

Editorial:
Current Perspectives in the Study
of Developmental Dyslexia

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Editorial

Developmental dyslexia is a complex disorder as seen from biological, cognitive and behavioral points of view; it has a negative impact on the academic life of those who suffer from it. This learning disability is characterized primarily by an unexpected failure to recognize words, as shown in the inability to develop fluid, effortless reading.

Despite advances gained since developmental dyslexia was first described in 1896, it continues to be surrounded by heated debates and disagreements about such basic issues as its definition, prevalence, causes, manifestations and treatment. This situation has motivated us to dedicate this issue of the *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology* to developmental dyslexia. The reader will note that, in the first place, all articles included deal with this topic; and secondly, the articles taken together reflect the diversity of opinions and approaches which coexist at the present time.

Prevalence rates for developmental dyslexia are cited at anywhere between 5% and 20%. To shed light on this variability, in our first article Tim Miles analyzes problems encountered when it comes to determining the prevalence of dyslexia.

A good deal of research emerging mainly from medicine and from psychology has attempted to detect etiological indicators of dyslexia. Definitive results are not yet clear, with pertinent literature pointing to different types of factors. At present there are four main theories of developmental dyslexia, all of them with a broad body of empirical evidence, and able to offer a plausible explanation of the traits which characterize dyslexic persons. These theories can be grouped into two opposing lines of research: on one hand, research which considers dyslexia to be caused exclusively and directly by a specific, cognitive deficit; on the other hand, research which considers cognitive deficits to be secondary to a much more general, primary deficit (Soriano, 2004 a). Three papers in this monograph enter into this context. First, Francisca Serrano and Sylvia Defior briefly review the current state of dyslexia, addressing different themes. Next, Angela Fawcett and Rod Nicholson focus on one of the most novel general-deficit theories of dyslexia – the cerebellar theory – offering a more comprehensive explanation of dyslexia's manifestations and its comorbidities. Finally, José Escoriza makes an in-depth analysis of the phonological deficit theory and its implications for evaluation and intervention.

Elsewhere, diverse longitudinal studies have shown dyslexia to be a chronic disorder, with reading difficulties that strongly persist over the long term, and educational consequences that go beyond learning to read. Moreover, dyslexia becomes more clearly observable with development, that is, from year to year (Snowling, Goulandris & Defly, 1996; LaBuda & Defries, 1989). Thus more and more authors feel that the best measure we can take to address reading disabilities is to detect and treat them early on. The article by Sotiria Tzivinikou falls into this line of study, analyzing advantages and limitations of instruments for early detection of children at risk.

Next we find two empirical studies which come to us from the University of La Laguna; these focus on a characterization of problems experienced by dyslexic persons in Spanish. Juan E. Jiménez et al. seek to determine in their study whether dyslexics present a deficit in syntactic processing, and Mercedes Rodrigo et al. look at the role played by lexical and sublexical units in orthographic processing by Spanish dyslexic persons.

Another issue we must make reference to is intervention. In recent decades a significant effort has been made to develop intervention programs and to analyze their effectiveness, an effort unprecedented in the field of learning disabilities. Obviously, this increase in intervention research is not fortuitous, but occurs in parallel to advances made in characterizing the problems experienced by dyslexics. In fact, different intervention programs aim to rehabilitate or reduce one or more defective mechanism(s) that supposedly cause the reading problem, thus reflecting different explanatory theories of developmental dyslexia (Soriano, 2004b). In the context of intervention, many authors have made claims in recent years for computer-assisted instruction (CAI). The main advantages of using computers with dyslexic students is that it offers reinforcement and practice, together with individualized instruction and immediate feedback, features which are essential in teaching these students. Computer-based methodology, due to its organization, structure and attractive interface, constitutes a useful procedure for motivating and intensifying practice, in order to help attain automatization of basic subskills such as recognizing and writing words. With this in mind, Manuela Torres presents a multicomponent software program being developed for intervention in developmental dyslexia.

In conclusion, I would note that our original objective for this issue, to offer a broad perspective on all lines of research, has not been fully met. A number of researchers courteously declined our invitation. For this reason I wish to express my earnest gratitude to those

national and international authors who did participate in this issue. Without you this monograph would not have been possible.

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