

# Chapter 1

## Defining Dyslexia

This chapter will:

- discuss the purpose of a definition for dyslexia;
- provide pointers to indicate the current breadth of research in the area of dyslexia, which will be followed up in Chapter 2;
- examine the factors that influence the development of a working definition of dyslexia;
- look at the implications of DSM-5 for the use of the term 'dyslexia';
- highlight the impact of different perspectives and agendas in developing an operational definition for dyslexia;
- provide a focus on the area of positive dyslexia, looking at what they *can* do, not what they can't do.

As indicated in the last point above, it is important to focus on the positive aspects of dyslexia. One of the earliest pioneers in this area was Tom West, whose landmark book *In the Mind's Eye* (1997) provided a launch pad for a new wave of research into the positive aspects of dyslexia. Perhaps one of the more refreshing statements regarding the potential attributes of people with dyslexia is made by West himself when he says: 'it is becoming increasingly clear [that much of the success attributed to people with dyslexia<sup>1</sup>] is because of the dyslexia not in spite of it' (West, 2014, p.78). West goes on to say that for years now we 'have too often focused on fixing the problems—and have totally ignored the development of talents' (p.87).

Dyslexia is often seen as a hidden disability and the estimates from a range of sources suggest that 10–15% of the population have dyslexia and around 4–5% severely.

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<sup>1</sup> Author's insertion.

It is important to be clear when defining dyslexia; and a working definition must take the positive and creative aspects into account. Too often definitions can be general, vague and essentially serve little purpose. They can also be misinterpreted and misused. Definitions need to be contextualised so they are relevant to the teaching and learning context. This chapter will provide clarification on the use of definitions and highlight the need to consider a working definition for dyslexia.

## **Defining Dyslexia**

The questions one needs to ask are—do we really need to define dyslexia and can we really encapsulate the features and the feelings that accompany dyslexia in a single statement? These points can be considered when one asks people with dyslexia questions such as ‘what is dyslexia?’ and ‘what does it mean to you?’ As part of the research for this book I asked some children and adults those questions! There was a considerable range of responses. Some of the responses are shown below.

‘A problem transferring my knowledge into written work.’

‘For me it is frustration at not being able to complete tasks on time.’

‘Being different from everyone else.’

‘Wanting to read books but not getting past the first page.’

‘Having a bad memory and being so disorganised.’

‘Feeling different from everyone else.’

‘Inconsistency in my work—some days I get it right and other days I get the same thing wrong.’

‘I find it difficult to listen to the teacher for more than a few minutes.’

The following comment came from a teacher who is dyslexic.

I do not define dyslexia as a bad aspect of my life, I would not be the person I am today if I did not have dyslexia as a part of my genetic and biological makeup. My characteristics of dyslexia have moulded my personality and the experiences and choices I have made in my life, for the good and for the bad. The negative aspects of dyslexia for me is the frustration, confusion and embarrassment I feel when I am involved with tasks which will highlight my difficulties—those which involve memory recall, sequencing, numbers and spelling. I will forget how to do things or misinterpret the instructions, particularly if they were given recently and quickly. The difficulties in being able to remember numbers is real and can cause problems, for example I do not know my parents’, partner’s or children’s telephone numbers. I also find it very difficult to find my way around the alphabet and this affects me on a daily basis. However, it is important to try and keep dyslexia in perspective and see the positive effect it can have on my life. I feel I can empathise with my pupils and their parents/carers. It helps me to keep working to create accessible teaching resources and approaches; perhaps it feeds my creativity and the speed of ideas, planning and focus which I have. These

benefits outweigh the negative aspects because they have enabled me to create effective strategies which help me to carry out the vast majority of tasks and responsibilities I have. Despite the embarrassment dyslexia can and does cause me, I function quite well in this society. But I appreciate that I am fortunate and have opportunities and support which others may not.

Reading through these statements one is struck by the emotional feelings attached to them—and that is the problem with a definition of dyslexia: it provides a definitive and descriptive response to what for many can be an area of emotional stress and personal conflict. Yet for education and research purposes a definition is necessary: it is necessary to assist in developing identification and diagnostic criteria and to inform intervention. Definitions can help to provide a label. For many parents a label is necessary as it can help to kickstart the support process. For adults with dyslexia it can help them develop self-knowledge and eventually coping strategies. For teachers it can provide explanations as to why the child may not be responding to the intervention provided. A definition therefore can be an important catalyst in this process. This is why it is important to emphasise the positive aspects of dyslexia. A good source of information is the Dyslexia Advantage website (<http://community.dyslexicadvantage.org>).

This website highlights why it is important to understand the advantages of dyslexia and helps children and adults gain personal insights into their own learning traits, thereby providing the means for them to become independent, more insightful and more successful learners.

The problem, however, lies in the lack of a universally accepted definition of dyslexia. The recent revision of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM-5) (American Psychological Association, 2013) is unlikely to help the cause much as 'specific learning disorder' is now the generic term to be used for reading, writing and mathematical difficulties. There are certainly sub-categories, but the authors of the DSM see the generic term as a positive aspect and believe that it is less restrictive and less limiting than previously. DSM-5 indicates that the diagnosis requires persistent difficulties in reading, writing, arithmetic or mathematical reasoning skills during the formal years of schooling. Symptoms may include inaccurate or slow and effortful reading, poor written expression that lacks clarity, difficulties remembering number facts or inaccurate mathematical reasoning.

A very crucial comment is made in the factsheet that accompanies DSM-5 when it indicates that the DSM-5 Neurodevelopmental Work Group concluded that the many definitions of dyslexia and dyscalculia meant those terms would not be useful as disorder names or in the diagnostic criteria.

It is true there are many different definitions of dyslexia, but there are many dimensions to dyslexia—dyslexia is not represented by a single entity (or caused by a single gene). Dyslexia is multifaceted and that can explain why a single, universally accepted definition has not yet been achieved. It can be argued, however, there is some agreement on the constellation of factors that can contribute to dyslexia, but controversy surrounds the respective weighting of these factors.

For example, the range of factors that can be associated with dyslexia includes the following:

- Structural and functional brain-related factors (Galaburda and Rosen, 2001; Hynd et al., 1995).
- Genetic factors affecting the developmental migration of magnocells in utero and influencing their subsequent function (Stein, 2008).
- Genetic correlations (Gilger, 2008).
- Procedural timing of sequences in task accomplishment (Fawcett and Nicolson, 2008).
- Processing speed (Wolf and Bowers, 2000).
- Inter-hemisphere transfer (Breznitz, 2008).
- Difficulty in automatising skills (Fawcett and Nicolson, 1992).
- Working memory difficulties (Jeffries and Everatt, 2004).
- Phonological deficit (Snowling, 2000).
- Language features—orthographic transparency (Wimmer, 1993; Share, 2008; Everatt and Elbeheri, 2008).
- Comorbidity between learning disabilities (Bishop and Snowling, 2004; Visser, 2003).
- Literacy achievement levels and the role of IQ in diagnosis (Siegel and Lipka, 2008; Joshi and Aaron, 2008; Wagner, 2008).
- Positive skills (West, 2014; Nicolson et al., 2012; Nicolson, 2014).

These points above illustrate the diversity found among the dyslexic population and are some of the factors that can influence our understanding of dyslexia. Each can have an impact on how dyslexia is perceived and how assessment and intervention are portrayed.

## Purpose of Definitions

Definitions of dyslexia, particularly those used by education authorities, school districts, voluntary organisations and associations are abundant, and some will be shown here. Often they serve a particular purpose and it is possible to categorise the type of function they serve.

- *Allocation*—Used to allocate resources and develop provision, these definitions can focus on discrepancies and provide discrepancy criteria in order that those who need additional support and special provision can be readily identified. The controversial issue may arise with children who have very high ability and whose reading or writing is in the average range. Clearly they are underperforming and need additional support, but because they are not failing in reading they may be overlooked. It is crucial, therefore, that a full assessment is administered and takes in the whole picture, looking at the child's complete profile.

- *Explanation*—Explain to teachers and professionals the key points for intervention and highlight the child's strengths and weaknesses. These definitions may have a list of statements and characteristics and can merge into operational or working definitions, which provide explanations of the difficulty and how it can impact on practice. Ideally this should be contextualised for the school, or the area, and utilise the available resources provided by the education authority.
- *Understanding*—Help parents and teachers (and indeed the person with dyslexia) understand what it is and how it may impact on their learning. It is difficult for a definition to actually do this. Often parents want to know the cause of a difficulty as this helps them more fully understand the extent of the problem and how it might be tackled. Since it is difficult to encapsulate this in a definition it is advisable to spend time with parents or the person who has been identified explaining exactly how dyslexia can impact on their child's learning. This is very important as one of the crucial aspects of dealing with dyslexia is the necessity for harmonious and effective links between home and school.
- *Research*—A research definition can help to provide a discrete and well-defined sample for researchers. This might include a set of criteria that is measurable, such as IQ scores and achievement scores.
- *Statement definitions*—These are becoming quite common where organisations have their own definition almost as a statement or a mark of status. Increasingly, organisations are seeking to have their own definition of dyslexia. This might be called a statement definition, which is developed and contextualised by the organisation, whether it is a voluntary body, parent group or an education authority.

## **How Should We Define Dyslexia?**

A number of definitions will be shown below—they each have some commonalities but there can also be a difference in the emphasis placed on different characteristics. For example, some will mention neurological factors, others focus on educational characteristics and some will make reference to identification criteria.

The definition that has been developed by the author of this book is shown below.

Dyslexia is a processing difference, often characterised by difficulties in literacy acquisition affecting reading, writing and spelling. It can also have an impact on cognitive processes such as memory, speed of processing, time management, coordination and automaticity. There may be visual and/or phonological challenges and there are usually some discrepancies in educational performances.

It is important to recognise the strengths, which can also form part of a dyslexic profile, and people with dyslexia may need support to be able to utilise these strengths.

There will invariably be individual differences and individual variation and it is therefore important to consider individual learning preferences as well as the education and work context when planning and implementing intervention and accommodations.

The main points in this definition are:

- *Processing difference*—This can highlight the differences among individuals and the need to use multi-sensory intervention strategies and to monitor their progress when they are engaged in tasks—particularly lengthier tasks.
- *Difficulties in literacy acquisition*—This is one of the key areas as it is usually these difficulties that first alert the teacher or the parent. It is important to note that this can take the form of difficulties with decoding (reading), encoding (spelling) and the production of written output (expressive writing).
- *Cognitive processes*—Cognition means learning and processing any type of information and it is this that can be challenging for students with dyslexia. Cognition refers to how information is processed and how this affects retention, processing speed, the ability to transfer information, to utilise prior learning and to eventually be able to develop automaticity in that skill, whether it be reading or writing. Effective teaching and a perceptive teacher can have an important impact in recognising and helping to deal with cognitive issues. That is why it is important to identify the nature of the learning issues the child experiences. In the UK, the British Psychological Association (BPS) definition (see below) has been widely used as a baseline for intervention. It focuses specifically on a failure to read and spell single words despite appropriate teaching (British Psychological Society, 1999a). It is now widely accepted that this definition is too narrow and does not take into account the cognitive and processing challenges that can be experienced by children with dyslexia. The Rose Report on dyslexia teaching (Rose, 2009) recognised this and widened its scope by proposing a working definition that takes into account a number of other characteristics, such as verbal memory and processing speed.
- *Discrepancies in educational performances*—This is often one of the most obvious indicators of dyslexia. There can be a difference between reasoning abilities (oral verbal comprehension or visual/perceptual reasoning) and processing performances, i.e. working memory and processing speed. This means that children and adults with dyslexia can solve problems and can reason and understand information, but may have difficulty in processing the information and accessing the information to help them solve current and future problems. For example, they may need more time to reread and even discuss the new information before effectively processing it.
- *Individual differences*—It is important to recognise that students with dyslexia are individuals and their individual learning preferences and differences need to be acknowledged. Not all children and adults with dyslexia will have the same profile although they may meet the criteria for dyslexia.
- *Strengths*—As indicated earlier in this chapter, recognising the strengths of a dyslexic is essential, not only in terms of boosting the child's self-esteem but also to

identify the most appropriate strategies that can be used by the teacher and the parents. Children will be more motivated if new material is initially presented to them through their stronger areas. Usually this will be the visual or kinaesthetic modalities. This means they need to see and experience the new learning.

- *Education and work context*—Some educational and work contexts can highlight the person's dyslexic traits while others can minimise these traits. For example, if a dyslexic person is attempting to locate information in a library they may have difficulty in accessing an index, finding the appropriate book and locating the information in that book. Without guidance this kind of task can be challenging for students with dyslexia. Other tasks such as those that involve some degree of creativity or visual processing may be easier. Getting the task and the environment right for learning is highly important for the person with dyslexia. It is important, therefore, to ask yourself questions about the task before presenting it to the child. In other words, there is a possibility the child may need more information to be able to respond to the task.

## Definitions

What do definitions actually do?

- Provide some guidance to teachers and researchers.
- Provide information on the nature of the child's challenges.
- Provide pointers for intervention.
- Develop an awareness of dyslexia.

**Box 1.1** What do definitions do?

**But** what *might* definitions do?

- Cause confusion because of the variation.
- Generalise a difficulty that in fact can be very individual.
- Mislead the public and practitioners.
- Provide little guidance for assessment or intervention.

**Box 1.2** What might definitions do?

Reid-Lyon (1995) suggests that the lack of an appropriate definition has had an impact on research in dyslexia and this has resulted in a reliance on exclusionary criteria and a lack of clear selection criteria for the sample being studied. He suggests that a definition must be governed by a theoretical view supported by substantial research and clinical evidence. This should be based on 'constructs' that can be

measured directly and consistently, and should provide clear indications of how to identify whether a person is dyslexic. The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) definition was developed from this premise.

The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) definition is as follows:

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

(Adopted by the Board of Directors, 12 November 2002)  
(<http://www.interdys.org/FactSheets.htm>)

**Box 1.3** IDA definition

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. (<http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/whatisdyslexia.html> 2008)

**Box 1.4** BDA definition

The main thrust of the BDA's work, however, can be seen in the Dyslexia Friendly campaigns and in monitoring and accrediting teacher training programmes. They recognise that they are in the position to set the standards for and accredit dyslexia knowledge and professional expertise and this is usually done through the BDA Accreditation Board (AB). The board sets the criteria for and evaluates proposals for courses wishing to be accredited by the BDA. The highest accreditation provided by the BDA is AMBDA. This acknowledges the holder's expertise in both theory and practice (teaching/tutoring). The UK Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) approves AMBDA: this means that it is a recognised Level 7 (postgraduate)

qualification giving the holder the right to assess, diagnose and make recommendations for provisions for external examinations (Exam Access Arrangements). Holders of AMBDA may be admitted onto the BDA's list of specialist teachers/tutors and assessors, and are also eligible for an Assessment Practising Certificate and/or Teaching Practising Certificate. It should be noted that from September 2015, Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) was no longer a requirement for AMBDA.

Dyslexia is manifested in a continuum of specific learning difficulties related to the acquisition of basic skills in reading, spelling, and/or writing, such difficulties being unexpected in relation to an individual's other abilities and educational experiences. Dyslexia can be described at the neurological, cognitive and behavioural levels. It is typically characterised by inefficient information processing, including difficulties in phonological processing, working memory, rapid naming, and automaticity of basic skills. Difficulties in organisation, sequencing and motor skills may also be present.

(Task Force on Dyslexia in Republic of Ireland, 2001, p.28)

**Box 1.6** Task Force on Dyslexia in Republic of Ireland definition

In Scotland the Scottish government has accepted the following definition:

Dyslexia can be described as a continuum of difficulties in learning to read, write and/or spell, which persist despite the provision of appropriate learning opportunities. These difficulties often do not reflect an individual's cognitive abilities and may not be typical of performance in other areas. (The Dyslexia Trail, 2014; [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/MakingSenseDyslexiaLearningTrail\\_tcm4-837345.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/MakingSenseDyslexiaLearningTrail_tcm4-837345.pdf))

**Box 1.7** Scottish government definition

Four points seem to emerge from the definitions above; these are:

1. a recognition that dyslexia is developmental;
2. an understanding that the central characteristics relate to literacy;
3. an appreciation that different and special teaching and learning approaches are necessary;
4. an acknowledgement that there can be additional secondary factors associated with dyslexia.

Definitions can differ in how they phrase these points and much of that depends on the purpose of the definition. One of the important points, however, is the need

to understand that it is crucial for education authorities to develop an operational definition that can be accessed and understood by teachers and parents.

An operational definition should:

1. provide a statement on dyslexia;
2. indicate precisely the identification criteria;
3. indicate how these criteria will be used, and by whom;
4. describe the kinds of challenges the students will experience at different stages of schooling and in different areas of the curriculum;
5. indicate the types of support that will be necessary;
6. provide pointers to resources, books, programmes, approaches and technology that may be appropriate;
7. clearly define the roles of teachers, teaching assistants, management and support/resource teachers in carrying out interventions;
8. indicate the role that parents can/will play in the process of identification and support;
9. discuss the implications for preparing the student for formal examinations and the type of additional supports and accommodations that can be made available to the student;
10. discuss the implications of curricular choice and curricular access and show how the school can accommodate the student's learning needs;
11. indicate the different levels of training the staff will require and show how these can be achieved;
12. indicate the long-term post-school study and career opportunities and show how the school will ensure that appropriate support and information are provided to the student and his or her parents.

It is feasible that these points can be developed and integrated into a policy for dyslexia. Many of these points can be seen in the Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland Task Group and Task Force documents (see [www.deni.gov.uk](http://www.deni.gov.uk)).

Crombie (2002a) developed a definition that focuses not on deficits but on accommodations:

Dyslexia is a difficulty with literacy which results in a person requiring a set of accommodations to be made to enable them to demonstrate their abilities. Accommodations can be defined as a set of enabling arrangements that are put in place to ensure that the dyslexic person can demonstrate their strengths and abilities and show attainment. (Crombie, 2002a, as cited in Clark, 2003, p.9)

This type of definition can lead to identifying the barriers to learning in both policy and practice that can have some impact on the need to develop accommodations. The strength of this approach is that it is positive, focuses on teaching and learning and can be set within the classroom context.

## **Barriers to Implementing Policy**

Some of the barriers that could prevent policies from being fully implemented are shown below:

- concern over numbers of children requiring support;
- the need for additional training exceeding budgetary provision;
- reluctance to label too early;
- lack of awareness that results in late identification;
- dyslexia is only one of a range of the specific learning difficulties that need to be catered for in an inclusionary learning environment;
- lack of clarity on the nature and concept of dyslexia;
- ‘the “waiting for an assessment” approach among some teachers is not helpful—they should be able to use their skills and experiences to intervene appropriately even if an assessment has not been conducted.’

This last point is of crucial importance. Teachers are at the front line and they have some responsibility for identification, and early identification in particular, but they can only do this successfully if they have sufficient training and opportunities to follow this up. This is important as early identification is usually a key factor in an operational definition and overall policy strategy.

## **Rose Review and Dyslexia**

The area of dyslexia has been the subject of government investigations and initiatives and these have certainly increased during the past decade. The ministerial statement from the UK government in May 2008 indicated that this is because there is now a significant body of scientific research substantiating the various neurological and cognitive components of dyslexia and this can indicate that special consideration is needed for intervention. This point has not escaped many of the voluntary and professional organisations on dyslexia, who collaborated to provide a joint response to the UK government on the Rose Review. To encourage schools’ development of best practice in improving outcomes for children with dyslexia, the government provided funding of around £1 million over three years to the ‘No to Failure’ project, which they indicated is a ‘trailblazing’ initiative, and additionally they will be evaluating the impact of specialist training for teachers and specialist tuition for children with dyslexia in some schools in three local authority areas. Additionally, they have provided substantial funding to the BDA and Dyslexia Action to run further Partnership for Literacy pilots and develop resources for parents and teachers. It is important to note the response

to this statement from the voluntary and professional organisations. They indicated that:

our organisations strongly believe that the country should be implementing a simple system where each school would have one teacher trained as a dyslexia/SpLD specialist who can recognise and support children with dyslexia/SpLD. This expertise is already widely available from dyslexia centres, specialist teachers and a number of independent schools who have for many years been providing effective support for dyslexic children in reading, writing, maths, and concentration. Each review and pilot merely adds to the delay in implementing the solution. They have been getting it right for years. We want to see this in all schools in the public sector.

So although there is now more acceptance of the concept of dyslexia there is still some disagreement and some anxiety that appropriate assessment and intervention procedures are not in place.

### **Education for Learners with Dyslexia**

‘Education for Learners with Dyslexia’ is the title of a report published in Scotland (HMIE, 2008) following a lengthy inspection of provision for dyslexia by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE). Over the period 2007–2008, the Inspectorate undertook a broad evaluation of provision for children, young people and adults with dyslexia in Scotland. The investigation identified the range and quality of provision in Scotland across all sectors. The Inspectors visited a number of pre-school centres, primary, secondary, independent and special schools, Scotland’s colleges and faculties of education in Scottish universities. The key issues raised in the survey of education authorities included:

- the views held and description of dyslexia used by education authorities;
- the range of provision, including early intervention schemes, specialist units and resources, and specialist teachers;
- teaching approaches, programmes and technological support used across the authority;
- opportunities for staff to undertake training;
- professional development related to dyslexia;
- the number of teaching staff with specialist qualifications.

The investigation found that the majority of education authorities adopted a range of approaches, which reflected a shared understanding of the way young people learn. The learning and teaching approaches used by most authorities include:

- metacognitive approaches;
- small group and one-to-one teaching;

- reciprocal teaching;
- scaffolding;
- reading recovery;
- synthetic phonics;
- structured phonics programmes.

The report indicated that parents' involvement in their children's review of progress was a particularly strong point of the current practices. Other areas that were considered strengths included:

- the knowledge and approachability of most support for learning staff in linking with parents and providing appropriate curriculum support;
- learning strategies that helped pupils to overcome difficulties independently.

The report, however, recognised there were a number of areas for development. These included:

- involving parents and young people in setting targets in Individual Education Plans (IEPs);
- delays in obtaining an assessment of children who may have dyslexia;
- delays in providing the right support for children with dyslexia;
- raising awareness among parents of difficulties associated with dyslexia and helpful support strategies.

Staff views about how teacher-education institutions could develop their contribution to preparing teachers to meet the needs of pupils with dyslexia included more time needing to be spent on teaching students about how to teach reading. It was interesting to note that most newly qualified teachers reported that they did not have sufficient awareness of the issues relating to dyslexia or a secure grasp of methodology and strategies that could be used to teach literacy and numeracy skills to all children. It is also interesting to appreciate the view that was expressed in the report that the lack of consensus across universities about what dyslexia is has to be seen as an area for development. It is crucial that there is uniformity and consensus in this aspect as it is important that new teachers entering the profession have a uniform and consistent induction to dyslexia irrespective of which teacher-education establishment they attended. This situation is not confined to Scotland—the same controversies would apply to other areas in the UK and in the USA. Moats (2008) indicated this clearly when she studied how prepared university professors were to teach on subjects such as dyslexia and reading. Her results indicated that in some cases they had less knowledge than some of their students.

The Scottish report indicated that a mix of views as to what dyslexia actually is prevailed throughout Scotland. Although the majority of authorities found the BPS's view helpful (BPS, 1999a), many schools, colleges and universities held a range of perspectives on dyslexia. The report suggests that such 'a mix of views can cause

confusion for newly qualified and practising teachers. Teachers and learners should have updated, accessible and practical advice on dyslexia and its impact on young people including co-occurrence with other additional support needs' (p.34). The recommendation was that the Inspectorate would work with education authorities and the Scottish government to produce examples of best practice in dealing with dyslexia. This is an excellent approach as it ensures dissemination of good practice. There is no doubt there are some excellent examples of practice in the UK and elsewhere, but these need to be identified and disseminated.

In England the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (Department for Education, 2015) is expected to make a big impact in the area of training. The policy is that every teacher is a teacher of children with special educational needs (SEN) and the SEN Code of Practice covers students aged 0–25, and this should be very beneficial to those who need support beyond the normal school leaving age. This means that schools, colleges, universities and other training providers need to develop the skills of specialists within their teams. As part of this provision, Education and Health and Care Plans are intended for those children or young people with SEN who need education provision. McLean and Bell (2016) suggest that trained specialist teachers are likely to be key players in this process.

### **Different Perspectives and Agenda**

There are also differences within the groups of professional practitioners and researchers. Fawcett (2002) suggests that one of the major tensions in dyslexia research has in fact been the range of potentially conflicting viewpoints. These viewpoints have emerged from 'researchers and practitioners; parents and teachers; teachers and educational psychologists; schools and local education authorities; local education authorities and governments—all have different agendas, and much of the time this forces them into opposition'. It is interesting to note that the working party of the BPS that was convened to provide guidance on assessment for psychologists was not able to settle the controversy, although it did make a number of recommendations that have been followed up by psychological services. In addition the definition indicated by the BPS working party is widely used, although it generated some controversy at the time.

Different perspectives can often become an issue when a new intervention is being advocated that does not have wide appeal. This was the case with the controversy over the implementation, and the research studies examining, an exercise programme—The Dore Programme (see Reynolds and Nicolson, 2007). This became an international issue and the debate centred around issues regarding:

- the debate over mainstream versus alternative interventions;
- the use of commercially directed interventions in schools;
- approaches that use the media to generate evidence of success;

- the extent of the scientific background that has helped to generate the new approach;
- the nature of the trials that have been carried out to examine the implementation and the success of the approach;
- the reference to the approach in peer-reviewed journals;
- the availability of the approach to all who might benefit from it.

Fawcett and Reid (2009) suggest a system of benchmarking as the range of approaches available can be confusing to both parents and teachers. They suggest that not all the approaches available are currently evaluated and those that have been evaluated may not use the same criteria for identifying how successful the approach is. Additionally, some approaches may have an advantage over others because of a heavy commercial thrust and vigorous marketing that makes them well known. This means that the effectiveness of the programme can be misinterpreted.

The key is certainly teacher training and this will be picked up throughout the book. The 'No to Failure Final Report' (The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust, 2009) in the UK proposed that schools should re-examine their budget to ensure that they were improving outcomes for students with special educational needs, including dyslexia. This emphasised a layered approach to training, whereby all teachers would understand dyslexia at a basic level, at least one teacher in every school would have specialist training and therefore have the capacity to screen for dyslexia, and there would be at least one expert specialist teacher in every school who could carry out full diagnostic assessments and liaise with external professionals. This is very much in line with the proposals formulated by the Scottish Dyslexia Trust in 1992 and, although great strides were made in this, it is very challenging for authorities to meet these types of objectives. But at least it generates a need and a demand for training and lays a firm framework legitimising such training. This in fact is one of the bonuses of the Rose Report in Dyslexia (Rose, 2009).

It is important, however, that any new approach be scientifically validated before it can be used in schools. At the same time it is important that education authorities are open to new approaches and are able to listen to the wishes of parents and appreciate that the dynamic nature of the field of dyslexia can mean that new approaches and different perspectives can emerge and that these need to be considered.

### **Points for Reflection**

- What is the value of a definition of dyslexia? What purpose might it serve?
- What is the importance of an operational or working definition?
- What are the barriers in practice that can prevent policy from being fully and effectively implemented?
- How might dyslexia fit into policy and practice for effective teaching and learning?

- What is the role of teacher education in relation to reading and dyslexia? To what extent is this role being fulfilled?
- What are the issues that can stem from new and sometimes controversial approaches? Why does dyslexia generate the anxiety and the emotional fervour that can be felt in debates on new approaches?
- How can these issues be resolved to the satisfaction of the different groups, each of which may have different agendas and priorities?
- How can more effective communication between home and school be implemented?