

SpLD and Adult Literacy

Our current approach to training in adult learning and literacy has focused on the possible factors that may lie behind the difficulties in literacy acquisition and other difficulties with learning.

In crude terms the causes of literacy/learning difficulties might be broken into 3 areas:
Low intellect (global learning difficulties);
External factors – such as missing out education, social background, peer pressure;
Differences within the individual but no intellectual impairment (specific learning difficulties).

Generally speaking, those with global learning difficulties will be identified and given appropriate provision. Those who simply missed out will generally progress with the opportunity to learn.

Others, don't progress well even with opportunity, motivation and adequate intellect.

However, the majority of adults returning to education will never had assessment for any SpLD and SpLD often go unrecognised through school and into adult learning/employment.

The incidence of SpLD in the adult population is uncertain*, but inevitably the incidence will be higher in those who have had difficulties in learning.

The first UK study into the incidence of dyslexia in adults with literacy difficulties was published in 2004 (Jenny Lee, *The Incidence of Dyslexia in Adult Basic Skills*, *Dyslexia Review*, vol. 15, No. 2, Spring 2004)

Among the findings are:

"Over 70% of learners who were tested showed deficits in the underlying cognitive skills that characterise dyslexia. Some of these learners also had indications of general learning difficulties." And

"Nearly 40% of the basic skills learners who were tested were at risk of dyslexia and did not show indications of low IQ."

The implication here is that there's more chance of a literacy tutor working with a learner with indications of dyslexia than not.

However, because SpLD labelled conditions tend to co-occur, overlap and generally blend into one another it can be difficult to discuss SpLD individually. The complexity is increased as SpLD can present differently and to different degrees within the labelled conditions.

Current thinking recognises that individual conditions are difficult to separate out and that the labels themselves may be artificial <http://www.danda.org.uk/pages/neuro-diversity.php>
<http://www.dystalk.com/talks/57-dyslexia-dyspraxia-amp-overlapping-learning-difficulties>

In practical terms practitioners may more usefully identify problem areas within the individual and develop and use coping strategies to overcome barriers to learning. Beyond the top-level indicator for labelled SpLD (reading/spelling for dyslexia; coordination for dyspraxia; attention

for ADHD; social communication for autistic spectrum disorders and so on) the problem areas for SpLD are very similar between conditions.

Problem areas can be categorised into short-term/working memory problems; coordination difficulties; organisational difficulties; environmental factors; learning preferences and mental and physical issues.

Adjustments can be made by the practitioner/learner to accommodate difficulties in all or some of these areas.

Working memory difficulties will affect the ability to learn and efficiency varies from individual to individual <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2012/dec/16/tracy-packiam-alloway-working-memory>

<http://www.sharpbrains.com/blog/2009/05/10/10-students-may-have-working-memory-problems-why-does-it-matter/>

We have given particular attention to the presence of undetected visual/visual processing problems in adults with literacy difficulties. Many aspects of vision and visual processing which can impair an individual's reading efficiency can go undetected in a routine eye examination and in many cases, the individual may not be aware that they are seeing printed material abnormally. Factors which can affect reading efficiency include problems with binocular vision, eye movement control, visual processing in the brain, visual stress and fatigue related to difficulties any of these areas.

Undetected visual difficulties may accompany SpLD or be misdiagnosed as SpLD conditions such as dyslexia or ADHD.

<http://www.childrevisions.com/reading.htm>

<http://www.childrevisions.com/ADD.htm>

http://www.children-special-needs.org/vision_therapy/esophoria_reading.html

In 2006 we commissioned a study to gauge the incidence of undetected visual problems in adult with literacy difficulties. The results of this study <http://www.aloscotland.com/alo/viewresource.htm?id=2880> prompted us to develop training for those working in adult literacy to raise awareness of the likelihood of undetected visual problems contributing to learners' literacy difficulties. Unlike SpLD, visual and visual processing problems can be treated and it is seen to be essential that these are dealt with before an individual embarks on a literacy programme.

* Notes on incidence

ASD: Estimated prevalence rate in the UK

The indication from recent studies is that the figures cannot be precisely fixed, but it appears that a prevalence rate of around 1 in 100 is a best estimate a best estimate of the prevalence in children. No prevalence studies have ever been carried out on adults.

<http://www.autism.org.uk/about-autism/some-facts-and-statistics/statistics-how-many-people-have-autism-spectrum-disorders.aspx>

IQ in autism

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>

Dyspraxia UK

It is thought that something like 4-6% of children will have dyspraxia to some degree. That is at least one in every classroom!

Recent studies suggest that it affects far more boys than it does girls.

<http://www.dyspraxiainfo.co.uk/Handouts/Dyspraxia,%20definitons,%20Aetiology%20etcs.pdf>

ADHD

Taking all forms of ADHD into account, perhaps 5% of school-aged children are affected - or 366,000 in England and Wales. Significant numbers remain undiagnosed.

<http://www.adhdtraining.co.uk/about.php>