difficulty. Specialists offer expensive 'cures'. Tensions between a prospective provider attempting to reduce costs and the family of a child threatening to fall through the educational net are almost inevitable.
- Even if it is accepted that a condition which can be defined as 'dyslexia' exists, there is currently no firm consensus as to the underlying causes and there remain areas of disagreement between the researchers within the field. Different causal theories underpin different patterns of behaviour and this must be reflected in differences in definitions of the condition.

How can these dilemmas be resolved for practical classroom teachers? It is highly unlikely, at this stage in your career, that you will be expected to get involved in 'diagnosing' dyslexia – you are not qualified to do so and you should refer any suggestions of this type to the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) and to your mentor. You will however have two priorities. It is your role to be aware of the types of learning profile associated with dyslexic differences so that you can spot these students, support them appropriately, and refer them on to the SENCo for advice or, if needed, further specialist assessment. You will also want to offer the best possible support for individual vulnerable learners to enable them to make the most of their time in school, to utilise their areas of strength to compensate for the things they find hard and to prevent them from disrupting your classroom. To enable you to do both these things – to identify and support learners with dyslexic type differences – you need to clarify your understanding of the following things.

- How will you define SpLD/ dyslexia?
- What are the learning differences that accompany SpLD/dyslexia?
- What are the casual theories underpinning SpLD/dyslexia?

Defining dyslexia

The SpLD/ dyslexia world involves a broad range of stakeholders – there are learners with dyslexia, families, teachers, school governors, educational psychologists, specialist therapists, researchers, educational policy makers and academics. Each has his or her own agenda, context and needs. This will influence the type of definition each adopts. You are currently a mainstream secondary school teacher. Your chosen definition will need to enable you to focus upon a particular learning profile and to adjust your activities and classroom to