

Persistent difficulties with literacy (reading and spelling) are perhaps the most well known and most prevalent of all educational difficulties. **There is absolutely no doubt that some children have difficulties learning to read and spell for reasons other than poor teaching or due to profound/severe learning difficulties.** However, despite a huge body of research into dyslexia no one has been able to produce a universally accepted definition that is precise and based on scientific findings.

In Hertfordshire it has been agreed to define dyslexia based on three widely recognised definitions; namely, the Rose Report (2009), the British Psychological Society (2002) and the current British Dyslexia Association definitions.

Dyslexia is a term used to describe difficulties with developing and acquiring accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling, which is severe and persistent in nature despite appropriate learning opportunities and evidenced-based intervention. Dyslexia is underpinned by difficulties in some or all of the following:

- Phonological awareness: the ability to perceive and manipulate sounds in words
- Verbal memory: the ability to store, process and manipulate verbal information
- Verbal processing speed: the ability to retrieve familiar words quickly and accurately
- Visual processing speed: the ability to visually recognise familiar words/symbols/patterns quickly and accurately

Dyslexia should be recognised as a continuum across a range of abilities rather than a discrepancy between intelligence and literacy skills. Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor coordination and personal organisation, but these are not by themselves markers of dyslexia.

An assessment of dyslexia is a process not an event and should happen over time, taking into account a child/young person's patterns of strength and needs.

(Rose report, 2009; British Psychological Society, 2002; British Dyslexia Association)

The term dyslexia is a social construct rather than a medical diagnosis. The term dyslexia is embedded into Western culture and so is likely to continue to be used for social and political reasons. Many people who have been identified as being dyslexic find the 'label' useful and are relieved that their difficulties have been identified and acknowledged. Hence, any challenge to the usefulness of the term dyslexia is often met with strong and emotionally charged resistance.

Recent research has concluded:

- Literacy difficulties arise for many different reasons. Hence, a model that assumes one main cause or a single 'typical dyslexic profile' for children with literacy difficulties is too simplistic.
- Research shows that it is difficult to reliably distinguish dyslexics from other poor readers.
- There is no research evidence to show that children with dyslexia should receive different intervention compared with other children with literacy difficulties. This pertains to decoding skills, ie, sounding out and blending letters to make words, as opposed to comprehending the meaning of those words.

Literacy difficulties arise for many different reasons. A model assuming one main cause for dyslexia is too simplistic. The term does not provide much information about how individual children's literacy needs should be addressed. Much information about dyslexia is discussed as if it were fact, whereas many of the assumptions surrounding the term are not supported by scientific findings. Dyslexia is perhaps best thought of as an umbrella term that indicates that a child has persistent difficulties with literacy, while acknowledging that the exact nature of the difficulties may vary from case to case.

*References:*

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- *The Dyslexia Debate, Elliott & Grigorenko, 2014*
- *Rose Report, 2009*
- *House of Commons Report, 2009*