

A Study on the Effects of a Dyslexia Diagnosis on the Career of a Post Primary Teacher and the Benefits it leads to in the Classroom

Visual Culture



National College of Art and Design
A Recognised College of University College Dublin

Student Name: Aisling Downes
Email Address: AISLING.DOWNES
Year of Study: 3rd Year
Semester: 1
Department (if applicable): Fine Art Paint and Education

Are you on the Joint Course? Yes
Visual Culture Tutor: Francis Halsall
Essay Due Date: 9th of January 2023
Word Count: 3826

Please confirm the following by writing your initials in the space provided

I have credited the sources of all the images included in this submission. Initials: AD

I have the sources of all quoted and paraphrased text in this submission. Initials:AD

I confirm that this submission is my own work. Initials: AD

A Study on the Effects of a Dyslexia Diagnosis on the Career of a Post Primary Teacher and the Benefits it leads to in the Classroom

It may never be possible to determine the number of dyslexic teachers in Ireland until the stigma around being a dyslexic teacher significantly reduces. Openly dyslexic teachers are few and far between in Ireland. These dyslexic teachers are paving the way as role models for dyslexic students but may face old fashioned thinking, stigma and even discrimination from fellow colleagues. I myself am dyslexic and have only come across one dyslexic teacher in my lifetime and I am currently in third level education. That teacher has been highly influential on my life and has given me the self-confidence to now study to become a teacher myself. In this essay I will explore “The Effects of a Dyslexia Diagnosis on the Career of a Post Primary Teacher” from initial diagnosis to the effects it has on both teachers and students alike in the classroom. I will explore the effects a dyslexia diagnosis has on the self and how it impacts a person. I will include true testimonials of real life experiences of teachers with dyslexia in the classroom. I wish the reader to comprehend the adversities a dyslexic person may face in a professional environment and therefore why they may choose to hide their diagnosis and their everyday struggles. I will discuss the benefits of having a dyslexic teacher and being a dyslexic teacher. Being diagnosed with dyslexia can be a very emotionally heightened time with people reacting in different ways. Dyslexia diagnosis affects every person differently but there are similarities in most case studies and testimonials.

Despite the initial reaction of a dyslexic to their diagnosis, if they find the benefits in it they can become incredible educators with a unique set of skills different and incomparable to their neurotypical peers.

Being diagnosed with dyslexia can have a huge impact on a young person's life. There are both positives and negatives of receiving this diagnosis. From my research and studies of testimonials, I have found that often people feel like they are finally understood and part of a group but more often than not dyslexics may question their intelligence. Despite the fact, if you measure intelligence by IQ dyslexics by definition cannot be considered unintelligent. The most commonly used definition of developmental dyslexia was formulated by The World Federation of Neurology as; "A disorder manifested by difficulty learning to read, despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence and sociocultural opportunity. It is dependent upon fundamental cognitive disabilities which are frequently of constitutional origin" (Griffiths, 2011). This negates the idea that dyslexia has any effect on intelligence and that the World Federation of Neurology view dyslexia and intelligence as separate entities. "Typically, the reading *potential* is estimated by administering an intelligence test and then projecting the reading potential from the IQ score (Aaron, 1997). In order to be classified as dyslexic, the *actual* reading ability has to be below normal, IQ has to be at least normal and there has to be a discrepancy between actual reading ability and potential reading ability. There is, however, no general agreement on the extent of discrepancy that should be taken as a marker of dyslexia." (Gus & Samuelsson, 1999).

Getting a dyslexia diagnosis is not straightforward in Ireland. There is a lengthy waiting list and an educational psychological assessment is expensive and may be beyond the financial reach of many families. Children must be a minimum of six years old and have completed eighteen months in education. There are many different routes to go down to try and receive a dyslexia diagnosis for you or your child. School going children might be able to be tested in school by the National Educational Psychological Service, free of charge but this is difficult to attain in practice. Private companies and independent educational psychologists also conduct dyslexia assessments in Ireland. Some Irish teachers specialise in the assessment of dyslexia and have obtained international recognised qualifications which allow them to assess children who may have dyslexia. Ireland does not provide free dyslexia tests even to those who avail of medical cards or are unemployed. (Dyslexia Association of Ireland, 2022) These factors leave students with undiagnosed dyslexia in Irish classrooms reliant on the special education system in individual schools to identify and support their learning needs.

Presently in the Republic of Ireland undiagnosed children can still avail of support hours in school. In 2017 the Department of Education and Skills Special Education Section released a circular; "Circular No 0014/2017". The purpose of this circular was to "advise schools of the revised allocation process for Special Education Teachers to mainstream post primary schools" (National Council for Special Education, 2017). The circular stated that "The new model will provide a greater level of autonomy for schools in how to manage and deploy special education teaching support within their school, based on the individual learning needs of students, as opposed to being based primarily on a diagnosis of disability" (National Council for Special Education, 2017). Support hours following this circular were allocated on the learning needs of the children and not to

those necessarily with a diagnosis. This begs the question: is there any benefit of getting a child with dyslexia diagnosed in Ireland?

The latest circular released by the Department of Education for 2023 highlighted the large increase in special education teachers now allocated to second level schools. "Overall, the total number of special education teachers available for allocation to schools has increased by 40% since 2011, from 9,740 in 2011"(Special Education Section, 2022). This large increase shows growth of diagnosed and undiagnosed children in the Irish Education system in need of support. Prior to this the majority of support was being allocated towards diagnosed children and young adults. That is now seen to be dated in light of the 0021/2022 Circular. "It replaced the previous model which was considered inequitable, encouraging unnecessary labelling of children with special educational needs. Creating a profile for each school which is needs-based and gives schools autonomy to decide how to deploy the resources they have" (Special Education Section, 2022). This new approach could make receiving a dyslexia diagnosis less impactful. It is also speculated that because of the cost of a diagnosis in Ireland and now the absence of a need of a diagnosis to avail of school support that the amount of newly diagnosed children in Ireland with dyslexia may decline. On the other hand it is argued that there are vast benefits to getting a dyslexia diagnosis such as; "to clarify needs, to organise appropriate intervention, to prevent loss of self-esteem, to plan and differentiate, to improve standards"(Neanon, 2012).

Receiving a dyslexia diagnosis can affect one's self esteem. This can be as a result of internal and/or external factors such as being treated differently by teachers. Students

may develop a feeling of incompetence and inadequacy or may be bullied by their peers. This lack of self-esteem may often result in a decline in many behaviours necessary for learning and working life such as motivation, engagement and persistence. “Research has also suggested that children with dyslexia have a poor internal locus of control (Humphrey and Mullins, 2002b). Consequently, personal successes are attributed to external factors (e.g., teacher quality, parental support etc.) rather than internal factors as a result of their own perceived inadequacies. Failures are attributed to lack of ability rather than effort, and this has a detrimental impact on their self-concept, resulting in feelings of ‘learned helplessness’ (Peterson, Maier and Seligman, 1995). The maladaptive attributions of learned helplessness could include reduced motivation, disengagement, lack of persistence and passivity (Peterson, Maier and Seligman, 1995), and research has indicated that these attributions are typical of poor readers (Chan, 1994; Johnson, 1985). “The link between children with reading difficulties and learned helplessness has been known for many years (Butkowsky and Willows, 1980; Humphrey and Mullins, 2002b). In contrast, children without dyslexia attribute success to personal ability, and experiences of failure are attributed to lack of effort or fluctuating external factors, rather than internal factors such as lack of ability (Humphrey and Mullins, 2002b” (Glazzard & Dale, 2012). These learned attributes of dyslexia is what has developed the “they are just lazy” phenomenon. This has been incredibly harmful for students as many teachers still believe in this unprogressive thinking, which in itself promotes students to disengage from education.

The concept of self-image has been studied by four main theorists; Psychoanalysts, Humanists, Behaviourists and Phenomenologists. These theorists often do not agree but do all agree that self has an important function in the process that is personality. Being

diagnosed with dyslexia can affect your self-concept. (Gurney 1988) defines 'self-concept' as "the image or picture that we have of ourselves which we carry around and use to define ourselves as well as to categorise our behaviour." Educators must have an adequate understanding of self-concept so that they can promote and instill a positive self-concept in their students. Educators must utilise areas from all four theorists as no theory is without flaws. Being a positive role model for students and encouraging a positive self-concept is imperative in all students but in particular those with learning disabilities. Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and the famous "Bobo Doll Experiments" teaches us that children are more likely to be influenced and mimic behaviour from people who they admire (Bandura, 1961).

Not having a positive self-concept can have negative effects of "self-control where people show that they are capable of deciding to give up rewards and even to volunteer directly for punishment in the process, e.g. giving up smoking." (Gurney 1988). Teachers have such high involvement in a child's life and act in loco parentis for so many children throughout their career. Gurney argues that "self-concept is learned, it is crucially important to young children, not only in influencing their behaviour but also because it is still in the process of being learned and crystallised. It is vital, therefore, that early experiences are predominantly positive and that children come to see themselves as accepted, loved and successful. They are then in a better position to love and accept others."(Gurney 1988). Having a negative self-concept can result in low self-esteem which in modern day is highly prevalent in those who commit violent crimes. Boosting children's self-esteem in schools will implement major positive individual and societal change.

If students with dyslexia overcome these obstacles there can be an incredibly promising career in education for them with advantages unique to those with dyslexia which will aid both them and their students in the classroom. There are many benefits to having a dyslexic teacher and to being a teacher with dyslexia. Being neurodiverse gives you untold advantages in the classroom compared to neurotypical teachers. Reading and studying testimonials allowed me to comprehend these benefits; "I do feel that my difficulties have made me be more empathetic towards the children I teach. I also feel that I am much more likely to recognise children who are struggling than other professionals are. There have been many children, even in my short career that I have identified as in need of extra support or possibly displaying dyslexic tendencies". (Glazzard & Dale, 2012). This is an excerpt from Emanuels story of struggling with dyslexia as a student teacher but who also relayed the positives she found in her practice as a result of her dyslexia. Choosing a career as a teacher and asking to be in the academic world everyday can highlight the shortfalls that come with dyslexia in a competitive learning environment based on academic achievement and grades. This can fill dyslexic teachers with more self-doubt than they would if they had chosen a different career path. However this does not mean they should shy away from this career as highlighted by Julias testimonial; *'I love being a trainee teacher and it has lifted my confidence in so many ways. However, some things do make me feel rather anxious. One cause of anxiety in the classroom is during group discussions, when children take ownership of producing a shared text. No amount of preparation can prepare me for some of the fantastic words the children think of. However, I am very open with my colleagues about my difficulties and they have always been extremely supportive. Explaining to the children that everyone needs some help sometimes was easier than I initially thought. It*

was also inspiring at times, for all the children that felt that they often needed help. I do remember a time when I had written something on the whiteboard that was spelt incorrectly. When the teaching assistant came over and slid her hand across the whiteboard to remove what I had written, it did upset me. However, it is something I have to be prepared for and have to be open and honest about. Everyone makes mistakes and I don't pretend to be any exception to this rule.' (Glazzard & Dale, 2012). This excerpt gives key insights to the life and stories of personal resilience of someone who has been diagnosed with dyslexia.

Accommodations must also be made for dyslexics on the route of pursuing their teaching career. One of these accommodations is the Disability Access Route to Education scheme (DARE) allowing students with disabilities to more easily access their preferred third level course. "DARE offers reduced point's places to school leavers who, as a result of having a disability, have experienced additional educational challenges in second level education." (DARE, 2022). To apply to the DARE scheme, unlike availing of student support hours in school, you will need a diagnosis and evidence of your disability. You must complete an "Educational Impact Statement" that highlights the effects your disabilities have on your life and how it hinders you academically. If you are deemed eligible you may be offered a place on your preferred college course even if you do not have enough leaving certificate points as stated by the Central Applications Office (CAO) that given year. The majority of colleges and universities in Ireland opt into the DARE scheme so more than likely students will be able to find a course that suits through the DARE scheme. Participating colleges reserve a certain amount of places each year to award to successful DARE applicants at lower Leaving Certificate points. DARE is also applicable to early school leavers under the age of twenty three as a

“backdoor into education” whose learning and physical disabilities have had a negative impact on their post primary education. Dare is also applicable to anyone who can present an Irish leaving certificate, A levels or EU qualifications (DARE, 2022). This is crucial for many neurodiverse students to obtain a third level education. Without DARE the academic and professional world would not be as diverse as it is today and it is the hope that this diversity continues to spread.

As well as there being a list of disadvantages of being a dyslexic teacher in the classroom, there are a list of positives further reinforcing that dyslexia is not a disability but a different way of thinking. They may more easily be able to identify a student with dyslexia and having dyslexia allows for teachers to have valuable insights into the challenges students face. Teachers may lose patience or interest in students who seem to be daydreaming or distracted whereas dyslexic teachers understand this behaviour and therefore have the motivation to engage students back into their lesson. Revisiting Albert Bandura's theory that children engage more with adults and role models they admire, teachers with a special interest in dyslexia can show students history's greatest artists, leaders and inventors who were dyslexic which reinforces positive self-concept. The classroom has a wide variety of learners many of whom will respond well to differentiation aimed at dyslexic students such as adding visual elements to presentations, the classroom and set work. Nearly all students will benefit from differentiation not originally designed for them at least once in the academic career. (Friday, 2014)

Even though the list of positives is lengthy there is of course a list of negative attributes associated with educators with dyslexia. More often than not and most widely known, dyslexics struggle with spelling. This will then have a direct knock on effect on report writing and on writing on the board. Dyslexics can struggle with active recall which can make remembering names of students, peers and parents difficult. This could also affect remembering dates and numbers. For others their organisational and time management skills are affected, which affects lesson planning and returning corrected work on time. Checking and marking written work and generally reading documents can be something that dyslexics struggle with. As a result of these shortcomings dyslexics often face colleagues who do not understand the nature of dyslexia. A more thorough initial teacher education and ongoing teacher professional learning on dyslexia and all aspects of special education is required in Ireland so that our educators can feel confident in identifying and meeting the needs of all the students in their classrooms.

Dyslexics receive unsolicited questioning of their competence as educators from other teachers, pupils or parents. All of this results in low self confidence in their reading writing or mathematical abilities but in order to improve these skills they will need support from mentors or senior staff which is often lacking. (Engage, 2022). Many, such as the British Dyslexia Association, argue that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages of being Dyslexic." Dyslexia is a neurological difference and can have a significant impact during education, in the workplace and in everyday life. As each person is unique, so is everyone's experience of dyslexia. It can range from mild to severe, and it can co-occur with other learning difficulties. It usually runs in families and is a life-long condition. It is important to remember that there are positives to thinking

differently. Many dyslexic people show strengths in areas such as reasoning and in visual and creative fields". (British Dyslexia Association, 2022)

To facilitate and combat these negatives, reasonable accommodations have been devised. Reasonable accommodations are essential to the neurodiverse as they navigate the working world designed for the neurotypical. Reasonable accommodations facilitate dyslexics and anyone with disabilities to not only survive in their chosen career but to thrive. Reasonable accommodations are by name and by nature reasonable and should not be seen as a hindrance in the school as students should not be seen as a hindrance when there is a need to differentiate work in the classroom. In England, students are legally entitled to reasonable accommodations if their dyslexia has a "substantial and long term adverse effect on normal day activities". Dyslexia was legally recognised as a disability in the equality act 2010. The employer is required to make reasonable adjustments such as; "giving you more time with marking, templates for records and report writing, extra reading time, allowing for more verbal assessments and less written assessments and providing a laptop."(Engage, 2022).

In Ireland the Dyslexia Association of Ireland have stated the following as reasonable accommodations for someone with dyslexia in the workplace; "Meeting minutes provided in advance, accessible documentation, extra time to work on projects, inclusive working environments, job duties aligned with employee strengths as much as possible and assistive technology." (Dyslexia Association of Ireland, 2022). In reality young teachers are often embarrassed or afraid they will be discriminated against if they admit their disability. "A major dilemma facing young people about to

enter the workforce is whether to inform prospective employers that they have dyslexia. Despite the passing of the employment equality Act 1998 and the Equal status Act in 2000. The position of workers with dyslexia is still not clear. If a job candidate declares on an application form, or at an interview, that they have dyslexia, even if they also have impressive qualifications, will they get the job?" (Ball et al., 2011). These difficulties should not be faced by a young person when trying to begin their teaching career in such a developed country as Ireland. The hope is that the stigma of dyslexia will lessen with time especially when there is no clear evidence that teachers with dyslexia are less fit to teach when compared with their neurotypical peers. "UK legislation states that when deciding if students function effectively as teachers and meet required fitness standards, reasonable adjustments should be available and positive management strategies adopted by students should be considered (Beverton et al., 2008; Riddick, 2003; Riddick and English, 2006). This research demonstrates that this is not always the case. There is no indication that teachers and student teachers with dyslexia are any less competent than their non-dyslexic colleagues, and this requires further research". (Griffiths, 2011). This begs the question why dyslexics have been made to feel that they are less competent. This quote perfectly supports the theory that dyslexics are in fact, perfectly good teachers;

'Do teachers' own standards impact on the literacy standards of the children they are teaching? . . . How many children have left school unhappy (or poorly educated for that matter) because their teacher misspelled the odd word? (2006: 206).' (Griffiths, 2011)

To conclude, I have thoroughly researched and examined "A Study on the Effects of a Dyslexia Diagnosis on the Career of a Post Primary Teacher and the Benefits it leads to

in the Classroom". I have examined the effects and the processes of initial diagnosis and the classroom practice of a neurodivergent teacher. I have explored both sides of the debate of the advantages of being diagnosed versus undiagnosed. I explained some of the most prevalent scaffolding and supports available that are crucial in achieving and completing third level education such as the DARE scheme. I have shown that dyslexia has no link to intelligence and is another way of thinking and therefore students with neurodivergence should receive adequate reasonable accommodations in the professional sphere. Even though there may be shortcomings associated with having a dyslexic teacher that I have discussed, there are also an infinite amount of benefits, as each neurodivergent teacher recognises and appreciates neurodiversity in their neurodiverse students. Dyslexic teachers may unknowingly to themselves become role models to students with learning disabilities simply because they have dyslexia and are honest with students. I examined psychological theories and their application in the classroom, what it means to be a positive role model and the effects of having a positive role model has on students. I deeply explored the concept of "self-concept" which if students struggle with, may have detrimental effects on their learning and their self-esteem which may lead to antisocial behaviour.

The study concluded that if children diagnosed with dyslexia are supported throughout their education, develop a strong self-concept and avail of the scaffolding designed for their support, they can succeed in being excellent post primary teachers who excel in their chosen field but also in Special Educational Needs and differentiation.

Bibliography

Aaron, P. G. (1997). A component-based approach to the diagnosis and treatment of reading disabilities.

Ball, M., Hughes, A. and McCormack, W. (2011) "Dyslexia and How it Affects Adult life ," in *Dyslexia: An Irish perspective*. Dublin: Dyslexia Association of Ireland, pp. 182–183.

Bandura, A. Ross, D., & Ross, S. A. (1961). Transmission of aggression through the imitation of aggressive models. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 63, 575-582

British Dyslexia Association (2022) *About dyslexia*, *British Dyslexia Association*. Available at: <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexia/about-dyslexia> (Accessed: December 28, 2022).

Dyslexia Association of Ireland (2022) *Arranging an assessment at the Dyslexia Association of Ireland*, *Dyslexia Ireland*. Available at: <https://dyslexia.ie/assessment/> (Accessed: January 5, 2023).

Chan, L. K. S. (1994) 'Relationship of motivation, strategic learning and reading achievement in grades 5, 7 and 9.' *Journal of Experimental Education*, 62 (4), pp. 319–39.

DARE (2022) *Testimonials*, *Access College*. Available at: <https://accesscollege.ie/dare/events/testimonials/> (Accessed: January 5, 2023).

Dyslexia Association of Ireland (2022) *Arranging an assessment at the Dyslexia Association of Ireland*, *Dyslexia Ireland*. Available at: <https://dyslexia.ie/assessment/> (Accessed: December 29, 2022).

Dyslexia Association of Ireland (2022) *Dyslexia at work*, *Dyslexia Ireland*. Available at: <https://dyslexia.ie/info-hub/adult-dyslexia/dyslexia-at-work/> (Accessed: January 2, 2023).

Engage (2022) *Supporting teachers with dyslexia*, *Engage Education*. Available at: <https://engage-education.com/blog/supporting-teachers-with-dyslexia/> (Accessed: November 10, 2022).

Friday, M.J. (2014) *The gift of being a dyslexic teacher*, *Edutopia*. George Lucas Educational Foundation. Available at:

<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/gift-of-being-dyslexic-teacher-matthew-friday>

(Accessed: January 5, 2023).

Glazzard, J. and Dale, K. (2012) "Trainee teachers with dyslexia: Personal narratives of resilience," *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 13(1), pp. 26–37. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2012.01254.x>

Griffiths, S. (2011) "'being dyslexic doesn't make me less of a teacher'. school placement experiences of student teachers with dyslexia: Strengths, challenges and a model for support," *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 12(2), pp. 54–65. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2011.01201.x>.

Gurney, P. W. (1988) *Self-Esteem in Children with Special Educational Needs*. London: Routledge.

Gus, S. and Samuelsson, S. (1999) "Intelligence and dyslexia: Implications for diagnosis and intervention," *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 40(2), pp. 127–134. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9450.00109> .

Humphrey, N. & Mullins, P. (2002b) 'Personal constructs and attribution for academic success and failure in dyslexia'. *British Journal of Special Education*, 29 (4), pp. 196–203.

National Council for Special Education (2017) *Des Circulars: National Council for Special Education - CPD and in-school support, DES Circulars | National Council for Special Education - CPD and In-School Support*. Available at: <https://www.sess.ie/documents-and-publications/circulars> (Accessed: December 29, 2022).

Neanon, C. (2012) "chapter 2 Why Identification of Dyslexia is Necessary ," in *How to identify and support children with dyslexia*. LDA, pp. 14–15.

Peterson, C., Maier, S. F. & Seligman, M. (1995) *Learned Helplessness: A Theory for the Age of Personal Control*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Providing evidence of your disability (2022) Access College. Available at: <https://accesscollege.ie/dare/providing-evidence-of-your-disability/> (Accessed: November 11, 2022).

Special Education Section (2022) *Special Education Teaching Allocation 2022/23 (post primary)* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/767cc-special-education-teaching-allocation-202223-post-primary/> .

