

Summary of Doctorate Research: Dr James Thatcher, (2011)

1. Title

An exploration of the views and experiences of children with specific learning difficulties/dyslexia as consumers of special educational provision, and of their parents and professionals.

2. Introduction

This research was carried out within the framework agreed for doctorate study by educational psychologists in Norfolk i.e. to develop further the professional skills of educational psychologists, to raise the level of intellectual rigour and knowledge of research methodology within the service as a whole, and to contribute to service development within the local authority.

The study was carried out within the contexts of Every Child Matters, the Lamb Inquiry, the Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum, the SEN Green Paper and the recently published evaluation of DCSF investment initiatives.

3. Aims of the Study

- 3.1 To establish the views of members of an SEN sub-system (children, parents, SENCos and educational psychologists) about dyslexia and approaches to addressing it.
- 3.2 To seek the experiences and views of members of an SEN sub-system about the nature and effectiveness of SEN provision for children with dyslexia.
- 3.3 To seek the views of members of an SEN sub-system about communication and user participation.

4. Methodology

- 4.1 To address Aim 3.1, rating scales were completed by 50 children, their parents, SENCos and educational psychologists. These rating scales were subject to quantitative analysis.
- 4.2 Aims 3.2 and 3.3 were explored in two ways.
 - Children, parents, SENCos and educational psychologists from the whole sample (257 children, their parents and associated professionals) commented on their experiences of SEN provision and gave their perspectives on its nature and effectiveness. They also commented on user involvement. These responses were analysed using thematic analysis.
 - A member of each of the four respondent sets was interviewed in order to establish a richer picture of their experiences and views of SEN provision for children with dyslexia and about user involvement. These responses were also analysed using thematic analysis.

5. Findings

5.1 While there were differences in emphasis, the quantitative analysis revealed that there was general similarity of views on the part of members of all respondent sets about dyslexia and approaches to it. On average, members of all respondent sets agreed on the nature of dyslexia, that pupils with dyslexia can make progress, that support in school helps and that it helps if everyone in schools knows about dyslexia. Respondents also agreed that pupils with dyslexia need access to specialist teaching in mainstream schools.

Responses by all sets suggested more variation in views on the sufficiency of support in schools, whether everyone in schools tries to help pupils with dyslexia, and the desirability of attending specialist units.

In summary, there was general similarity of views between service users and professionals about dyslexia. In essence those views were that specialist provision should be made in mainstream schools by knowledgeable staff.

5.2 Qualitative analysis indicated that on average:

- members of all sets agreed that 'inadvertent factors' in local authority and school systems presented the biggest barriers to progress and well being of children with dyslexia. Such factors included lack of teacher knowledge, a lack of adjustments and the development of secondary difficulties;
- members of all sets also agreed that specialist approaches within mainstream schools were the preferred approach. There was no significant view expressed that provision should be made in special schools;
- children and parents tended to value access to units within mainstream schools;
- children and parents valued explicit recognition of dyslexia and Statements of SEN;
- many children and parents did not perceive there to be good communication between them and the local authority or schools. Some communication was seen as a 'battle';
- there was little evidence from the responses of there being proactive systems in place to involve service users as participants.
- there was only limited evidence from the responses of recognition by professionals of the importance of user participation.

6. Recommendations

Recommendations are made for the local authority, schools, and the practice of educational psychologists.

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