The Emotional Impact of Dyslexia

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Dyslexia and Intervention Teacher

- Family members with dyslexia
- Conducted research in the field of dyslexia
- Completed doctorate form University of Houston, Clear Lake
- Test, identify, and service students with dyslexia
- Assist teachers
- Provide interventions for students
- Member of the campus intervention team
Objectives

– To discuss 15 years of research
– To identify factors leading to anxiety, stress, and depression
– To examine effective methods to assist students with dyslexia
School described by researchers

- Unpredictable battleground
- Unskilled to exist
- Psychological and often physical torture
- Destructive and humiliating
- Nasty, degrading experience
- Society should be deeply ashamed
School

–all students with dyslexia experience some form of damage from school
Dyslexia

**Academic**
- Reading level
- Copying information from the board
- Short-term memory
- Organizational skills

**Social/Emotional**
- Repeated and continued failures affect self-esteem
- Stress and anxiety can lead to depression and sometimes Post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD
School Failures

- To make friends (social-delayed processing often results in blank stare)
- In reading and writing (academics)
- To be attractive (clumsiness, sloppy eating, disorganized)
Stress

– Stimulus-based (war, hurricanes, divorce)
– Response-based (individual’s biological and psychological response)
– Transactional- experiences between individual and the environment
Transactional Stress

– Harm - psychological damage has been done
– Threat - where harm is anticipated
– Challenge - response to the demands are made with confidence
Stress

- Stress varies by person
- Not all stress is bad
- Loss of a job at age 20 versus age 64
- Crisis or opportunity
- Key—how individuals deal with stress
- Develop adequate coping strategies or avoidance
- Rewarding or exhausting
Depression

- Sad, anxious or “empty” feelings
- Hopelessness and/or pessimism
- Guilt, worthlessness and/or helplessness
- Irritability, restlessness
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details
- Excessive sleeping
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Aches, pains headaches, digestive problems that endure despite treatment
Depression

– The prolonged effect of childhood depression creates adults at-risk for suicide

  – (Harrington, Bredenkamp, Groothues, Rutter, Fudge & Pickles, 1994)
Overview of one study

- Participants n=29
- Ages 27-70
- Degreed n=12
- Non-degreed n=17
- Females n=18
- Males n=11
- England
- Qualitative Study
- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
Feelings When Growing Up

- Different from peers 81.8% (m=64%; f=78%)
- Abnormal 65.4% (m=46%; f=67%)
- Misunderstood 69.2% (m=36%; f=78%)
- Alienated 30.8% (m=46%; f=17%)
- Inferior 50% (m=27%; f=56%)
- Isolated 50% (m=27%; f=56%)
Experiences at School

- Teachers thought I was lazy (m=73%; f=73%)
- Teachers humiliated me (m=55%; f=72%)
- Teachers bullied me (m=36%; f=61%)
- Teachers called me disruptive (m=18%; f=6%)
- Received in-class help-primary (m=9%; f=0%)
- Received out-of-class help-primary (m=18%; f=39%)
- Secondary in-class help (m=9%; f=17%)
- Secondary out-of-class help (m=27%; f=33%)
- Teachers/schools denied my dyslexia (m=36%; f=33%)
Participants

- ‘he can do it if he wants, but he’s lazy’ (Peter)
- Every single report home stated ‘lazy, lazy, lazy’ (Peter)
- I was bullied in the playground and when I went out and about...I found it hard to learn...children made fun of me...I was put in remedial classes and I was bullied as well (in the classroom) (Samuel)
- School reports stated ‘could try better, doesn’t try; doesn’t take care) (Samuel)
- My teachers didn’t give me any allowances for my problems (Zara)
- ...the teachers did not want to involve me in anything the school did (Bullied by peers and teachers) (Jean)
- Open house...there was worked displayed and they faked all my work...my dad turned round to them and said ‘he didn’t do that’ and they said ‘we could not show the real work’ (Malcolm)
- The head master was of the opinion that dyslexia did not exist...he told my parents that I was basically backward and that I would never be educated and never have a job, never a career (Milly)
- The teachers told me I would not amount to anything (Anita, multiple participants)
- My parents were told I had a ‘cuckoo brain’ (Karen)
- Teachers only want to teach the students who learn easily
Participants

– When I was put into the remedial class the humiliation I felt still stays with me today (Adrian)

– It was quite humiliating because if you couldn’t do things (like) your tables, you were told to stand in front of the class and say them (out loud). I felt like I had something wrong with me and he (teacher) made me very nervous too. (Andrea)

– I was just seen as a problem child. In the words of my English teacher ‘I was an ignoramus.’
Wrong Support

- A mother’s helper...trying to teach me to read...(she) would get real annoyed with me (Emma)
- I was taken out of class...I really got annoyed as I was labeled a ‘special’ kid (Izzy)
- The thought of letting a fourteen year old kid wire the stage, (climb) up on ladders...if their (teachers) cars wouldn’t start, they would (get me) to get them started (Malcolm)
- PP 126-127
Good Support For Students with Dyslexia

- Prefer to be in the classroom with peers, not taken out and away from peers
- Need a trained specialist with a knowledge of dyslexia to assist them emotionally and academically
- Need patience and time to understand the subject matter
- Need time to develop strategies which will help them learn the school curriculum.
- Need teachers who will grade on oral achievements rather than what is produced on paper. (p. 129)
Homework

- Parent thought I was lazy (m=36%; f=39%)
- Parents compared me to my siblings (m=46%; f=39%)
- I frustrated my parents with my homework (m=77%; f=72%)
- My parents did support me with my homework (m=46%; f=39%)
- My parents did not support me with my homework (m=9%; f=28%)
Research

- Parent frustration- lacking the skills to teach and for not taking the time taken to understand the problem (P. 139)
- Some frustration stemmed from parents using methods that worked for them
- Homework, worksheets, etc triggered extreme anxiety in parents (PTSD)
- Parents covering up their own difficulties by being unable to do the homework themselves (P.140)
- Many parents did the homework themselves rather than admit there was a problem with their child coping with the work load. (Parent embarrassment)
Mourning

– Many parents experience a mourning period upon learning their child has dyslexia.
– Mourn realizing their child is not normal.
– Mourn that their dreams of having a perfect child is lost.
– Mourn that their child will be labeled ‘disabled’ for the rest of their lives.
Parents Covering Up Their Own Dyslexia

- The data suggests there is a big problem with parents covering up their own dyslexia.
- Often their partner does not realize the parent and child exhibit the same problems.
- Avoiding helping their own child in order not be ‘found out’ that they are incapable.
- Many parents get diagnosed as a by-product of their own child getting diagnosed.
Coping as a child with dyslexia

- Hiding in class (m=64%; f=67%)
- Avoid reading and writing (m=82%; f= 94%)
- Problems copying from the board (m=55%; f=83%)
- Being the class clown (m=18%; f=6%)
- Attention seeking in class (m=18%; f=17%)
- Going into a protective bubble as a child (m=73%; f=67%)
Participants

- I would do anything not to read aloud. (George)
- My self-doubts about myself and not wanting to look foolish in front of the group...saying something inappropriate or wrong. (Brian)
- I had the verbal ability so I would actually help people, if people weren’t getting things I would help them...I would avoid doing the written side of stuff by being the teacher’s helper. (Emma)
- I would choose to put myself at the back of the class, never in front. (Jean)
- I would duck down a few inches behind the person in front... I would never volunteer. (Norman)
Participants

– It seems like I live in a different world than everybody else...I can’t keep my concentration going ...unless it is something I’m quite interested in. (Peter)

– My friend and I were talking about who we would like to be if only for a day, we both said that we would just like to be normal. Just to be able...to read something and ‘get it’...I read something three times, it still does not make sense. (Rachel)
Truancy and Leaving Home

- Truancy (m=54%; f=39%)
- Running away from home (m=18%; f=39%)
- Faking sickness to avoid school (m=54%; f=50%)
- Being school phobic (m=36%; f=28%)
- P.161
Participants

- I ran away when I was 16 years old, I had enough. My parents used to bully me cause I couldn’t do anything right...so I ran away to find my own life...always ended going back...that just re-enforced to them that I needed their help all the time in a very controlling sort of way. (Maureen)

- I ran away from home on two occasions...I did that because everything was getting on top of with school and bullying, struggling (with school work), I was trying to escape. (Samuel)

- When we had our bags packed we felt safer. I always took the dog with me. (Rachel)
Self-harm

- Self-harm 85% (m=64%; f=83%)
- Self-harm via alcohol 31% (m=46%; f=17%)
- Self-harm via food 35% (m=18%; f=39%)
- Self-harm via bodily harm 23% (m=9%; f=28%)
- Thoughts of suicide 50% (m=36%; f=50%)
- Thoughts of being unworthy 65% (m=36%; f=72%)
- Helplessness 62% (m=36%; f=67%)
- Attempted suicide 42% (m=9%; f=56%)
The Hidden Sorrow

– The data suggests that the participants experienced feelings of unworthiness and helplessness which have resulted in various types of self-harm and depression.

– Some may want help finding ways to cope with emotional pain and distress, they use self-harm as a means to communicate the severity of their anguish, trauma and pain to others.

– Many participants did not see self-harm as a problem because they perceive their actions as non-fatal and does not affect others.
The evidence suggests that alcohol starts as a social activity but later is used to deal with stress and in excess can form the vehicle for attempting suicide.

When I drink I don’t feel dyslexic anymore. (Ronnie)

Some participants stated that they can think much faster than their ability to communicate and write.

Some participants felt alcohol balances the thinking to communicating process.

Alcohol affects the frontal lobes which is where individuals with dyslexia are known to have unique neurological processing, however no research has been conducted in their area.
Proposed Interventions

– Parents with dyslexia should receive Cognitive Behavioural Treatment or Attribution Modification Treatment to address their post traumatic stress from childhood in order to teach their children that school and learning is a positive experience.

– Governments should provide teachers with more dyslexia training to recognize basic symptoms of dyslexia along with recognizing that work avoidance is a reaction to continuous educational failure.
Proposed Interventions

– Reintroduce baseline assessments when students first enter school.
– Provide interventions to students with dyslexia before continuous failure and helplessness occurs.
Proposed Interventions

– Emotional counseling should be offered to all children experiencing difficulties at school.
– Schools should be more proactive to determine why students are failing to learn and eliminate “let’s give him/her more time to mature” attitude.
– Address helplessness so learning is a positive experience.
Recommendations

– Use a systems approach for dyslexia programming in schools
– Monitor the stress and anxiety levels in students with dyslexia
– Ensure that students with dyslexia are involved in school activities and extra-curricular activities
– Reading instruction is not enough
Recommendations

– Open communicate between parents, administrators, classroom teachers, and dyslexia teachers
– Help students with dyslexia develop coping strategies
– Use technology to facilitate learning
– Build rapport with students with dyslexia
– Focus on strengths
Transitions

– Students with dyslexia do not view transition as a means for adaption but rather as a disruption in their lives (Scott, 2004).

– The change in the environment is awkward and unwelcomed. Transitions affect the weakest attributes in students with dyslexia particularly in their organization skills.

– If self-esteem is already low, transitions will create additional feelings of inadequacies.
Transitions

- Transitions make concentration more difficult for students with dyslexia where more concepts and objectives are added to the curriculum (Scott, 2004).
- More expectations include changing classes, remembering materials required for each class, remembering instructions, new school rules, and directions.
- Time, organization, and an increased workload can be overwhelming (Spafford & Grosser, 1996) thus adding to the stress and anxiety of students with dyslexia.
Questions to Facilitate Improvement

– Are we referring students for further testing (FIE) if academic and reading progress is not being made?
– Are our classroom teachers receiving the support they need?
– Are we developing adequate workshops?
Questions to Facilitate Improvement

• What strategies facilitates their learning?
• Are they receiving the emotional support they need? (counseling, support groups, teacher mentors)
Video

–We don’t need to change our students...
–We just need to help them balance their boards!
References

For More Information

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