Supporting adults with dyslexia by creating community groups: an examination of three models of provision in the voluntary sector

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ABSTRACT In England, voluntary groups are one option of support for adults with dyslexia who are no longer taking part in formal education. This study examines the structure of three dyslexia groups which aim to provide support for adults with dyslexia. This small scale qualitative study considers the uniqueness of each discrete group as they disclose their own independent structures to support adults with dyslexia. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the group leaders, and the data were scrutinised, not only to give factual information about the groups but to consider their collective beliefs and values as reflected in the discourse of their leaders. The study maps findings to theories of social and medical models of dyslexia. These findings lead to a discussion of key issues which can potentially inform stakeholders in the support of adults with dyslexia.

Keywords: Adult education, Disability groups, Dyslexia, Inclusion, Lifelong learning, Peer support
Introduction

Internationally, there is a concern to create a community which embraces diversity in order to face the social and environmental challenges of the twenty-first century. In order to achieve this, it is important to consider how the challenges facing members of the community who face specific difficulties may be mitigated. Adults with specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, may find it difficult to access support after leaving education, perhaps despite having been well-supported at school. Furthermore, those in full-time work do not have access to the support arrangements in place for those enrolled in study in post-16 educational settings, such as colleges of further education and universities. In England, independent support groups have been created which aim to meet the needs of adults with dyslexia in the workplace (Farnfield and Penton-Voake, 2004). This article examines three such groups through the experience of their leaders. The existence and exploitation of such voluntary groups chimes in well with the current coalition government’s stress on the ‘big society’, where community groups are actively encouraged to provide opportunities for supporting the more vulnerable members of society. Although there is a body of research exploring the potential benefits and pitfalls of self-help and support groups for a range of disabilities (Barnes and Mercer, 2006), so far relatively little has been written about adults with dyslexia in this context.

The paper reports a small scale study examining the nature of three independent groups for adults with dyslexia. These participants were therefore uniquely placed to listen to the voices of adults with dyslexia and those who work directly with them. These unpaid individuals were also free to structure their organisations without the constraints of providing auditable evidence to justify centralised public funding. The very lack of externally imposed structure makes these groups of particular interest for research seeking to elucidate the structures which can best fulfil the support needs of adults with dyslexia.

The three groups were a purposive sample which offered an opportunity to consider different models of voluntary group. Qualitative data from interviews with three leaders who help to run such groups is analysed in this paper. The first organisation, (A) was an independent registered charity in its own right which ran a range of activities and classes aimed at local adults with dyslexia and sometimes families. The second organisation (B) was again independent, and was run by a committee of adults with dyslexia, concerned mainly with group support and gave information and advice in regular meetings. The third group (C) was created as a separate but complementary adult section created as an add-on to a local group.
mainly aimed at parents and teachers of children with dyslexia, and was affiliated to a national dyslexia charity.

The structure offered by these adult dyslexia groups, none of which were in receipt of direct government funding, was considered likely to be different from that offered in traditional work-based training programmes or adult literacy classes. This is because self-help groups are free of the constraints of justifying their existence and providing proof of measurable outcomes. Their nature, therefore, may link more closely to the perceived needs of adults in the community.

Theoretical background and context

Social inclusion

It has been demonstrated that peer support in children with dyslexia is an important component to promote social inclusion in school settings (Humphrey, 2003). It is accepted that both underlying dyslexic difficulties such as short term memory deficits, and behavioural manifestations such as poor spelling, persist into adulthood (Rose, 2009), and therefore it can be surmised that peer support may be equally important for adults. It has been shown that the effects of dyslexia on individuals do not cease at the end of formal schooling, but are long lasting (McLoughlin et al., 1994).

The literature indicates that ongoing support by professionals and others who understand the past and present experiences of people with dyslexia could potentially have a positive effect on their personal growth throughout adulthood (McNulty, 2003). This sort of support could be provided by a voluntary group, which in turn could be publicised and financially supported by business whilst still remaining independent. However, being a member of such a group first of all requires the individual to accept the label of dyslexia which is encapsulated in the group’s name, and this in itself may involve a shift in their own self-image. An adult may still not have had the opportunity to access an assessment to identify dyslexia. Research into other types of self-help groups suggests other barriers: for example gender has been shown to be a potential barrier to joining groups; men may be more reluctant to seek help than women (Chan, 2009; Seymour-Smith, 2008).

Dyslexia and employment

Despite legislation (DfES, 1995; DfES, 2005a) people with disabilities continue to risk marginalisation in the twenty first century’s workforce (Barnes and Mercer,
2005). Often, dyslexia goes unrecognised in individuals, even after an adult has passed through the education system. Singleton (1999), for example, showed that a high proportion of students in English higher education (HE) establishments were only acknowledged to have dyslexia after they had entered HE. This lack of recognition is likely to be mirrored in employment contexts, and may lead to an adult being unable to access support and adjustments which could lead them to reach their potential both in terms of employment and well-being.

Students with dyslexia who leave school with no qualifications or qualifications which match their competences are at a disadvantage in the employment market; the effect of low basic skills have been shown to have long-term negative effects on employability (Bynner and Parsons, 2001). In addition, many adults with dyslexia have associated their difficulties with more general intellectual impairment, despite the fact that it is now accepted that dyslexia may be present in any individual regardless of innate ability (Vellutino et al., 2004; Shaywitz, 2003). They may regard a lack of successful engagement with the education system as a personal failure for which they themselves are in some way to blame (Dale and Turner, 2001). A continued feeling of inadequacy and low self-esteem may follow an adult with dyslexia throughout their career and may lead to unstable patterns of employment (Bell, 2010). It is proposed that such adults could well benefit the support and advice which continues to be available through adulthood and is not dependent on being enrolled on an education course.

In workplace situations, information and guidance for employers is provided by trade unions (Hagan, 2004) and courses and written information provided by associations such as the British Dyslexia Association (BDA website, 2011). However, there is a need to educate employers in the simple adjustments which could make the workplace more dyslexia-friendly, in order that disability legislation can be fully implemented. Voluntary groups are a potential vehicle for disseminating such information.

Mapping to models of disability

The findings of this study were related to a consideration of the social model of disability. The social model was proposed by disability activists and researchers towards the end of the twentieth century. Up until that time, disability of any kind had been regarded as the responsibility of the person concerned: the medical model (Oliver and Barnes, 1998). The individual with a disability was expected to make adjustments to fit in with the demands of society and its institutions. The framing of dyslexia as a child-based issue, which should be dealt with in a school setting, encourages a medical model by closely relating dyslexia to the acquisition
of literacy and ignoring the long term effects of underlying difficulties such as short term memory deficits (Fitzgibbon and O’Connor, 2002). The social model, however, recognises the existence of individual impairments but indicates that it these are not the responsibility of the individual but of society as a whole. English legislation demands that ‘reasonable adjustments’ (DfES, 1999) should be made to enable everyone to reach their potential without placing unnecessary barriers in their way. Simultaneously, at international level, there is a growing awareness that employers should be educated to embrace diversity in the workforce, including disability, in order to encourage creativity and innovation, and therefore productivity (European Commission, 2008).

In England, research suggests moving away from the medical model of dyslexia where all funding depends on diagnosis and is attached to the individual, towards better awareness and provision for people with dyslexia throughout society (Riddick, 2001). However, current classes on offer in the community tend to be linked closely to literacy attainment and accreditation and may not meet the needs of adults with dyslexia (Dale and Taylor, 2001). The lack of educational opportunities available to adults at this level could also be a potential area for voluntary groups to develop.

This study highlighted the challenges and conflicts in providing a group which involved people who are dyslexic and non-dyslexic. The fact that dyslexia is a spectrum (Miles, 1993), with no clear cut-off point to aid identification makes this difficult to analyse, and in this study no attempt was made to gather data on the dyslexic profiles of group members. However, in the context of a voluntary group it could be argued that whether or not a person has actually been identified as having dyslexia by a psychologist or specialist teacher is hardly relevant. These groups are open to all and there are no set membership criteria. The researcher regarded this as a strength, as the groups were self-selecting, making them a significant area of study for a researcher concerned with finding out how these groups reflect the needs of the members of the community who are not obliged to fit set criteria prescribed by institutions or educational establishments.

Poole (2003) used the ecological model of human development, proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), to place children with dyslexia in a social and environmental context. She argued that the effects of dyslexia were mitigated or aggravated not only by education but also by the child’s close and extended family and friends, by their school, clubs and religious institutions, and by the wider culture in which they live. This can be applied to adults with dyslexia who are no longer being ‘taught’ in a formal way and yet whose dyslexic differences still play a significant role in their formation of self-image. In research carried out with adults in higher education settings, Pollack (2009) showed that dyslexia was very much part
of their identity. Thus, it may be surmised that the ‘ecology’ of an adult with dyslexia will include such factors as their workplace and employment role, their relationships with family, colleagues and employers and indeed their membership of groups such as a dyslexia group.

Methods

The following research questions were proposed:

- What is the structure of support groups which are currently functioning for adults with dyslexia in the English workplace?
- What is the nature of support offered and how is this relevant to these adults?
- What lessons can be learned for stakeholders such as employers, education providers, policy makers and group members, in organising, providing and accessing support?

The project began with an initial internet search to find three adult dyslexia groups within a geographical area surrounding the town in which the researcher had been asked to instigate an adult dyslexia group. Information gathered in this way revealed that the groups identified offered diverse services.

Data were collected about these three different adult dyslexia groups in the region which represented diverse models of support. Group leaders or chair persons were identified as representatives of their organisations. These three participants were contacted initially by telephone to request a face to face interview. Two of these interviews took place in the participants’ homes and one at the office of the dyslexia group.

Of the interviewees, it should be noted that one was an adult with dyslexia and the other two were qualified dyslexia support tutors. One of these two reported that they may have dyslexic tendencies.

The small sample does not allow for wide generalisations; however, the variety of participants and the groups they represented was a rich source of data. The participants not only proffered information about the practical setting up and running of a group but also shared their own experiences pertaining to this. This discourse therefore provided not only factual data but also qualitative data about the interviewees’ personal constructs and values relating to dyslexia in adults.

The research tool was a semi-structured interview schedule, which aimed to take the form of a quasi-natural dialogue in which the interviewees, the group leaders, had an opportunity to contribute their own direction to the conversation
(Opie, 2004). This format was used to seek information about setting up groups and of provision which matched the needs of adults with dyslexia along with any factual data about the nature of the groups which could be provided. Each interview was limited to half an hour and participants were invited to describe the experiences of starting a group, the nature of the support provided by the group and to identify their key issues and concerns. The researcher made interjections to enable a semi-natural discussion (Holstein, 1995).

The interviews were recorded and transcripts were made. These data were next scrutinised for similarities and differences which were noted and coded. The researcher then extracted key areas of commonality between the three data sets. An initial list of 8 areas were refined and grouped to from the following 5 codes:

- Organisation and funding
- Publicity and attendance
- Screening and diagnosis issues
- Lack of existing appropriate support
- Individual needs: building self-esteem and understanding of dyslexia

The data were re-examined to check if these key areas covered all the coded responses across the entire data set. This resulted in a final grouping of data which was used to discuss the findings. The resulting findings were triangulated to identify common themes and comparisons made between the three groups to bring out emerging themes and factors.

It should be noted when considering the analysis of findings that the author was involved in setting up a group for adults with dyslexia, and a search for information to help inform this process inspired this research (Bell, 2009). There may therefore be a possible bias here then since there is a vested interest in running groups for adults with dyslexia.

Findings

The findings are reported in the past tense because it was clear the voluntary nature of these groups necessitated change and evolution over time depending on membership numbers, funding leadership and numerous other external factors. (For example, one of the interviewees was about to stand down as chair person of the group.) The transcripts showed evidence that the groups were partly dependent on short term funding and the availability of volunteers. Thus, what is reported here is simply a snapshot of what was happening at the time. The three groups had contrasting structures which reflected their membership:
Group A

- Originated as the inspiration and at the initiative of one trained dyslexia teacher and with one interested supporter and is an independent organisation providing classes.
- Was a registered charity in its own right.
- Offered classes, social meetings and special events.
- Dyslexia screening offered.
- Offered awareness training for local employers.

Group B

- Originated with a helpline and grew into an independent organisation.
- Ran a monthly meeting, often with invited speakers.
- Ran outreach events.
- Manned a helpline.
- Occupied offices in a library building.

Group C

- Originated as a sub-group of a dyslexia association aimed at parents of children with dyslexia.
- Affiliated to the British Dyslexia Association, which has charitable status.
- Dyslexia screening offered.
- Irregular meetings offered aimed specifically for adults.
- Manned a helpline.
- Occupied offices in a school.

The groups comprised mainly of members who had dyslexia themselves, some of whom had been referred by health professionals and others who had responded to publicity efforts. No data was available to track back the original contact for joining each group. However, some groups also included members, sometimes identifying themselves as “helper”, who did not have dyslexia themselves. Commonly, a friend or family member had dyslexia which had inspired an initial interest.

Organisation and funding

None of the groups investigated were in receipt of any direct government funding.
Money was necessary to pay for venues and sometimes speakers, in addition to administration costs. For the group which ran classes, teachers were paid. When services were provided, such as a screening interview or a class, these were sometimes offered free of charge but sometimes had to be paid for. Across the three groups, a range of funding sources were identified:

- Contributions from members (Subscriptions, donations)
- Funding from the English National Lottery: A government backed organisation which offers grants to charities cultural institutions using money from national lottery revenue (The National Lottery, 2009).
- Grants from local and national businesses.
- Grants for dyslexia charities and foundations.
- Money charged for meetings
- Money charged for screening tests and classes.

One group was closing a class through lack of funding and it seemed that the range of services and meetings offered by the groups was limited by funding and manpower rather than need. Applying for funding was time consuming and sometimes ineffective:

*We had a good application, but they didn’t feel we were helping the most needy in the community….we failed for three years running (To get a Lottery Grant) …… I know that there is money, I know that we just have to fill in forms …. M.*

Voluntary groups without the necessary financial backing to pay salaries for administration naturally rely on goodwill to carry out necessary administrative work. In these groups this was provided by volunteers, some of whom had dyslexia themselves but some of whom were interested for other reasons:

*Alice (Name changed) has a dyslexic adult daughter and that is what really got her involved. D.*

Recruiting enough people to help appeared to be an ongoing problem.

*We can’t get people to help. M.*

This leaves a heavy burden on the small number of volunteers left to cover all the routine tasks.
Finding and paying for a venue was a challenge for these groups. Group C was able to have an office provided by a local school for no cost, but this tied them in to having all their meetings at the school. This was considered to have been a barrier to some potential members, who may associate school with unpleasant experiences. The numbers of adults with dyslexia who attended the group were thought to have dwindled after the move to the school from a community centre.

Several people said "All right for me but everybody else..." so I think everybody felt that a school wasn’t the best place. M.

Location could also provide a barrier for adults with dyslexia as directionality, map reading and following instructions are widely held to be an associated dyslexic difficulty. Group B had provided a pictorial map and instructions to help mitigate this. They had also used sponsorship to obtain some well-produced dyslexia friendly posters and banners to give directions to the city centre church where the monthly meeting was held, using images and minimal text.

Maintaining numbers for regular attendance was identified as a struggle for all three groups. A conflict was identified by one interviewee who recognised that it is important not to create dependency on a group. This inevitably means that people will move on as they no longer feel the need to access group support.

I think we have had a throughput of people. So we don’t necessarily hang onto people, which is good because we are trying to move people on. D.

Notwithstanding, having enough members to share the work of running the group was seen to be a struggle, and numbers varied widely over time in all three groups. Small numbers did not deter these groups from continuing, however, as they felt there was a real need for the group within the community, as the following section outlines.

**Bridging a gap between education and the workplace**

The original motivation for setting up all three of these groups seems to have been a consciousness that there was inadequate or inappropriate support in the local educational community provision for adults with dyslexia. Even when classes were provided in the context of adult education, these were not necessarily considered to meet the needs of these adults. Previously, D had been a teacher providing dyslexia support in funded literacy classes in educational institutions.
Here she contrasts the nature of the provision offered with her perceived needs of group members:

*Although I was running two classes for adults with dyslexia, they were not really appropriate for them. They were not in my mind meeting the needs of these people because the needs were more than educational. There were also a lot of issues about confidence, self esteem and before you had got those sort of things straight, you know, you couldn’t work on the literacy skills.* D.

However, the target groups were those who did not have the benefit of support in an educational setting:

*I set up the adult dyslexia centre as a gap-filling exercise. We aimed to bridge the gap for people in particular who weren’t necessarily in education anyway and didn’t get any help from colleges but who were at work or off work or just at home in a domestic situation with children who knew that they were on the outside looking in. They didn’t do things the way other people did, they didn’t necessarily always know they were dyslexic but they were having issues with their lives and so we set ourselves up initially as a sort of information, advice and guidance centre.* D.

All three groups set out to offer services and information that was not generally available in the community.

*We had, if you like, meetings in various libraries and community centres where we would have tea. It was mainly younger people sort of saying how we are coping with things, what coping structures we have in place…..there was a helpline and then there were different people to sort of help and guide and bringing in a limited amount of expertise.* W.

The interviewees pointed out a need for information and support which was not available uniquely during normal working hours, when many adults are unable to take advantage of services because of their employment commitments. W pointed out that this was when support was needed.

*Because I am running a helpline and manning it. I am manning it, you know, out of hours and we meet out of hours and we see the behaviour of dyslexics out of hours and when it all comes on top.* W.
Unlike full-time students, adults with dyslexia who are in employment need to deal with the extra challenges presented to them without the availability of professional support. This can put a strain on relationships with family and friends and therefore a support group is an important way to share both practical and emotional problems.

If they have got family, they might ask a relative. But if they have asked a relative, they have already put a strain on that relative and there is probably a breakdown. I now know through the helpline that there is lots of dyslexics that are separated from their partners because the strain of them needing support is too much. W.

The opportunity to share frustrations and difficulties about everyday challenges and past disappointments was seen by all three group leaders as a key role for the group:

I think we have quite a lot of people coming to these groups who are quite angry, and when I say angry I don’t mean just somebody else, but being able to talk about the past. M.

As a group you know you are amongst kindred spirits, that people have gone through the same. W.

These statements demonstrate that the presence of other people with similar characteristics and experiences provided a feeling of support which might not even have been available from close family and friends. However, it was seen to be important for the group members to accept their own strengths and weaknesses:

Once they realise they don’t have to be the same as other people, they must be themselves, then that is a real door opening for them. D.

Therefore providing good, accurate information was seen as a key function of all three groups.

Providing information and services: moving towards metacognition

Developing an understanding of the nature of dyslexia by recognising individual strengths and weaknesses, and in particular appreciating that dyslexia is not linked to intelligence, is a key element in dyslexia support. This can be particularly ap-
plied to adults who may only recently have discovered their dyslexia and who have been struggling against difficulties throughout their education. Many adults with dyslexia have grown up with a conviction that they are unintelligent. Two of the groups met the needs of those who had not had the opportunity to have a full dyslexia test and were unsure about the nature of their difficulties or differences, by providing screening for adults who had not had their dyslexia identified.

It is being able to say to someone as I did yesterday to somebody who works for borough council and got a degree. But he just has difficulties and his degree was very practically based so: ‘Why? Why am I like this? You know, what is the problem with me? You know, is there something the matter with me?’ And once someone has things explained, especially just how the dyslexic brain works differently therefore you are going to be doing things differently, it seems that a weight lifts for most people. D.

This area of metacognition, widely regarded as a key element in dyslexia support in an educational context (McLoughlin et al., 2002; Rose, 2009) was seen as important in all these groups. However, one interviewee recounted the unrealistic expectations which can be held by members who come to find simple solutions: perhaps a result of the general perception in society that dyslexia is a childhood problem which can be dealt with at school (Fitzgibbon and O’Connor, 2002).

I think what they were looking for then, they are still looking for now, that someone is going to fix it for them. W.

This search, not only for recognition but possibly also for an easy “cure” to long term dyslexic difficulties could lead to disappointment and disillusionment, if expectations were not carefully managed by the group.

**Decisions and dilemmas**

Setting up and running groups for this particular sector of the adult population raises dilemmas which can be linked to the concept of the social and medical model of dyslexia. For example, the lack of set criteria for joining a group liberates the individual from embracing the label of disability. However, the very epithet of dyslexia, included in the group name, may have associations which can present a barrier for some possible members. Therefore choosing a group name should be very seriously considered.

Instigating a group meeting at set times, and using invited speakers, may cause
difficulty. Speakers can be costly unless they give up their precious free time to talk to the group. The time constraints added by inviting outside speakers puts on additional pressure to enforce punctuality. This creates a conflict, since this study demonstrated attendance and punctuality were a strain for some members, particularly if time keeping and memory skills are weak, as they often are in dyslexia:

I ring up a day before the meeting, and on the day, to tell them that the meeting is on tonight and that has increased our membership from three to five to nearly thirty. W.

I do try and send the sheet out without too much time in advance, you know, so, you know, so that people don’t have time to forget it. D.

All three groups used speakers to some extent and found this to be useful for sharing information.

When we had speakers it focused on a particular thing, area, and I think that they were very helpful. M.

One of the interviewees, an adult with dyslexia, found some speakers helpful if they were responding practically to the needs of members.

We have had speakers talk about the latest hardware, computers, scanners, the latest software, but also give us some training on it. W.

However, in this group there was a concern that speakers who seemed to be taking a more medical approach whilst misunderstanding the nature of the needs of adults with dyslexia were criticised:

We would have speakers who talked down to us and in a way I suppose the term would be goody goodies that they are talking down to us but they are not giving us what we need and what we want. W.

This group (B) prioritises dyslexia awareness for the public and employers

We would have awareness days in the city centre where we would set up this and give out leaflets and tell people. We would also go to like places where you have community fundraisers or a community fair. W.
Group A also offered talks to employers and companies to raise awareness amongst employers.

Discussion

Because they are free of constraints by funding bodies such as governments or local authorities and involve the adults with dyslexia themselves, adult dyslexia groups are an interesting field of study for researchers who wish to inform the development of appropriate interventions and support. The small scale of this study prevents the construction of wide generalisations, however some areas highlighted in this discussion make a contribution to the body of research and could help policy makers and practitioners to respond to the needs of this sector of the community.

The venue chosen for support groups is not without associations which may chime in with past, negative experiences of adults with dyslexia. Groups which are geographically located in school settings may find that this will discourage members who have had difficult and painful experiences in the education system, as is often the case with adults with dyslexia. Providers of support for adults with literacy difficulties must be aware that the geographical location of classes may in itself be a factor in the uptake of support and lifelong learning.

Publicity and recruitment will always be a challenge for these groups as they seek to support members of society who are likely to shy away from written information. The groups in this study provided evidence of their continued efforts to get information out about meetings or classes. This will be a challenge for any group of this nature. There is a role for local colleges, libraries and local education authorities to support such groups by publicising their existence. Improved awareness in businesses could also enable employees to access support by publicising and support local groups. Information technology such as mobile phones and internet can be used to keep in touch with members and as a potential strategy to compensate for poor literacy skills, although this may not be attractive to all adults with dyslexia who may shy away at text based methods. Imaginative, pictorial advertising and information may be used to avoid causing additional barriers by overloading weak literacy skills of some potential members.

These findings show that manpower and funding are barriers to the efficient running of these groups. In England, the government at the time the interviews took place was committed to lifelong learning (Department of Education and Skills, 2005b) and also to the encouragement of diversity in the workplace (Department for Education and Skills 2005a). The current [coalition] government appears to endorse this, stating in a consultation paper that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities should be supported so that
'they can succeed in education and their careers' (DfE, 2011). Continuing support for the adults that these young people with become should also be a priority.

However, funding for classes in the community and work-based programmes may not be targeted in the best way. One way of moving forward would be to allocate funding to directly dyslexia adult groups themselves, or to allow further education colleges and local government community education classes to run groups which are not based on the accreditation of literacy acquisition. This would enable them to extend their support in the community. The groups are also a source of potential information for policy makers and funding providers and research should be funded which involves such groups as informants. More detailed and extensive research could inform the creation of focussed and relevant provision for adults with dyslexia.

These groups all reflected an awareness of a need for outreach and training in local workplaces. Funding could be allocated to adult and further education providers to raise awareness in local businesses, and dyslexia group representatives could be involved in promoting or carrying out this work. Businesses could also extend partnerships with local groups through sponsorship. The existing Access to Work (Jobcentre Plus, 2009) funding in England is based on employees with dyslexia adapting to their environments, therefore encouraging a medical model of disability by placing the responsibility on the individual.

The ecological model of dyslexia suggests that dyslexia is not just a set of biological and behavioural differences in individuals, but it exists within a complex web of relationships to a culture and the people in it. Dyslexia groups can be seen as an important and positive part of this culture for their members; they can become part of the ecology of adult dyslexia and help their members to achieve their potential both within and without work.

If, as a society, we are working towards a more inclusive culture it is important to employ a social model of disability for dyslexia. Voluntary groups have the potential to do this, particularly if they are are run by a blend of volunteers with a spectrum of difficulties from those with no dyslexic learning preferences but a professional or personal interest, to these with severe dyslexic difficulties. If adults with dyslexia themselves are involved in running groups themselves there is less danger of adopting a medical model, because there is not a group of "others" dictating their needs. However, this research shows that the combined group structures can be mapped to a blend of both medical and social model. Further research into the outcomes of groups related to their individual members will shed more light onto how effective this blend of provision can be in supporting the needs of adults with dyslexia who are no longer in education.
Conclusion

The results of this study join a growing body of research into the experiences of adults with dyslexia. They throw light on key areas to be considered when setting up opportunities to enable the inclusion of adults with dyslexia within the workplace and the wider community.

The issues highlighted by these findings clearly have implications for policy makers and providers of adult dyslexia support. The discussion of findings made suggestions about how these lessons can be used to create improved opportunities for adults with dyslexia, any of whom may not have been able to maximise their potential in formal education settings, at school or beyond (Bell, 2010).

The group leaders in this study gave up time and energy to commit themselves to meeting what they saw as a real and urgent need in the community.

*It is unbelievable and you look at the percentage of adults, dyslexics in prisons... M.*

However, further research is needed to investigate outcomes for group members in order to draw conclusions about what sort of support could or should be directed to these groups. From this small study it is not possible to comment on the effectiveness of the different group models, and it would be important to gather qualitative data from group members rather than leaders in order to assess this. A more extensive funded research project should look at data from a wider range of groups across the country and seek out possible lessons from good practice in international settings. Quantitative research should be carried out across a wider range of groups. Detailed and rich data from this research, supplemented by qualitative data gathered with group members, could help inform policy makers on provision for adults with dyslexia. It is important to look at what adults with dyslexia have already provided or used themselves, to inform and direct the setting up of potentially inexpensive but important provision.

The social model of disability underpins the fact that for adults with dyslexia, lifelong learning is not just about going over the same ground as they have previously covered in school or formal education. More enlightened and informed support can help individuals to achieve their potential and therefore benefit the workforce to the advantage to society as a whole.
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Supporting Adults with Dyslexia


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