Inclusion and Intersectionality in Visual Arts Education

Edited by Kate Hatton

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Chapter 5

Dyslexia: Naming pedagogic difference in the art school, a cultural studies perspective

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This chapter aims to unpack the way in which knowledge about dyslexia is developing in the UK, within the context of the 2010 Equality Act. This marked something of a watershed for higher education (HE) educators in relation to specific learning difficulties (SpLD) like dyslexia. The chapter uses several transdisciplinary (Osborne, 2015) perspectives to propose, on the one hand, a less binary understanding of dyslexic difference and, on the other, more productive engagements with the disability label (Goodley, 2011, 2015), in line with the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990, 2013). It advocates a cultural studies approach, which offers useful ways of thinking about dyslexia: first, it provides an opportunity to develop critical perspectives on the biomedical 'systems of truth' (Foucault, 1991: 23), which inform dominant discourses of dyslexia; second, it provides an interdisciplinary location for the coming together of a range of perspectives that are relevant to a critical engagement with dyslexia research and pedagogy; and third, it is particularly appropriate in a UK HE art and design educational context because of the influence of cultural studies on the content of the 'contextual studies' which forms a significant part of most undergraduate art and design courses.

In nearly all higher education institutions (HEIs), dyslexic students make up a sizable proportion of those claiming disabled students' allowance (DSA). They are significantly more likely than their non-dyslexic peers to have 'expressed disappointment about the lack of support they received from teaching staff' (Rodger *et al.*, 2015: v), and the attainment of HE dyslexic students is, in general, lower than that of non-dyslexic students. The 2010 Equality Act consolidated and extended equality legislation in relation to SpLDs such as dyslexia and marked something of a watershed for HEIs in the UK (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2014). Since then, there has been an exponential rise in the number of students arriving at universities with a dyslexia diagnosis (Rodger *et al.*, 2015), but there is

still some confusion about how best to support their social and learning processes (Riddell *et al.*, 2005; Cameron and Nunkoosing, 2012). This has meant that most HEIs are being encouraged to re-evaluate the provision made for dyslexic students, and also to consider how this fits within a wider diversity and inclusion agenda (Rodger *et al.*, 2015).

For creative art and design HE educators, some, but not all, of the circumstances outlined above are present. For example, on some HE creative art and design courses, dyslexic students outnumber non-dyslexic ones and, on many, there is no identifiable attainment gap. This is the case even though studio practice is not the only element of UK creative art and design courses and that a considerable proportion of the assessed content of most courses is made up of traditional assessment tasks such as formal academic essay, extended essay or dissertation. These significant differences have implications both for the way in which HE art and design educators consider the needs of their dyslexic students and for the application of their findings in relation to wider diversity and inclusion agendas and the intersectional nature of these (Crenshaw, 1991).

This chapter draws upon a range of different writing – specifically about dyslexia, relevant to it and critical of the term – to explore the ways in which dyslexia is conceptualized and to think through some of the assumptions upon which a 'diagnosis' of it is premised. It is pragmatic in its intention in that it is seeking to improve the experiences and achievements of HE students who are negotiating a dyslexia label. It is underpinned by what the Australian cultural theorist Chris Barker (2004: 201) describes as 'anti-essentialist paradigms' and takes a Foucauldian cultural studies approach to knowledge about dyslexia. This questions the bio-medical 'systems of truth' (Foucault, 1991: 23) that underpin a 'diagnosis' of dyslexia and sees identity as culturally constructed (Hall, 1997). The chapter critically engages with the essentializing tendency of much of the research into dyslexia and argues that a cultural studies approach is a useful addition to both research into dyslexia, and the process by which the truth claims made about dyslexia cohere into productive understandings.

The chapter begins by outlining a working definition of dyslexia and identifies the cultural studies context of my approach. It then goes on to explore the lack of consensus in the research into dyslexia, as illuminated by a philosophical perspective (Davis, 2016) on a dialogue between Rod Nicolson (2016) and Julian Elliott (2016). It then offers a way to draw parallels between, what can be understood to be, the discursive construction of dyslexia and some other powerful discursive constructions that are explored and applied as part of many cultural studies teaching processes.

What follows this is an identification of some key strategies proposed by pedagogic researchers into dyslexia and then an identification of some of the areas of complexity and intersection. These mean, I argue, that many of the assumptions we make about the dyslexic student are open to question, particularly in an HE art and design, educational context. They also mean that new perspectives and frames of reference are required. The concluding section, therefore, uses a cultural studies approach to consider a different perspective on disability (Goodley, 2000, 2007, 2011, 2015; Goodley *et al.,* 2014) and on dyslexia (Cameron, 2008, 2014, 2015, 2016; Cameron and Nunkoosing, 2012; Cameron and Billington, 2015) and proposes a different way to consider dyslexia in the art school.

Working definitions

The use of the terms 'dyslexia' and 'dyslexic' are by no means straightforward. The British Dyslexia Association (BDA, 2016), for example, preface their definition by stating that 'there are a number of different definitions and descriptions of dyslexia, which may be appropriate for certain contexts or purposes'. The naming of dyslexia as a disability and as a distinct category of neurodiversity is also problematic in many ways. An examination of some of the key areas of contention are outlined below, but for this chapter, Rose's 2009 definition has been used as the key point of reference.

As Rose (2009: 10) states, 'dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling'. A key aspect of this definition is that dyslexia is understood to be SpLD distinct from more generalized learning and literacy difficulties or disabilities. Rose's definition avoids reference to a genetic or neurobiological cause for dyslexia, but there is still some lack of consensus about the validity of this approach.

The terminology used in relation to dyslexia is also significant. We talk of 'diagnosing' dyslexia and the 'symptoms' of it and this arises, in part, because medical science, neurobiology and psychology are the 'root disciplines' (Reid and Valle, 2004: 15) of research into dyslexia. While 'the social model of disability' (Oliver, 1990, 2013; Goodley, 2000, 2011) locates the disabling effect of impairment externally, within social structures and institutions, rather than internally, within the person as deficit, medical model thinking is arguably still dominant.

One of the key aims of this chapter is to suggest that the framing of understandings of dyslexia within a cultural studies paradigm is important. A key aspect of this is the analysis of this dominant discourse and an

exploration of the implications of the use of terminology and existing frames of reference.

A cultural studies context

As an 'interdisciplinary or post-disciplinary field of enquiry' (Barker, 2004: 42), cultural studies is defined by its lack of unity. It is now a contemporary, global practice and has developed into a multi-faceted, complex, loosely defined frame of reference for self-defined formations of theorists and practitioners. Often critiqued for its obtuseness, over-reliance on jargon and wilfully impenetrable language, it can sometimes seem that 'the uses of cultural studies' (McRobbie, 2005) are difficult to identify.

Key to the genesis of the field was the establishment, in 1964, of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham. The focus of the work carried out was always highly politicized and critical of the dominant ideological structures (including academia), which maintained the unequal hierarchies of post-war Britain. Stuart Hall's directorship, which began in 1972, widened its frame of reference from an essentially white, male, heteronormative, class-based, ideological critique (see, for example, Hoggart, 1990; Williams, 1983; Thompson, 1966) to one that sought to examine the mechanics of other complex, ideological, discursive formations and the ways that these are built upon, and produce, inevitably unequal binary understandings of difference (Derrida in Hall, 1997) and self/other (Lacan in Hall, 1997). The aim of the centre was always to change this.

Fundamental to the critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1991, 1994; Giroux, 2004) at the heart of cultural studies is the use of transdisciplinary theory (Osborne, 2015) to enable the development of new perspectives on established assumptions about identity and difference. Hall's work, in relation to the representation of black men in the media (Hall, 1971; Hall, *et al.* 1978), is emblematic of this. The centrality of black identity politics to Hall's work, and his exploration of the way difference is understood and responded to, informed his writing, his political agenda and his pedagogic practice. His aim was to implement what Freire (1970: 36) described as 'a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation'. Hall's work has been enormously influential, and he is described, in a 2013 documentary about his life, as 'the architect of cultural studies' (Akomfrah, 2013). Although it is important to resist essentializing the fields of cultural studies, by implying that there is one single, authentic approach, Hall's ideas provide a reference point for much of the cultural studies work that now takes place, including this chapter. But since cultural studies is an organic and evolving practice, debates about how cultural studies writing can be defined and what cultural studies is, are ongoing.

Barker's (2004: xiii) response to the question 'What is cultural studies?' is to argue that the question is to some extent a 'trick of grammar' – that instead we should focus on how we should use the framework of cultural studies in meaningful ways and to what end. The radicalizing of thought around dyslexia relies heavily on taking new theoretical approaches and on being critical about how both dyslexia and disability are conceptualized. This work is ongoing in several different disciplinary locations but it is the inherent criticality of cultural studies, its innate interdisciplinarity and its transformability that lends itself to a productive questioning of what is meant when a 'specific learning difficulty' is named as 'dyslexia': what we are asking when we frame the question 'what is dyslexia?'.

What is dyslexia?
Context
The term 'dyslexia' was first used in the 1870s, but its meaning has altered significantly since then (Soler, 2009; Elliot, 2016). Its current development is part of a wider move towards classifying learning difficulties, mental health conditions and neurodiversity, including dyspraxia, dyscalculia, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder, autism, depression and anxiety. There is a great deal of crossover between these conditions, some lack of consistency in the use of the terms and also significant co-morbidity between them (Lyon *et al*., 2003). In the case of dyslexia, increased anxiety levels within educational contexts are understood to be almost inevitable (Carroll and Iles, 2006).

Since the 2010 Equality Act there has been an increasing awareness that dyslexia can be disabling and a significant rise in the number of students requiring 'reasonable adjustments' and the additional support available via the DSA. A prerequisite for an application for DSA is a formal dyslexia assessment. This is usually carried out by an educational psychologist (or occasionally a specialist teacher) whose approach is informed by the 'corpus of scientific knowledge' (Foucault, 1991: 24), which underpins a fundamentally essentialist understanding of dyslexia.

There is an inevitable tension here between the deficit thinking of the formal dyslexia assessment, which must focus on what the individual cannot do in order to justify the provision of extra support, and what is described as 'the social model of disability' (Oliver, 1990, 2013; Goodley, 2000, 2011). The social model locates the disabling effect of impairment externally, within social structures and institutions, rather than internally, within the person as deficit. It is this model that educational institutions are being encouraged to use in relation to disability and Rose's carefully

worded definition of dyslexia (see below) points to this. The commissioning of his report, by the UK government, aimed to address the confusions that existed about how dyslexia should be addressed. This required an analysis of conflicting definitions, understandings of causation and proposed teaching strategies. Rose's definition avoided reference to a genetic or neurobiological difference in relation to dyslexia and remains contentious, for some, because of this. But his report informed the 2010 Equality Act and has had a significant effect on UK educational policy and practice.

Definitions

According to Rose (2009: 10):

- Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling.

- Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed.

- Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities.

- It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points.

- Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organization, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia.

- A good indication of the severity and persistence of dyslexic difficulties can be gained by examining how the individual responds or has responded to well-founded intervention.

There are significant differences between Rose's definition and those definitions that appear in the research literature. The following, from Firth *et al*. (2013), Carroll and Iles (2006) and Lyon *et al*. (2003) are indicative of some of these differences:

- Dyslexia is characterized by 'neurological processing problems that are likely to be genetically based and lifelong, and which are highly resistant to change despite excellent teaching … significant difficulty with reading, writing, spelling or mathematics' (Firth *et al*., 2013: 116).
- Dyslexia is 'a complex neurological condition … (with) lifelong effects … (which include) … slow, effortful and often inaccurate reading' (Carroll and Iles, 2006: 651).

- Dyslexia is 'a specific learning disability that is neurobiological 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' (Lyon *et al*., 2003: 2).

Although there is clear overlap between all of these definitions, there are also significant differences, most notably in reference to a distinct genetic or neurobiological difference. What this means is that cross-disciplinary discussions about dyslexia are often hindered by different assumptions and frames of reference. It also means that the application of the research to pedagogic contexts is problematized.

A philosophical perspective

This lack of consensus is clearly illustrated in a recent book in a series called *Key Debates in Educational Policy*, which aims to bring 'philosophical perspectives to bear on UK educational policy' (Winch, 2016: viii). *Dyslexia: Developing the Debate* is structured as a dialogue between Rod Nicolson and Julian Elliot (Davis, 2016). Nicolson is the executive editor of the BDA journal *Dyslexia* and a central figure in mainstream UK dyslexia research. Elliot (2016: 135), Professor of Educational Psychology at Durham University, argues that, because the term dyslexia is 'so variously understood ... it is not a helpful diagnostic term'. The philosophical perspective on these two, diametrically opposed positions is provided by Andrew Davis (2016: 160), who concludes:

> it is important to note that however plausible these narratives may be, they do not settle the issue of whether, for instance, dyslexics really do share some kind of common essence. ... Even if conceptualizing dyslexia as a condition with essential properties is motivated by an essentializing mentality, it still might be true that the majority of those awarded a dyslexia label actually do share one or more objective, identifiable features.

The reticence of these conclusions indicates that the application of dyslexia research to pedagogic contexts in the UK is complex and in flux. For Davis, there seems to be significant difficulties involved in weighing up the conflicting opinions of Nicolson and Elliot. On the one hand, he does not seem convinced by the scientific evidence put forward by Nicolson, but on

the other, avoids Elliot's conclusion that what this means is that the term dyslexia is not a useful categorization.

However, implied within Davis's concluding remarks, and implicit within the now widespread use of the term 'dyslexia' is a contained assumption that dyslexia *is* an understood categorization. Although there is still no single test for dyslexia (Reid, 2009) and although understandings of what dyslexia is have altered since the word was first used to identify unexplained difficulties in the recognition of written text (Soler, 2009; Elliot, 2016), there remains the idea of a dyslexic learner as somehow different to other learners who experience difficulties in the acquisition of literacy skills.

A cultural studies perspective

In addressing this central problematic we can draw parallels between what can be viewed as the discursive construction of dyslexia and the construction of other significant, categorizations of collective identities, such as race (Hall, 1997; Gilroy, 1987; hooks, 1990), gender (de Beauvoir, 1981; Butler, 1990, 1993), sexuality (Foucault, 1978, 1985, 1986) and nationality (Hobsbawm, 1983; Anderson, 1983). These theoretical perspectives aim to reveal and reject historical, 'common-sense' understandings of an innate, hierarchical, biologically determined, binary relationship between, for example, black and white, woman and man, heterosexual and homosexual, 'the West and the rest' (Hall, 1992), the 'Orient and the Occident' (Said, 1985).

What this offers, in relation to attempts to unpack the term 'dyslexia', is an understanding that – even though a biological, genetic or neurological explanation for dyslexia may not be convincing – it can be argued that dyslexia is no less 'real' or powerful than other cultural constructs such as race, gender and nationality.

To return to Barker's (2012) response to the question 'What is cultural studies?', we can address the question 'What is dyslexia?' obliquely by asking how is it useful to talk about dyslexia and what purpose this discussion serves. If we have an understanding of dyslexia as a powerful cultural construct that performatively (Butler, 1990) describes certain similarities of difference this opens up our thinking and can enable a more productive engagement with a disparate body of research (which, at its core, is still a work in progress) without the need to take on board the implications of the essentialist notions and binary thinking that inform so much of it.

What follows, therefore, is a selective, pragmatic engagement with a range of dyslexia pedagogic research that seems to offer strategies, situations and interventions relevant to the HE context of this study; a brief

explanation of their particular relevance to HE art and design educators; and then an identification of some of the key areas where, I would argue, the different approaches impede a productive synthesis and application of the research.

Pedagogic strategies and interventions

Most pedagogic research into dyslexia is motivated by a desire to improve the experiences and attainment of dyslexic learners, but there is still some confusion about what works best (Riddell *et al.*, 2005; Cameron, 2012). The suggested strategies can be categorized into four key areas: student strategies; staff perspectives; communication; and assistive technology.

Student strategies

One of the most useful and influential approaches can be found in the work of Firth *et al.* (2010), who conclude that the key coping strategies identified in successfully compensated dyslexics are: an awareness of their dyslexia but a resistance to being defined by it; a proactive rather than passive response to the barriers to learning it presents; the ability to set goals and to persevere; an understanding of how to access help; and a flexible response to problem solving. The relatively informal context of creative art and design learning offers, perhaps, a more conducive context for these kinds of strategies to develop than a more formal straightforwardly academic context.

Staff perspectives

Staff attitudes to dyslexia and their knowledge about it have been identified as having a significant impact on the achievements of dyslexic students (Gannon-Leary and Smailes, 2004; Cameron and Nunkoosing, 2012). Gannon-Leary and Smailes (2004: 17) offer this remark from a student in support of this:

> It is dependent on lecturers and how sympathetic they are or how knowledgeable they are about dyslexia. Some of them haven't a clue. They need to have a basic understanding of what it is and how they could make things easier for students.

Cameron and Nunkoosing also identified a significant lack of awareness about dyslexia at their own institutions. They conclude that the attitude of lecturers:

> was found to inform approach to support, and vice versa. Personal and meaningful experiences with people who have the dyslexia label was identified as the catalyst for genuine interest in

the challenges dyslexic students face at university. (Cameron and Nunkoosing, 2012: 341)

Their extensive review of the literature suggests that this lack of awareness and/or interest means that dyslexic students can face challenges when attempting to communicate with academic staff about their dyslexia and the reasonable adjustments that they require.

Communication

Although it is important to acknowledge that the lack of consensus about all aspects of dyslexia, and the academic discipline within which a lecturer's knowledge base is located will have an impact on the perspective they take towards dyslexic students, it can be argued that a more critically engaged interest in the range of perspectives in play would be beneficial for both. A cultural studies perspective could perhaps be useful here. It could help academics to examine their own positionality, the intersectional identities of their students and the power dynamics articulated in the problematic interactions identified by both Gannon-Leary and Smailes (2004) and Cameron and Nunkoosing (2012).

Assistive technology

The provision of assistive technology is one of the key aspects of the additional support the DSA funds. But in compulsory schooling, IT compensations for specific issues are generally not considered appropriate. However Milani *et al.* (2010) found that the use of audiobooks, as an alternative to reading, by dyslexic adolescents had a significant, positive effect on learning and general wellbeing. In addition, Edyburn (2006) offers a thoughtful and convincing critique of attitudes to the use of assistive technology in schools. He argued that teachers are comfortable with the idea of remedial teaching but resistant to the idea of compensation for specific difficulties. He advocates the earlier use of assistive technology, for example spell checkers for pupils whose spelling issues were preventing the development of other writing skills.

In support of his argument, Edyburn (2010) draws parallels between the use of a spell checker for a dyslexic student and the use of a wheelchair for a physically disabled individual. Another analogy might be the use of spectacles by a shortsighted person. In both these cases, most people would deem it appropriate to compensate for the specific impairment. Edyburn suggests that the same attitude should prevail in regard to dyslexic impairments, in school. The use of cultural theory can help develop different models of thought around the use of assistive technology and avoid deficit thinking in relation to this.

Complexities and intersections

Some key issues need to be considered in assessing the relevance of the strategies outlined above and the implications of them for art and design learning in HE. These are more significant in relation to HE art and design learning because of the high incidence of dyslexic learners and because of the different educational processes that take place. The issues centre upon: the difficulties researchers face in differentiating between dyslexic and non-dyslexic students; the disputes which exist about the prevalence of 'successfully compensated' or 'high functioning' dyslexics and the fact that the procedures adopted for the assessment of dyslexia are inexorably linked to the learning processes and expectations of primary and secondary schooling. Different researchers choose diverse ways of dealing with these issues. Institutions also have their own tendencies in relation to the way they respond to these differences and apply support systems (Rodger *et al.*, 2015).

Cameron and Nunkoosing (2012: 248), for example, factor in the existence of undiagnosed dyslexics by identifying particularly supportive lecturers as those who 'recognise the existence of students who were unaware of their dyslexia'. This of course draws attention to the lack of clarity in relation to definitions of dyslexia but, perhaps more importantly, there are also ethical issues to be mindful of. The students referred to might not have chosen to define themselves in this way and may not be comfortable with the dyslexia descriptor.

Deacon *et al.* (2012) approach this issue differently. Their research is explicitly focused upon attempting to differentiate between dyslexic and non-dyslexic students, as well as identifying dyslexic students who have successfully compensated for their dyslexia. They compare three groups of students: formally diagnosed dyslexics; non-dyslexic students who have experienced literacy difficulties in mainstream schooling; and non-dyslexic students with no past problems in literacy development. They did this because:

> Recruiting only individuals with a confirmed diagnosis can reduce both the likelihood of finding fully compensated individuals and the generalizability of findings to the full range of high-functioning dyslexics. (Ibid.: 121)

Like Elliot (2016), Deacon *et al.* (2012) concluded that dyslexia is not a useful categorization. They suggested that, rather than emphasizing attempts to

identify dyslexic students, universities should encourage all students to self-identify any previous literacy problems in primary and secondary schooling.

This suggestion reflects one of their key findings. They found that an attainment gap existed between, on the one hand, students who had not experienced literacy difficulties in primary school and, on the other, *both* the diagnosed dyslexic students and the students who had experienced literacy difficulties but who did not have a formal diagnosis of dyslexia. These findings suggest that, in an HE context, 'diagnosing' dyslexia is less important than identifying students with prior literacy difficulties and then offering additional support that is more fully integrated in the teaching and learning provision provided for all students.

Many researchers, including Deacon *et al.* (ibid.: 134), argue that for the dyslexic learner, 'full compensation for early reading difficulties is rare'. This idea, that early reading difficulties are rarely fully overcome, is alluded to in the definition provided by Rose (2009) (see above), and it has historically informed a great deal of the popular understandings of dyslexia, in relation to reading and spelling difficulties. In addition, it can be argued that Rose's reference to teaching methods means that it is only when all opportunities to address learning difficulties have been exhausted that the dyslexia diagnosis can be made. In other words, if a dyslexic learner receives appropriate teaching and thereby overcomes their learning difficulty, they can cease to be defined as dyslexic or may never be formally identified as dyslexic in the first place.

These contradictory findings suggest that any assumptions we make about a dyslexic student are open to question and that institutions seeking to respond to the needs of dyslexic learners face challenges. This is without the added complexity that an arts educational context brings, namely there is often no attainment gap between diagnosed dyslexic students and those without a diagnosis, but they are more likely to express their dissatisfaction with their learning experiences (Rodger *et al.*, 2015: v).

Findings by Re *et al.* (2011) offer another perspective on these contradictory findings. Although, like Deacon *et al.* (2012), they argue that for the dyslexic learner compensation for early reading difficulties is rare, they also note: 'An apparently surprising result was obtained, that is, individuals with dyslexia do not read well and make errors in reading some words, but nevertheless, understand what they read as well as controls' (Re *et al.*, 2011: 236). We can speculate, as Re *et al.* (ibid.: 236) do that 'this seems to be because of the particular procedure we adopt for assessing reading comprehension, focused on the ability to do detective work ... and the fact that reading errors were not high and most did not change the text

meaning'. One of the key aspects of a cultural studies approach to written texts is that all texts are polysemic and different interpretations, if justified, are valid. For learning processes relying on an ability to analyse connotative as well as denotative meanings, these different reading processes may well be less disabling.

What is also significant in a HE context, is that specific skills such as single-word decoding are no longer being scrutinized or assessed in the way they are in primary and secondary school (and also in formal dyslexia assessment). In addition, some of the other practical literacy skills, such as writing by hand and automaticity in spelling, which are so central to success in mainstream schooling, can be relatively straightforward to address at HE level. Accurate typing, for example, is more useful than good handwriting, and being able to use a spell checker much more important than the ability to memorize the spelling of new terminology (if the assessment process allows this).

So, the kind of skills central to achievement in mainstream schooling – and which tend to form the basis of an assessment of dyslexia – can cease to be so disabling in an HE context, particularly if we factor in the findings of Re *et al.* (2011) that dyslexic learners understand reading material as well as non-dyslexics. This is particularly the case for those on art and design courses, because a creative, interpretive approach is something that is actively encouraged.

The cross-referencing of these perspectives on the criteria used to identify the dyslexic student, on successful compensation in relation to dyslexia and on some of the research findings, further supports the idea, as Davis (2016: 1) suggests, there 'are several ontological, epistemological and normative complexities' in play within the research into dyslexia. For HE educationalists, looking to support the needs of dyslexic learners, perhaps what needs to be sought is not cross-disciplinary, theoretical and pedagogic points of consensus, because these are unlikely given the epistemological complexities and numerous areas of contention, but more pragmatic, theoretical points of departure: ones which aid an understanding of the discursive construction of dyslexia in specific cultural, historical, educational and institutional contexts.

The following section of this chapter investigates three critical responses in how knowledge about dyslexia is developing in the UK. All attempt to intervene in this discursive process and challenge established assumptions. They question the usefulness of medical-model thinking in relation to dyslexia (Cameron, 2008, 2015, 2016; Cameron and Nunkoosing, 2012; Cameron and Billington, 2015; Davies, 2017) and disability

(Goodley, 2000, 2007, 2011, 2014, 2015), and use transdisciplinary perspectives to offer different viewpoints.

The discursive construction of dyslexia

Cameron's work is framed by the academic field of critical psychology and her focus is identifying and categorizing attitudes to dyslexia and discourses of it. She uses 'constructivist grounded theory, informed by Charmaz' (Cameron and Nunkoosing, 2012: 343), which, as she explains, differs from the way discourse analysis is commonly used within her field in 'its recognition that theories do not arise from the data without the co-constructing influence of the researcher' (ibid.: 343).

Cameron (2015b: ii) classifies dyslexia discourse into seven sub-categories: 'dyslexia as desirable; as innate deficit; as an excuse for stupidity or laziness; as difference; as disability; as social construction; as identity'. She identifies the ideological context for these sub-categories and the subject-positions that are constructed in negotiation with them. Her approach is particularly useful because it offers a systematic analysis of current discourses of dyslexia, in her own institution, which can be considered and adapted in different institutional and disciplinary contexts.

My own study (Davies, 2017) sought to understand the formation of HE dyslexic, pedagogized identities (Atkinson, 2001) at one arts university in the south of England. It made a series of recommendations in relation to students' experience of, and attainment in, the written, cultural studies component of their creative fashion courses. The aim was to interpolate the students (Althusser, 2001) as 'experts in the field of dyslexia … [rather than] … objects of study' (Davies, 2017: 7). I argued that students on creative art and design courses can be viewed as an untapped body of potential experts on alternative approaches to academic literacy development and that more research into the alternative strategies they employ would be useful.

The context of this is a perceived link between creativity and dyslexia which means that discourses of it, within art and design HEIs, tend towards the more positive sub-categories of dyslexia as classified by Cameron. Students also have frequently chosen their creative art or design courses, precisely because they experienced literacy difficulties in compulsory schooling, and gravitated towards more practice-based or vocational subjects. If we factor in that, on some art and design courses, formally diagnosed dyslexic students are not in the minority – and on some courses there is no attainment gap between students with a dyslexia diagnosis and those without – there is significant scope for students to develop more positive understandings of

their own dyslexic difficulties. This requires, I argued, a more embedded understanding of social model thinking in relation to dyslexia as disability (for those students with a formal diagnosis) as well as strategies of support and intervention more centrally located in curricula and mainstream teaching and learning provision in HE. If these strategies are more centrally located, this also addresses the needs of undiagnosed, high functioning or fully compensated dyslexic students which, as we have seen, are difficult to identify, as well those of students without a formal dyslexia diagnosis who, it may be argued, could or could not be dyslexic.

Goodley's work, within the field of critical disability studies, offers a great deal in relation to the reframing of understandings of dyslexia as disability. He explores new ways of thinking about disabled identities and calls for a resistance to 'over-coding' in a bid to develop more 'socially just pedagogies' (Goodley, 2007: 21). Drawing on Gabel, he argues that 'too often … disabled learners are excluded from the discourses of critical pedagogy' (Gabel in Goodley, 2007: 3) and utilizes a range of post-structuralist theories to develop radical and powerful new ways of thinking about disability. As Goodley (2007: 18) argues:

> Rather than being viewed as the stuff of shame or deficit, these new 'bodies' and 'minds' promote opportunities for reconfiguring the classroom, the learning environment, the school, spaces and times of pedagogy. Bodies that refute normalisation are reconsidered in terms of their resistant possibilities.

Using Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical concepts of 'rhizomes' (1987: 3–26), 'bodies without organs' (1987: 149–76) and the idea of the 'post-human' body derived from Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (1991), Goodley argues that impaired bodies and minds inevitably lead to experiments with 'new models of the self' (Goodley *et al*., 2014: 348). He holds that these are aligned to post-structuralist, post-colonial and post-modern rethinkings of the fictive nature of the unified, sovereign self and enable progressive constructions of identity which acknowledge that a successful self is always an 'interconnected and relational entity' (Braidotti in Goodley *et al*., 2014: 7).

Goodley's work provides new opportunities to rethink the manifestations of dyslexia within a framework of disability rather than in opposition to it. What is particularly interesting about his approach is it turns on its head the assumed, hierarchical relation between abled and dis-abled bodies and minds, and challenges the disablism inherent within this

assumption. He argues that this kind of hierarchical thinking is oblivious to the new models of identity prescribed and required by post- or late-modern modes of production and the social and cultural milieus that have emerged. He sees the disabled body as quintessentially 'post human' and inherently 'rhizomatic' where the boundaries between person and, for example, new technologies are blurred.

In this conceptualization, the assistive technology advocated for dyslexic learners can cease to be framed within a narrative of deficit. It can become part of a more powerful narrative of identity: a response to Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (1991), part of an augmented, post-human rhizomatic body equipped for the changing requirements of a post-modern world where a constant renegotiation with technological change is required, as well as a reflexive understanding of the interpersonal connections inherent in the construction of any successful self.

Goodley's use of Deleuze and Guattari's transdisciplinary perspectives and Cameron's work within critical psychology operate at the margins of their own disciplinary contexts in ways like the eclectic methodological approach of much cultural studies writing. All are in dialogue with the assumptions inherent in their own 'root disciplines' but are fundamentally informed by pedagogic aspirations which seek to address exclusionary practice in HE and which share the aspirations of the critical pedagogy at the heart of a cultural studies approach.

In relation to the development of alternative understandings of dyslexia, within an HE context, the interdisciplinary space of cultural studies offers a great deal. As the dyslexia research suggests, dyslexia intersects (Crenshaw, 1991) and overlaps with other categorizations of SpLD, neurodiversity, mental health conditions and learning difficulties in complex ways. This is reflected in the use of terminology and in the difficulties connected to the continued attempts to pin down and delineate definitions of dyslexia.

But it is also important to bear in mind that the kinds of literacy difficulties pedagogic research into dyslexia is trying to address are also part of the mechanics of exclusionary practice more generally. Particularly in relation to class and race. The complexity of these intersections and the centrality of the kinds of specific difficulties being discussed, when we talk about dyslexia, means greater understanding of dyslexic difference could have wider implications in relation to inclusion in HE both within the art school and beyond.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the ways in which dyslexia is conceptualized and has attempted to deconstruct some of the assumptions upon which a 'diagnosis' of dyslexia is premised. It has critiqued the essentializing tendency of much of the research into dyslexia. It has argued that the use of the terms 'dyslexia' and 'dyslexic' are by no means straightforward, and that the naming of dyslexia as a disability and a distinct category of neurodiversity has implications. It has drawn attention to the fact that medical science, neurobiology and psychology are the 'root disciplines' of dyslexia research and pedagogy and that 'the ontological, epistemological and normative complexities' in play (Davis, 2016: 1) are frequently not foregrounded in the research and in the application of this research to educational contexts.

The chapter advocated a cultural studies approach as a useful addition to research into dyslexia and the pedagogy of it, and argued that this approach can provide an interdisciplinary location for the consideration of dyslexic difference in new ways. Fundamental to this is a view of dyslexia as a discursive construction that performatively (Butler, 1990) describes certain similarities of difference.

Whereas the idea of dyslexia as discursive construction is problematic for scientists and social scientists who may be wedded to the grand narrative of science as the process by which inherent and universal truths about the world and its inhabitants are revealed, what cannot be disputed is that, in the UK, since the 2009 Rose Report and the 2010 Equality Act, there has been a significant shift in discourses of dyslexia and in governmental and legal recognition of it. Students arriving at HEIs are increasingly defining themselves as dyslexic and have increasingly adopted strategies of achievement in negotiation with the dyslexia label.

This chapter concludes with a suggestion that Cameron's categorizations of sub-discourses of dyslexia can be adapted in different institutional and interdisciplinary contexts and that Goodley's work, within the field of new disability studies, provides a way to reconceptualize the idea of dyslexia as disability.

Within an art school educational context, the splittings and inversions inherent in attempts to consider the impact and implications of dyslexic difference as a disability, as a continuum and as a position of creative potential are particularly complex. Because of this, they offer, I would argue, opportunities to rethink the kinds of binary understandings of difference at the heart of both essentialist thinking in relation to dyslexia and exclusionary practice in educational institutions and beyond.

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