Report on British Dyslexia Association Courses for Reading and Spelling

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Contents

Introduction

I attended two full day courses run by the British Dyslexia Association (BDA), one for the teaching of spelling and one for the teaching of reading:
- Practical Solutions Plus – Spelling (17th October 2012 in London)
- Practical Solutions Plus – Reading (14th November 2012 in Bristol)

There was a third Practical Solutions Plus day – Writing – that I did not attend.

I have written this report as accurately as possible. However, it is based only on the content of the Power Point slides, my own notes, and my memory of what was said. As a result, it may not fully reflect the intentions of the trainer nor how it was perceived by other delegates.

The Courses

The following are descriptions of the courses from the BDA website:

Practical Solutions Plus

Duration: 1 - 3 Days Cost: £130 per day

Practical Solutions Plus is designed for teachers and teaching assistants and is split into three days, each day covering a different area of literacy: reading, spelling and writing. The way the programme is structured allows for you to attend one, two or all three days.

Who it is designed for:

Teachers and teaching assistants working with children with SpLDs will find these days very beneficial. As each day is devoted to a specific area of literacy, time is available to discuss how best to work with children with varying weaknesses. For example alternative methods are looked at to help children with auditory or visual distraction.

Please note: it is essential that participants have at least a rudimentary knowledge of SpLDs. If you do not have this knowledge we recommend you attend the Practical Solutions for Teachers and TAs before attending these courses.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the Reading day participants will:
• Understand the skills that are required for reading.
• Understand a multi sensory approach to teaching reading.
• Understand the importance of phonological awareness in relation to reading.
• Understand strategies to develop both basic and higher reading skills.

By the end of the Spelling day participants will:
• Understand the skills that are required for spelling.
• Understand the difficulties experienced by dyslexic individuals.
• Understand strategies to develop and improve spelling.

By the end of the Writing day participants will:
• Understand some of the difficulties faced by dyslexic individuals in relation to handwriting and creating pieces of written work.
• Identify some support strategies for handwriting difficulties and for organising written work.

Differences between these BDA Courses and Synthetic Phonics Courses I have Attended or Provided

Summary of the Differences

BDA Courses	**Synthetic Phonic Courses**
• Dyslexia is described as a specific learning difficulty.	The term "dyslexia" is seen as unhelpful – the aim is to make sure everyone learns to read.
• Dyslexics are seen as a distinct group requiring different teaching.	Synthetic phonics teaching is recommended for all.
• It is important to diagnose dyslexia.	It is important to identify all pupils who have difficulties learning to read.
• A range of different strategies was recommended for reading words.	Only phonics is recommended for reading words (and morphology and etymology later).
• "Miscue Analysis" was advocated.	"Miscue analysis" is not advocated.
• There was no clear explanation of the English alphabetic code.	Time is spent explaining the complexities of the English alphabetic code.
• The emphasis was on planning for individualised teaching.	The emphasis is on following a systematic programme.
• Reading and spelling were treated as separate topics.	Word reading and spelling are described as reversible processes, taught together.
• Decoding and reading comprehension were not clearly separated.	Reading is described as the product of decoding and language comprehension.

Further Details of the Differences

BDA Course	Synthetic Phonic Courses
• It was emphasised that dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty and that it is important to diagnose it.	While it is recognised that some pupils have much more difficulty than others in learning to read, the term "dyslexia" is avoided. It is seen as unhelpful, because the aim is to make sure all pupils (except a very few with profound learning difficulties) learn to read, regardless of whether or not they have been diagnosed as dyslexic.
• "Dyslexics" were seen as a distinct group requiring different teaching from others. Analysing the special attributes of dyslexia was seen as essential to finding the best ways to help them. The difficulties dyslexics have in learning to read were emphasised.	The emphasis is on synthetic phonics as the most effective method for teaching everyone to read and spell, and crucial for those who find it difficult. An emphasis on the attributes of dyslexics is seen as detrimental, because it may result in low expectations, instead of a determination to teach every pupil to read.
• Those with reading and spelling difficulties are assessed using special tests designed to show whether or not they are dyslexic.	Special assessments to diagnose dyslexia are not recommended. However, teachers are told about the importance of assessment to find where gaps are in pupils' knowledge of the alphabetic code and whether they are able to blend sounds for reading and segment spoken words for spelling, so that teaching can be targeted to pupils' needs.

- It was emphasised that every dyslexic is different. As a result, a range of different strategies for different pupils were recommended and described. Phonics was included as an important strategy. Whole word learning and analogy were particularly recommended too.

It is maintained that every pupil, regardless of their individual attributes, will benefit from knowledge and understanding of the alphabetic code and learning the skills of blending sounds for reading and segmenting spoken words to identify sounds for spelling. This learning is not just beneficial, but essential for those who do not learn to read and spell easily. The use of other strategies for learning to read words is seen as confusing and potentially damaging, especially for those who have difficulty learning to read.

- The use of "Miscue Analysis" was praised. With "Miscue Analysis", teachers listen to pupils reading and analyse their mistakes in order to identify the strategies they use (syntactic, graphic, phonemic, semantic).

Miscue analysis is not mentioned, unless it is raised by delegates. It is seen as unhelpful to analyse the cues pupils use to read. Decoding accurately ("phonemic strategy") is seen as the only sensible way to read initially (knowledge of morphemes is important later). Other ways, such as trying to remember whole words (graphic) or guessing from context (syntactic and semantic) are seen as ineffective at best and harmful for those who do not learn to read easily. This is because these strategies work only with texts for young children or texts designed for teaching reading in that way; they do not help pupils to read unfamiliar words and they may encourage habits that are difficult to break.

- Aspects of the alphabetic code and terms such as "phoneme", "grapheme", "sounding out", "patterns" (mainly graphemes with more than one letter, e.g. digraphs), different spellings for the same sounds, etc., were included in the training, but there was no specific time given to a clear explanation of the English alphabetic code. Examples of confusing aspects of the code were given. The emphasis was on the fact that English is very difficult to learn and the impression given was that there is no logic to it.

Time is spent explaining the complexities of the English alphabetic code, i.e., that
- there are about 44 phonemes in English and how to pronounce them
- that they are represented by one or more letters (because in English we have about 44 phonemes, but only 26 letters)
- that some phonemes may be represented in different ways (*b__oat__, h__ome__, sn__ow__, g__o__*)
- that some graphemes represent different phonemes (*__ch__ip, s__ch__ool, ma__ch__ine*)

Most synthetic phonics courses provide some sort of chart, to show this more clearly. The aim is for teachers to understand the logic of the code.

- Although some programmes were mentioned, the emphasis was on identifying the specific difficulties of individual pupils and providing a range of activities to address these difficulties. Programmes and resources were suggested as useful for providing this individualised help, but not as central.

The importance of rigorous teaching, following a systematic programme is emphasised. Where an effective programme is used for mainstream teaching, the same programme can be used with pupils who have difficulty learning to read. These pupils should be assessed to find out where gaps are in their knowledge of the alphabetic code and which skills they need to practise most; then extra teaching should be provided to consolidate learning and practise these skills. Most extraneous activities are discouraged. Only those that provide opportunities to practise or apply what has been taught as part of the programme are recommended.

- Reading and spelling were treated as separate topics, with training on separate days.

There is an emphasis on the fact that reading and spelling are reversible processes that should be taught together, with one supporting the other.

- The skills of decoding and reading comprehension were not clearly separated. Similarly, the skills of composition, spelling and hand-writing were not clearly separated.

It is made clear that reading comprehension is the result of two separate processes - decoding and understanding language (as in "The Simple View of Reading", first defined by Gough and Tunmer, 1986) and both are essential. Similarly, independent writing depends on the ability to express oneself (composition) and the skills of spelling and handwriting. While emphasising the importance of understanding and using spoken language, synthetic phonics courses concentrate on the knowledge and skills needed for decoding and spelling, and most courses include some discussion of handwriting.
It is emphasised that teachers should find out whether reading difficulties are due to difficulties with decoding or difficulties with comprehension and teach accordingly.

Spelling Course Detail:

Words in italics and colour are my comments.

First, there was a summary of the questions to be answered in the course:
1. **Why is English so difficult?**
2. **What skills do we use for spelling in English?**
3. **What are the implications of these for our pupils?**
4. **What can we do to help?**

1. **Why is English so difficult?**
o history and influences of different languages
o opaque compared with transparent code
o large number of letters in some syllables (e.g. "strengths" – one syllable, 9 letters, from Usha Goswami). A long string of letters is difficult for those who have problems with processing sounds or have visual problems
o "If we say they can get by with pure phonics, we are telling them a lie", because of words such as "tomb", "comb" and "bomb".
   We would say that the letter "o" represents different phonemes in each word, and that is phonics.
o But most words are taught according to a regular pattern (84% according to a computer analysis of 17,000 words)

2. **What skills do we use for spelling in English?**
   o We were asked to look at a few words and identify the skills we used to read them, e.g. "socks" – root word "sock"; "misshapen" – root word + prefix and suffix; analogy, which phoneme for "ou" in "grout" – think of rhyming words "out", "about", "shout"
   o Long list of skills:
      - Listening and studying articulation
      - Sound discrimination (th? f?)
      - Clear "mind's ear" representation – auditory sequential memory [ASM]
      - Phoneme/grapheme correspondence
      - Blending – sound patterns
      - Recognition of syllables and morphemes
      - Knowledge of spelling rules
      - Knowledge of vocabulary
      - Familiarity with mechanics of writing + pencil control + letter formation
   I add the skill of listening for the sounds in words, i.e., segmenting the spoken word to identify the sounds in a word. I would not say that blending is needed for spelling, except to check a word after spelling it. Otherwise, I agree with this list.

However, for training I would not give a list like this, as it makes the process sound very complicated. The mechanics of handwriting involve separate skills from spelling and can be included in training as a separate topic. My list for skills and knowledge for spelling would be:
- *Identifying the sounds in words*
- *Knowledge of phoneme-grapheme correspondences*
- *Knowledge of root words, prefixes and suffixes*

All the other skills mentioned are parts of these.

3. What are the implications of these for our pupils?

- We were given this list of what pupils need to know:
  - Articulation
  - Phoneme → grapheme correspondences
  - Letter names
  - Common irregular words ("sight" words)
  - Spelling patterns and rules
  - Syllable structure
  - Morphemes /affixes
  - Word origins and derivations

I agree with this list, except that teaching the essential skill of identifying sounds (by segmenting spoken words) is missing. It was pointed out that "phoneme → grapheme correspondences" are not enough for spelling. I agree, but identifying sounds alongside learning phoneme → grapheme correspondences is the first step needed to learn to spell. This was not made clear.

4. What can we do to help?

- We went through how to help pupils with:
  - Articulatory awareness – distinguishing between /th/.../f/, /p/... /b/, /s/... /sh/, /tr/.../ch/

  We were shown "Springboard for Children" – a video for articulating sounds (seeing mouth) Difficulties with articulation before age 5 ½ - no problem, but after 5 ½ likely to result in literacy difficulties.
  - Auditory discrimination

  Suggested activities: Make up alliterative sentences. Identify sounds at beginning, middle and end of words.

  I have found teachers spending too long asking children whether sounds are at the "beginning", "middle" or "end" of words and no longer advise this.

  Discriminate between words like "pail" and "bail". Segment and blend – "start with larger chunks ... ba...na...na...".

  I advise starting with phonemes.

- Learning letter shapes: Trace letter, say its sound and name, practise writing, saying sound and name (avoid schwa), write from memory saying sound and name, write with eyes shut, put hand in a bag to find plastic letter.
- Developing awareness of syllables

Clap and tap, "but some dyslexics may not like this," because dyspraxic. Sing to hear beat of each syllable.

"There are rules but they're not always true." e.g. vowel in every syllable, but "prism"

Teachers can get "too hung up about closed and open syllables"

o Rules and Patterns

They are important for the dyslexic learner because they help to explain why words are spelt the way they are and add an amount of consistency.

Most people just pick up on such rules and patterns – dyslexic learners often don't unless they are pointed out. They may not be visual learners who learn to spell from their reading or they may not have had enough exposure to written texts to learn spelling from them.

Rules give additional word attack skills for spelling.

It was emphasised that rules should not be taught in isolation.

"Always link rules to activities or words they are doing anyway."

We were given 18 rules for spelling and went through them at length. (I did not take clear notes about what the 18 rules are.)

o Spelling by analogy, including spelling patterns, word families, onset-rime (e.g. sight, light, tight,...)
o Rhymes – use poems, limericks, songs, rap
o Spelling techniques: Look, Cover, Write, Check or with an adult – Echo, Spell, Write, Check (Teacher says; pupil echoes)
o Motor memory: encourage cursive writing, use "Rainbow writing" (Write words using cursive writing in different colours.) Also, touch typing memory (use "Nessie" or "Dance Mat" for touch typing.
o Mnemonics, e.g., "Big Elephants Can't Always Use Small Exits" and "Rhythm Has Your Two Hips Moving"

o Then the importance of multi-sensory learning – Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic (VAK)

o Multi-sensory activities for teaching spelling:
- Listen to words, say words, look at words, write words, spell aloud using letter names (fine to use sounds for CVC words, but should use letter names later)
- Sand/shaving foam tray, plastic letters, back writing, pictorial aids for particular letter patterns (e.g. thief, chief), physical spelling
- Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) visualisation

- Homophones
- Words within words
- Word Chains (e.g. bet→bent→bend→blend→bland→blank)
- Cutting up words
- play word dominoes with root words and affixes (plastic "Word Building Dominoes" from Educational Insights)
- Pair games
- Hunt the silent letter/the spelling pattern / the 2/3/4/5/ syllable word (can help scanning skills for later)
- Syllable flaps (paper folded to show, e.g., ba na na)
- Bingo
- Longest word competition
- Shannon's game (like Hangman, but you have to guess in the correct order)
- Dicey Spelling (writing words with eyes shut, opposite hand, bubble writing, ...)
- Visualisation – Close eyes and picture the word.
    -

o Spelling Aids – Dictionaries, letter strips, personalised dictionaries, subject specific glossaries, Nessie – Click on Nessie's eyes to see correct spelling, feed specialised vocabulary into computer dictionary. Let children have words they misspell or topic swords on a card with them.

o Higher level spelling skills
- affixes, morphemes, word origins, subject specialist vocabulary and activities to teach these. We were asked to make a list of prefixes and suffixes and identify the meaning and grammatical function of each.
- longer pieces of writing: load specialist vocabulary into computer dictionary; first draft have a go or write the first sound or leave a blank or write in brackets; mark for 5 spellings only, focus on content vocabulary,
- activities for teaching these
- praised "Alpha to Omega"
- Proof-reading: need for awareness and self-correction, read aloud, check past tense endings, vowel in every syllable, rules for prefixes and suffixes, homonyms *(?)*. Could use script to speech software

o Assistive Technologies:
- Wordshark, ClaroRead, TextHelp: Read and Write Gold (speech to text and text to speech), WordQ and SpeakQ (Higher Ed level, build in bank of specialist vocab, then uses predictive text), Penfriend XL, Co:Wiriter6, Clicker 6, WriteOnline, Pocket spell

checker (Collins or Franklin), Neo 2, ICON map (? free, screen grab and cut and paste)
- Games: Nessy, Progress with Quest (spelling software for children)

o More useful websites
- www.primaryresources, www.teachingideas.co.uk, www.spellingsociety.org, www.tes.co.uk,
- bdatech.org (for people who like to try new technologies)

o Other techniques discussed:
- e.g. for spelling "environment", think of "Ron in his environment"
- notice "sym" at the beginning of words, e.g. "symphony", "sympathy"
- "ology" means a subject, so "biology", "psychology", "ethnology"

o Recommended: "Teaching Literacy to Learners with Dyslexia: A Multisensory Approach" by Sylvia Phillips and Kath Kelly

Spelling Summary
This spelling summary had a slightly different list of skills from the earlier one:
o Phonological awareness
o Ability to segment and blend
o Phoneme-grapheme knowledge
o Awareness of syllables
o Knowledge of rules
o Knowledge of sight words
o Motor memory
o Knowledge of word-building

Stages of Spelling Development
There was a hand-out showing stages of spelling development as
1. Pre-Communicative
2. Partial Alphabetic
3. Phonetic
4. Transitional
5. The Correct Stage
and we were asked to analyse copies of children's writing and assign them to one of the stages.
I cannot see the point of this or how it makes a difference to teaching pupils to spell, providing pupils are taught using a systematic programme.

Sorting Words

We were given a pile of words to sort in pairs, but not told how to sort them. It became clear that they included groups of words with the same phoneme but different graphemes (came, train, acorn, today), groups with the same grapheme-phoneme correspondence (German, gentle, gypsy, gin) and groups with a simple CVC pattern (sob, wet, bit, can, keg him, ...), as well as others. *Although this would be a simple exercise for anyone with synthetic phonics training, some of the delegates found it very difficult. They would have benefited from an overview of the alphabetic code and how one sound can represent more than one spelling and one spelling can represent more then one sound. I think the idea was that it is more effective for delegates to discover how the English alphabetic code works than to be told how. I understand the value of this, but felt delegates would have benefited from a clearer explanation and an overview of the code, at least at some point.*

Other discussion:

Brain: There were discussion and images about the differences between the brains of dyslexic and non-dyslexics. The trainer was asked if it can be changed. She answered that there is not enough evidence but that she suspected it could not be "completely ameliorated".

Goswami: about an experiment with dyslexics and non-dyslexics and their responses to rhythm. Those who are not dyslexic can keep a rhythm but those who are dyslexic cannot as easily. "The dyslexic brain is different." Katie Overy had success by using programmes that focus on rhythm ... very simple activities with those who have literacy difficulties. Found that the rhythm perception of dyslexic children in Key Stage 2 is skewed. After the activities, their literacy skills improved (spelling and reading) more than for children who didn't take part in the activities.

Dyslexia: Most children who are dyslexic have other difficulties "co-occurring disorder" ... "things going on holistically that we ignore at our peril", e.g. dyspraxia, being "challenged with perception of time"

Conclusion
- o Spelling is likely to be a persistent difficulty.
- o Use assistive technology where appropriate.
- o Don't lose expression and creativity because of poor spelling.
- o Implement a structured, multisensory approach that builds on existing knowledge.
- o Make it fun!

Reading Course Detail:

Words in italics are my comments.

Objectives of Course:
- understand skills in reading
- consider the role of phonological awareness
- explore strategies to develop basic reading skills and higher reading skills.

Began with introductions and comments.
"You will have kids in your class who are dyslexic but don't know they're dyslexic."
Phonics is a "central form of teaching children to read ... but is it the best way for all children?"
For dyslexics "there are deficits in getting clear representations of sounds, shown by brain imagery".

Phonological Awareness:
- Phonological Awareness is "the key to acquisition of reading ... key to dyslexia ... in other languages too"
- Bilingual learners may produce behaviours similar to dyslexia, when they are not dyslexic. "If they really are dyslexic, they will not be able to overcome ... poor phoneme awareness as easily ... Those with dyslexia will never overcome their problems ... Those with English as a second language will overcome their problems (up to about the age of twelve)"
- Having problems with phonemic awareness is the "most powerful indicator of reading problems".
- If young children have phonemic awareness problems, they may be dyslexic.
- "Dyslexia is very often associated with a whole catalogue of difficulties" ... Margaret Snowling was mentioned here ... "Children with the same genetic disposition" will have different outcomes. If a child is "growing up with lots of language in the home, that child may not show any signs of dyslexia ... but a child with the same disposition in a family with poor language at home may have extreme dyslexic difficulties."
- "It is really quite remote for a child to be only dyslexic ... 75% have co-occurring difficulties."

Reading Exercise:
We were asked to read:
"It was Gorund, and Frink, the chumpy strupner, was gringling jerundly in the splint. He was effringly tronk because that day Armbly was dirntling the vank."
Then we completed a comprehension exercise and were asked how we found answers, using syntax, knowledge of high frequency words, etc. We were told that it is possible to answer questions, but not understand.

Skills involved in fluent, accurate reading

First there was a discussion about skills needed:
- where to start:
    - geography of text
    - shape of letters
    - directions
    - letters to sounds
- whole word recognition
- phonic decoding
- syllabification
- spelling rules *(Reading and spelling seemed to be confused here.)*
- recognising patterns
- capitalisation
- punctuation

 "Tapping into different strategies ... we can't say this is the strategy you should use"

Then these were discussed:
- orthography (linking letters to sounds, etc.) and phonology
- meaning and context
- use of clues pictures/textual was included as part of meaning and context (not as a way to guess the words)
- Frith's 3 stages of reading: Logographic, Alphabetic, Orthographic
    - "Children usually start at logographic stage, for example, 'MacDonald's'."
    But not necessarily if taught with synthetic phonics.
    - Explained "26 letters represent a number of sounds" but did not say 40 +.
    Alphabetic code not clear, but phrase "alphabetic code" was used once.
    - "orthographic" used to include "whole word recognition", but said this is open to debate.
- Issues that can affect dyslexic readers:
    - "At the heart of dyslexia": phonological processing deficit.
    - Short term/working memory deficit, affecting decoding and comprehension
    - Visual deficit (www.irlen.com – about background colours, etc.

- **Visual Issues**: Irlen Syndrome, Hemispatial neglect
  www.youtube.co/watch?v=T-3LWFS5YS8&feature=related) about severe damage to one side of the brain and how that affects the other side

- Importance of **Phonological Awareness** – lack of phonemic awareness is the most powerful determinant of likelihood of failure to learn to read.
  But there is evidence that early diagnosis is not followed by reading failure, if children are taught to read with synthetic phonics.
  How to develop phonological skills: rhymes, rhythm, counting syllables, phoneme deletion games, segmenting/blending, finding phonemes in words, spoonerisms, alliterative sentences.
  I understand that the most effective way to develop phonological skills is to teach children about sound-letter correspondences.
  "It has been recognised that dyslexics are poor at rhythm".
  Katie Overy study – rather than tackling literacy problems through reading and writing ... lots of work on rhythm. "Doing a little rhythm games can be really beneficial."
  Time spent teaching children about rhythm could be used to teach them to read directly.

- **Learning letters:** Use pictures to match sounds to symbols, pure sounds, upper and lower case together (Brain research suggests better together), multisensory practice, overlearning, (recommended "Dyslexikit") , Reading Cards. Emphasised multisensory.

- **Skills for word reading:**
  - grapheme-phoneme correspondence, ability to blend sounds, decoding by analogy (spelling patterns, onset and rime), knowledge of sight words (described as for "completely irregular words"), knowledge of syllable structure, knowledge of morphemes and word grammar
  "Children who are learning to read in English need to develop multiple strategies in parallel if they are to become successful readers ... whole-word recognition, e.g., choir, yacht; rhyme analogy, e.g., light, night, fight (described as "irregular"); and grapheme-phoneme decoding strategies so that they can read "regular words" like *tip, fat, dog*.
  "Phonics alone is just not right." About government promotion of synthetic phonics: "It's very dangerous." "You need all of these strategies." (whole word, other strategies)

- Explained dyslexia other countries – still dyslexic but slower.
  "English dyslexics may never learn to spell accurately and always find reading tough."

- We were asked to sort a list of high frequency words into 3 columns: consonants and short vowels, patterns, irregular

- Use wooden or plastic letters or letter/syllable cards to blend sounds in words, e.g. *ca+t* or *c+at* or practise onset-rime e.g. t+ap.

- **root words, suffixes and prefixes** Other dominoes for root words, suffixes and prefixes. We played with these.
  I thought they would be good for helping pupils to understand morphemes.
  We made words using suffixes and prefixes, e.g. unhelpfulness.

- Stressed the importance of understanding **syllables.** We were asked to check words to see that there is a vowel for every syllable and it was pointed out that it doesn't always work.

- **Miscue Analysis** It was stressed that miscue analysis is very valuable. We went through each type of error (grammatically sensible substitutions, bizarre substitutions – "barking at print"/reading without comprehension, tracking problems, over-reliance on whole-word or phonic decoding strategies, omission of small words. We were given examples of errors and told how they showed one strategy or another.
  But all the examples given were decoding errors.
   "If you are only looking at accuracy, you are missing a lot."
  "Never use a test that does not include comprehension."
  "A bright dyslexic might understand, but replace words with other words which make sense."

- **Higher reading skills** Bringing together accuracy + fluency + understanding

- **What Good Readers Do** A long list followed about predicting, asking questions, relating to experiences, etc.
  It seems to me that all of these depend on accurate word reading skills and are a distraction if word reading skills are not secure.
  "Dyslexic learners will take much longer ... Effort involved in decoding will mean less attention for comprehension"
- What makes a text difficult?... too many hard words, phonic complexity, number of syllables, no contextual clues, no explanatory illustration ...
  All about not being able to decode
   ... complex language structure, figurative language, beyond reader's language experience, general knowledge related ...
  Difficulties with reading comprehension are due either to difficulties with decoding or to difficulties with language comprehension (or possibly both). When there is doubt about a pupil's comprehension, I would always ask if they understand a text when it is read to them or not. If they understand it when it is read to them, then the problem is decoding and not language comprehension. Then teaching should focus on decoding and not on comprehension.

- **The vicious reading circle** Poor decoding → ....reluctance to read → poor vocabulary

This is the Matthew effect.

- **Difficulties faced by dyslexic pupils**
    - Forgetting what they have read about
    - Motivation and frustration
    - Vocabulary development is slowed down
    - Comprehension may be literal – reading between the lines is problematic
    - Making connections between ideas
    - Skills not integrated efficiently
    - Lack of breadth of reading experience makes appreciation difficult.

Most of these difficulties would be caused by difficulty with decoding. Some comprehension difficulties could be caused by lack of exposure to literature because of difficulty with decoding. However, some comprehension difficulties could be caused by poor understanding of spoken language, regardless of decoding skills. Teachers should ascertain whether the underlying problem is decoding or comprehension.

Then we went on to discussing how to develop higher reading skills, such as scanning, skimming, comprehension, etc.
To me, it is unhelpful to spend teaching time tackling higher reading skills, if the underlying problem of poor decoding skills has not been solved. If pupils can decode, then I would expect the teaching of higher reading skills to be the same for those diagnosed with dyslexia and other pupils.

- **Preparing for Comprehension**: "As all primary teachers know ..."
    - Introduce the book
    - Look at it together
    - Discuss story, characters and pictures
    - Draw on previous knowledge and experience
    - Prepare new vocabulary
    - Ask questions.

BUT can they read the words? If they can, then they should read the text independently first and then analyse the meaning of the text. If they cannot, then they should not be asked to read it; instead it could be read to them.

- **Reading for information: strategies for students**
    - several strategies given
    - last strategy – "teach word-decoding skills"

But word-decoding is not simply one of a number of strategies needed for reading for information. It is the basis of reading. If a student needs to retrieve information from a page and cannot decode the words, someone should read the page to that student. And then, separately, they should teach that student how to decode words.

- **Word derivation** and **Subject specialist vocabulary -** *useful suggestions*

- **Strategies** Then more strategies for comprehension + scan and skim

- **Dyslexic friendly fonts**

- **List of Literacy Programmes:**
    - <u>Alpha to Omega</u>
    - <u>Just Phonics</u> by Ruth Miskin
    - <u>Dyslexikit</u>
    - <u>Rapid Reading and Rapid Plus</u>
    - <u>Project X</u>
    - <u>Oxford Reading Tree</u>

  *This list includes none of the modern systematic synthetic phonics programmes. Newer programmes, related by publishers to "Rapid Reading" and "Oxford Reading Tree", are "Rapid Phonics" and "Floppy's Phonics Sounds and Letters", and these **are** based on synthetic phonics principles.*

- **Assistive technology** – "not cheating!"
    - Talking books:
        - from Rising Stars
        - Kids Audio Books
        - Storynory
        - Oxford Owl
    - Literacy Tools:
        - Clicker
        - Nessy – It was pointed out that this is better for spelling than for reading.
        - Progress with Quest – "based on Orton-Gillingham")

  Talking books are clearly for comprehension and the others for teaching reading and/or spelling.

List of useful websites
  - <u>www.teachyourmonstertoread.com</u> "free and fun"
  - <u>http://roythezebra.com</u>
  - <u>www.ransom.co.uk</u>
  - <u>www.literacytrust.org.uk</u>
  - load2learn.org.uk (about text, e.g. colours of font and background)
  - <u>www.clpe.co.uk</u>
  - Centre for Literacy in Primary Education
  - bdatech.org (reviews technology)
  - readability-formula-tests.php

- **Further information** – website addresses for BDA, helpline, training