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"Improving the overall quality of how our society responds to adults with learning disabilities is a global issue which needs to be addressed by society in general. Changing current practice in literacy programs is only part of the solution. Literacy programs cannot do this alone. They must develop links to the community that will ensure adequate resources, support, and follow-up. By making these connections, literacy programs can ensure that adults with learning disabilities can continue to be successful not only in literacy programs, but in life in general."

(Bridges to Practice, Guidebook 4)

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Practitioners' Points

Volume 4, Issue 3

ADULT DYSLEXIA PERCEPTIONS AND
RESEARCH IN THE NORTH WEST REGION
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

BY
STEVE O'BRIEN

Steven O'Brien is the Chief Executive of a non-profit Adult Dyslexia Organisation based in the North West of England. He is a dyslexic adult with a BA (Hons) and is currently studying for a Ph.D. in Dyslexia and Welfare Provision in the United Kingdom.

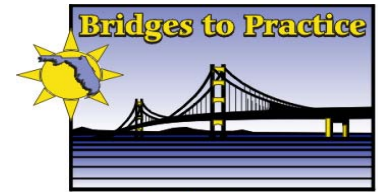


Current Government figures highlight the North West of England has the highest level of illiterate adults in the UK. The current level in Manchester of functionally illiterate adults is at 25% (Bench Hill/Manchester LSC, 2003). In the United Kingdom it is recognised that 10% of the population has Dyslexia (BDA 2004). However, this figure was established largely for the primary and secondary education sector of children, and is not necessarily indicative of the level of adults with Dyslexia in the UK.

The current provision of services for adults with Dyslexia in the United Kingdom is inconsistent. However there are some good examples of positive approaches to enabling dyslexic adults to reach their full potential. Government policy and practice is starting to address issues of Basic Skills deficits for adults with Dyslexia. The Government body for education, the DfES (www.dfes.gov.uk) has implemented changes to its framework for 'Skills for Life' and the provision of education for adults.

As an organisation, the **Adult Dyslexia Access (ADA)** has been involved in a predominantly advisory capacity. It is apparent that the lead organisations in changing and implementing 'Good Practice' are in the Voluntary Sector.

The **ADA** is one of the few pioneer non-profit organisations in the UK that is highlighting and addressing issues affecting adult dyslexics. As an organisation it delivers advice, guidance, a na-



Florida's Focus on
Adults with Learning Disabilities

tional help-line, Dyslexia screenings and assessments, One to One Dyslexia Teaching, and Mentoring to dyslexic adults. It also runs accredited awareness training courses, performs technical assessments, and is undertaking academic research within the field of Learning Disabilities.

The organisation has been established since 1998 and has developed from just one desk to a tri-centred organisation with over 10 staff. The **ADA** is self-funded and receives no mainstream funding from the Government. However, it has had continual funding from a major English Foundation that helped to develop the Charity from its embryonic stages.

The Charity does not offer the usual support group that meets once a month. Instead it has an open-door policy that enables *anyone* to access its services free of charge from 9AM – 5PM, Monday through Friday. In the past three years the **ADA** has screened and assessed over 1000 adults for free. From filling in welfare forms to scribing a Ph.D. document; the **ADA** is openly available to dyslexic adults regardless of their difficulties or requirements. Over the past seven years it has become the reference point in the North West of England region for the Government and other non-statutory bodies.

The organisation has worked with Prisons, Local Education Authorities, Colleges, Universities, National and Multi-National Organisations such as the British Government, Ford Motor Company, Learn Direct, and various Learning and Skills Councils (LSC) that are in each region of

(Continued on page 2)

"In England, the definition of Dyslexia is standardised to a white, male, middle class 18-25 year old age group. There is little research undertaken into the adult dyslexics who are not in education. No research has been undertaken into welfare or the socially disadvantaged. Welfare provision, careers advice, and Basic Skills provision are all severely lacking in information about or provisions for adults with Dyslexia. The **Adult Dyslexia Access (ADA)** has focused specifically on disadvantaged dyslexics, with the greatest focus being on disadvantaged adults who are unaware that their difficulties are caused by a hidden learning disability. In the UK, the notion of a Learning Disability is **not** acceptable and is in much need of revision. Misleadingly, the notion is confined to the measurement of an IQ level below 65 to identify a Learning Disability." (Steve O'Brien, Adult Dyslexia Access, United Kingdom)

ADULT DYSLEXIA PERCEPTIONS AND RESEARCH IN THE NORTH WEST REGION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

(continued)

England; some forty-nine in total. **The LSC has the remit and control of learning for Post 16 education.** They are proactive in developing new approaches to engaging learners and addressing the literacy and numeracy deficits of learners in their local regions (www.lsc.gov.uk).

In the past 10 years I have researched the provision for adult dyslexics in the UK. As an academic dyslexic, I have struggled to find services and provision for adults. In the UK there are some good National Organisations similar to the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) and the LDA, however they are generally child-oriented and have little provision for adults with Dyslexia.

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Terminology, and bias towards the notion of difference, clouds the Learning Disability debate. This presents a major barrier for adult dyslexics in the UK. The work carried out by the **ADA** has highlighted that the biggest cohort of dyslexics that are the most severely disadvantaged are the cohort that do not know how to identify and overcome the barriers to educational attainment.



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Subsequently, archaic myths about Dyslexia perpetuate in the UK. The **ADA** has been funded to deliver training to 550 Basic Skills teachers in 2003 and the lack of knowledge of Learning Disabilities was astounding. The notion of Dyslexia being solely a male issue, the confusing of the letters 'b' and 'd' or a simple deficit in spelling, are clearly apparent from teaching professionals within the Basic Skills arena.

The **ADA** has carried out **Dyslexia Awareness Training Programs** for the past 6 years for the Government and non-statutory organisations and has been alarmed at the disparity between staff development and resources to address Dyslexia, and the funding that is poured into Basic Skills deficits that do not encompass learning disabilities.

In 2000, the **ADA** undertook a research project that would span four years and was funded by the European Social Fund at a cost of \$300,000. The research was to identify the level of Dyslexia in the welfare provision of males/females between the ages of 18-25 years. This research was both innovative and ground breaking and has been highlighted in the House of Lords by the patron of the **ADA**; Lord Paddington.

The research involved 650 interviews, screenings and assessments for Dyslexia. The individuals were all from one region within the North West of England. These research results and findings have formed a part of my own Ph.D. The research has highlighted that 43% of the individuals who were unemployed are dyslexic. This was established by interviews, screenings, and assessments performed by an Educational Psychologist. The research also highlighted a correlation between truancy or exclusion from education and educational achievement: 79% of the individuals screened were truants or excluded. 80% had no formal qualifications. A correlation with penal attendance was also evident. Recent research by the British Dyslexia Association has further delineated of a disproportionate number of dyslexics in the penal system. The BDA has undertaken research that has highlighted 90% of young offenders are dyslexic (2003).

This research paints a bleak picture of provision for adult dyslexics in the UK, however there are models of good practice and key milestones are being achieved by the Government and Voluntary Organisations. The British Dyslexia Organisations are working towards making school authorities '**Dyslexia Friendly**' and the DfES is introducing clear frameworks to change the current provision of Basic Skills in the UK. However, there still needs to be investment into the infrastructure of teaching staff. At present there is a clear lack of qualified professional staff that can address the needs of adults entering education with a Learning Disability.

The need for **Mentors** and **Job Coaches** that can also enable the adult to overcome and understand their disability is also paramount in enabling the individual to reach their full potential. Without such coaching many individuals are unable to overcome the barriers to education and employment which they encounter. The case history below further exemplifies both the need for provision for adult dyslexics in the UK:



Charles was a Bus Driver who lost his job due to his poor reading and writing ability. His only option was to then take a job as a Refuse Collector thinking this job would not have any components of literacy.

Case History

Charles enrolled in a local college to improve his literacy and numeracy skills due to the failure of his employment and the need to read to his children. At the local classes Charles was told that he may be dyslexic; however he would need a full educational assessment to enable successful completion of the Basic Skills class and was asked by the college to fund his own assessment. Unfortunately, Charles was unable to afford to do so due to his low income.

Charles left the college and 12 months later was referred to the **ADA** by a friend who knew of the work that the organisation undertook. Charles was **mentored, screened, and assessed** by the organisation. He became fully aware of his disability and entered onto an Access to Higher Education in a college some distance from his home in order to gain entrance to a university course. In 2003, Charles achieved the qualifications required to attend the university and embarked on a Bachelors Degree in History. However, Charles would not have had the opportunity to reach his full potential if he did not have **access to an assessment and mentoring to address his learning disability** – key factors to his success.



NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LITERACY (NIFL)

BY

JUNE JUSTICE CRAWFORD,
INTERIM DEPUTY DIRECTOR



The National Institute for Literacy is pleased to announce the appointment of **Dr. Rochelle Kenyon**, the Bridges to Practice State Project Director in the State of Florida, as the moderator for the Learning Disabilities Discussion List on the NIFL website. A retired teacher and administrator in the Florida schools, and a long-time advocate for adult learners, Dr. Kenyon is a NIFL Master Trainer for Bridges to Practice. Having her as the moderator will provide the nation with an invaluable resource for those working in the field of learning disabilities.

In addition to guiding the discussion on the List, Dr. Kenyon will assist NIFL in developing discussion strands for practitioners and other interested parties. She will also arrange for guests from the field of learning disabilities who will be featured throughout the year. We anticipate a lively resumption of activity on this list after a hiatus of several months in which there was no moderator.

The Learning Disabilities Discussion List has often been a source of assistance for those working with youngsters and adults who wish to seek the advice of experienced instructors and special education teachers. Information about technology and accommodations for those with learning disabilities has also been featured quite regularly. *(continued on page 4)*

MAKE LEARNING FUN! - MOTIVATING INMATES WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES
BY RICHARD L. GRIMES, II, and
KATHLEEN J. YOUNG,
Academic Teachers
Florida State Prison, Raiford, Florida

Anybody learns better when learning is fun!



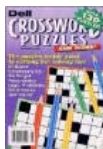
Our student inmates at Florida State Prison are not guests of the state because they've been making responsible choices. Learning how to take responsibility for their own education would be difficult even if most of them were not LD. Making it **fun** helps.

One of our most effective approaches is engaging them with interesting and fun materials while giving them choices. Some students must be enticed to study anything at all, and others must be encouraged to study a particular subject or lesson.

For the reluctant students, we use choice, puzzles, and short fillers. Inmates get precious few choices in prison. When asked, "What would you like to study?" they eagerly choose, usually naming their worst subject in school. We have math, science, social studies, language arts, reading, and essay-writing. Our students are with us for many years. What difference does it make where they start?

"Would you like to study one subject at a time or several?" Most choose to study several and name which ones. "Would you like to take a pretext to see what skills you need to focus on so that you don't waste your time on things you already know?" "Yes," he would respond. Gotcha! The student is onboard. **Choice --- or even the illusion of it --- is a powerful motivator for men who have every aspect of their lives determined by others for years on end.**

Many of the lessons we have written incorporate fun activities such as [word searches](#), [crossword puzzles](#), [word scrambles](#), [matching](#), and [cross number puzzles](#). Various free educational websites have programs that create these downloadable activities from our own data. Some lessons involve working problems to solve a puzzle or getting the last line of a joke. Others require working problems to negotiate a maze. Others have fillers, short mazes, or funny quotes embedded in lessons, primarily to encourage further reading, and as a reward for working that far along. Such lessons are available on educational websites and commercially at low cost with reproduction rights. (e.g., puzzlemaker.com)



Learning-disabled students especially benefit from **manipulatives**, but prison regulations prevent using most types because of safety reasons or contraband materials. That leaves

paper with liberal use of **colored** markers. For both reading and math we make **numerous paper manipulatives** and distribute them **in envelopes**. Most are cut out for the students, but some are activities the inmates can tear apart and assemble. Since they are not allowed scissors, inmates use their ID cards for a straightedge when tearing paper activities. Although we go through a lot of copy paper, index cards, and business envelopes, these are low cost materials. Inmates who are non-readers or very poor readers work almost exclusively with manipulatives until their skills increase. We teach several dyslexic students to do



***Brain Gym Exercises** daily and work with tactile and kinesthetic teacher-made learning materials. (*Brain Gym exercises access brain function drawn from all areas of movement - from the calisthenics we did in phys-ed class to the eye exercises of behavioral optometrists. These exercises have been found to improve ADD/ADHD/Dyslexic conditions as well as other learning disabilities.)

Failure breeds fear of more failure. Success breeds success. Many of our students want to learn but have had few positive experiences in school. They just do not need more failure to discourage them. For them immediate success is critical, an instant reward for effort. Liberal use of appropriate praise makes a difference. Even a **red ink pen** or **colored** marker can be a tool to boost self-esteem. The words **EXCELLENT!** or **GOOD JOB!** scratched across a lesson usually bring a big smile to any face accustomed to seeing a D or an F. All lessons are short, and most can be done in an hour or less. We have written several lessons just for the purpose of giving instant guaranteed success to reluctant learners who fear failure so much. Once they have solved a few problems correctly, worked a few puzzles, or answered some easy questions, they are usually eager to continue on do more difficult work.



Our students usually ask us to bring them more work than we plan for. Other inmates frequently request some of the lessons, even though they already have GEDs or high school diplomas. Kathy tutors twenty such additional inmates, mostly supplying them with lessons of their choice. Even though they are not officially in the education program, it is difficult to say "no" to inmates who want to continue learning. Only yesterday, one of the runners (inmates with prison jobs) asked Dick for some of lessons to work on. When given the sixteen science lessons we developed, his first words were, "Oh! Science. Cool!" Various studies show that inmates who receive some education in prison have a 30 to 35% lower recidivism rate. That is worth the time and effort of preparing a few more copies of lessons and encouraging other



inmates to become lifelong learners. It is certainly worth the small cost when we consider the expense of housing repeat offenders. For many of these inmates, this is the first time they have enjoyed studying.

A second motivational strategy is providing interesting materials in science, social studies, and language. Nobody likes to be bored, and many commercial texts are not appealing to our students. Also, some commercial texts are too politically correct for our inmates to take seriously. Since most of our students have reading disabilities, Dick wrote individual science and social studies lessons that incorporate humor, pictures, vocabulary studies, and simple explanations of difficult concepts, at a very low reading level — much lower than most commercial materials. Most of the students completing the science and social studies series increase their reading levels as well. Most will separate the written assignment pages to hand in and keep the lesson materials to read again at their leisure. Others choose to throw them out the window. *Oh, well, you can't win 'em all!*



Several commercially available, low-reading-level, high-interest books in both fiction and non-fiction are available, and we have written exercises to accompany them, incorporating vocabulary lessons and questions from higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Students have favorites among these, often requesting reading lessons other inmates have enjoyed. We avoid character study-type reading assignments and favor exciting stories.

Because our [LD students seem to benefit from shorter lessons](#), we download short literature by such authors as Mark Twain, Edgar Allan Poe, and Kin Hubbard, none of whom are still under copyright. Many websites contain literature that can be downloaded and printed into lessons. One favorite has been narrative poetry from eighteenth and nineteenth century poets and short humorous poetry. Vocabulary lessons are always short, and inmates frequently request them.

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You can't win 'em all, but with the proper materials and rewards, you can win most of them!

LD student inmates who have **fun** and [interesting lessons](#) presented to them, along with [appropriate praise](#), achieve in our environment.

Richard Grimes has been conducting training classes and teaching since 1984 in public education, corrections, and private business. Richard has been a consultant and developed numerous training programs for business and government agencies. He currently uses his work with close management adult offenders at Florida State Prison to develop subject aids for ADD, Dyslexic, and other LD students.

Kathy Young has taught in public schools since 1966 and has headed several professional organizations, done teacher training, spoken at several conferences, and written math textbooks. She piloted a dropout prevention program for grades 8-12 and has been involved in assisting research and field-testing of learning styles, cognitive skills, individualized instruction, CAI, and Brain Gym programs. Kathy currently teaches all subjects at cell front in Florida State Prison.

**THIS TEST IS OK TO USE, RIGHT?
WRONG!**

By

**Robin L. Schwarz, Lesley University
Learning Lab, Tutoring Coordinator**

This spring I am beginning to put together a complete protocol for evaluating ESOL learners for LD. This will be more than just the Five Questions published in Volume 2, Issue 3 of *Practitioners' Points*. Rather, it will be a whole evaluation, including screening of phonological processing, assessing literacy skills with screening tasks, and addressing in a structured way the many aspects of the adult ESOL learner that could negatively impact learning.

Arriving at this stage has taken years of study into why the usual methods of assessment for LD would not work for the ESOL learner. I had long been aware of the concerns of experts in bilingual special education in K-12 about inappropriate assessment of ESOL students. However, not until I became involved in the cases of two students whose educations were nearly completely derailed by inappropriate testing did I really understand the implications of these concerns.



In one student's case — a 20-year African who had been in high school for three years-- I looked at the factors of his background which rendered traditional testing impossible: Almost no formalized schooling, a non-literate background, a mother tongue phonologically and syntactically distant from English, a deeply traumatic childhood and youth, cultural differences that affected everything from habits of asking questions to ways of understanding text. The young man's teachers believed he must have LD because of his inability to "get" science or deeper aspects of American history. The diagnosticians were baffled by scores literally at the bottom of the scales, but an alternative method of assessment—no tests—showed he was just fine, given the huge educational gap he had to fill.

In the other case, the unsuitability of the tests and the thoughtless use of them for assessment of the student was what interested—or rather outraged—me. Though this young teen had been in the U.S. barely five months and, like the other student, had no formal schooling at all, her IQ was "measured" with such tasks as knowledge of synonyms, syntax, and vocabulary, listening to long oral passages and answering questions about them—and all of this in English! No surprise that when the tests showed a thirteen year old with basic literacy and language skills at below-kindergarten level, the school personnel interpreted these to mean the student was severely retarded.



Because I want to construct as fair a protocol as possible for evaluating adult ESOL learners, these cases have compelled me to look deeper into the question of bias in assessment, and what a fascinating exploration it has been!

Did you know that as early as 1930, a Spanish-speaking psychologist was objecting to the assessment of Spanish-speaking students with English IQ tests? Throughout the rest of the twentieth century, objections about testing and assessment were increasingly raised on behalf of one or another cultural or language group. Yet in the twenty-first century, despite a steadily growing chorus of expert voices, a respectable body of literature, and laws which directly address issues of bias and discrimination in testing, things have changed little, as the above cases illustrate.



My studies indicate that bias is present in virtually *every* testing tool and *aspect* of assessment to some degree. This is of special concern now when pressure is being put on adult education programs to measure their learners in many ways. Here are a few things the literature has to say about the bias in tests and the evaluation process that could affect scores, testing outcomes and by extension, teachers' views of their adult students:

- Many official sources caution clinicians that when a non-native English speaker is given a test in English, the first, and often only thing that is being tested is the person's English proficiency.
- Several luminaries in the field of intelligence testing contend that testing intelligence across cultures is virtually impossible.
- The very concept of testing for intelligence, or achievement (except as it relates to progress in school), and especially testing for disabilities, is unheard of in many countries and cultures. Therefore, when persons from those cultures are asked to participate in that exercise in this country, they have no clue of what is going on or why.
- Asking questions has many cultural implications. In some cultures
 - Asking or answering direct questions may be offensive.
 - It is impolite to answer questions that have excessively obvious answers for fear of offending the person asking.
 - Certain topics may be culturally inappropriate to discuss with strangers.
 - Open-ended questions may produce no answers or great discomfort.
- The concept of group harmony is essential to a number of cultures, so that testing which results in individuals standing out from the group in some way runs counter to these cultures.
- So-called "non-verbal" tests can produce very unreliable results from non- or low literate persons as they will interpret abstract and one-dimensional figures, i.e. pictures, very differently than literate persons will.

- Even those who have been to school in another culture may never have encountered language tasks, such as giving synonyms or opposites which are common on many tests in this culture.
- The law clearly states that tests used for English language learners must have been normed (standardized) on similar persons. Otherwise, it is impossible to know exactly what the results mean, as they cannot be compared to the norms. A moment's reflection on the diversity in the adult ESOL population will tell you this is an almost impossible standard to meet.
- The format of tests can be a significant barrier to learners, especially those who have little or no experience with testing.
- No matter how simplified, the language used on tests is not "normal," conceptualized language. Translation of directions or test items can make this problem worse.
- In the hands of an experienced, culturally aware diagnostician or educational specialist, some tests and parts of tests can help to find out more about a learner. **BUT BEWARE!** In the wrong hands or under the wrong eyes, they become dangerous to the average ESOL learner.



NEWS FROM NIFL

(continued from page 2)

As the moderator, Dr. Kenyon will also be involved in the Learning Disability Special Collection—<http://ldlink.coe.utk.edu/> **Core Knowledge Group (CKG)** that is currently chaired by Margaret Lindop at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. The Special Collection gathers information about LD and establishes categories for those seeking specific assistance or research information for adult and adolescent education. The information is placed on the NIFL website using some of the same categories that are used in the Bridges to Practice program to make it easier for trainers to find new information to use in training sessions. As more research is completed about adults with LD, the information will be added to the Special Collection and this will help to keep everyone in the field current.

Those who wish to join the NIFL list may do so by clicking on the NIFL website: <http://www.nifl.gov>, clicking on the **Bridges to Practice** icon, and then clicking on Discussion Lists and following the simple instructions provided on the left bar under "Subscribe.!"



June Crawford joined NIFL in March 2000 as the program director for the national Bridges to Practice program. Since then she has been involved in the adolescent and adult reading programs at NIFL through the Partnership for Reading and has recently accepted administrative assignment as the interim deputy director. She is also a reading clinician.