EAEC6002 Dyslexia – Multi-Sensory Learning

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Introduction

This poster presentation will identify and critically evaluate the barriers that young children with dyslexia may face in an early years setting and discuss how multi-sensory learning can support children and promote inclusive practice.

What is Dyslexia and Barriers

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability which means that children have difficulty with skills such as reading, spelling and writing (NHS, no date). Bohl and Hoult (2016) mention that dyslexic people have difficulty with processing words, decoding, phonological awareness and verbal memory, they may read and write slowly as a result and have poor or inconsistent spelling, affecting their ability to complete curriculum activities in the setting (Rief and Stern, 2010). People with dyslexia have a different brain structure compared to others, it affects the left side of the brain which controls language development (Raschle et al. 2011). Research and studies describe dyslexia like this for many years, many pieces often focus on the difficulties they face rather than strengths (Pavey, 2016). This could influence practitioner's planning when supporting children with dyslexia because they may focus on the child's weaknesses (Moody, 2009), while it is important to be aware of these to ensure they receive support, it is also important to identify strengths. Dyslexic children have strong creative thinking and problem solving skills (Lawrence, 2009: NHS, no date). Dyslexic children find differences and deal with situations through visual processing and intuitive strategies, these two methods help them to manage, develop and compare the information for activities such as problem solving and develop an image of the world (LaFrance 1997: Cancer et al. 2016). Visual processing and intuitive strategies are linked to creative thinking which is an important element to problem solving, it helps people to find solutions or deal with a problem in an imaginative and innovative way (Isaken et al. 2011: Cancer et al. 2016). The social model of disability emphasises the importance of people developing their knowledge to ensure that people with disabilities are supported to reach their potential (Hodkinson, 2016).

Multi-Sensory Learning and Inclusion

Multi-sensory learning is an approach which involves children using two or more of their senses providing them with a stimulating learning experience (Reid and Green, 2016: Taljaard, 2016). A multi-sensory supports children with their difficulties and encourages them to expand their existing knowledge and develop problem solving and non-verbal reasoning skills (Taljaard, 2016). Wismeijer et al (2012) and Dionne-Dostie et al. (2015) both believe that children gather information and develop their knowledge and understanding of the world through their senses. Pedagogical philosopher Mark Zuss and Piaget's 'sensorimotor' stage both mention the importance of sensory learning because it can benefit children's cognitive development and knowledge of the world (Phillips, 2015: Cohen and Waite-Stupiansky, 2017). Reid and Green (2016) believe that multi-sensory learning is fundamental for children with dyslexia, Blomert and Froyen (2010) and Han et al (2014) both agree on the importance of multi-sensory learning and results from their studies showed that multisensory learning for dyslexic children can help them to improves their reading skills. Multisensory provides all children with a stimulating/enjoyable experience, improving motivation, participation and practitioner's inclusive practice (Reid, 2006: Eide and Eide, 2011). Inclusive practice values children's differences and gives them the opportunity to participate and receive support (Petriwskyj, 2010). The Equality Act 2010 emphasises the importance of children with disabilities having the right to protection from discrimination and equal opportunities (Envy and Walters, 2013). The Foundation Phase encourages settings to promote positive attitudes, equal opportunities, and participation (Department for Education and Skills, 2015). The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice highlights the importance of providing early intervention programmes like multisensory learning to support children and promote inclusion (Welsh Government, 2004).



(Source: Blackburn Darwen Music Hub, 2016)



(Source: Story Sacks, 2011)



(Source: Society for Research in Child Development, 2018)

Multi-Sensory Methods

There are many different methods to use when using the multisensory approach, the sessions can be carried out one-to-one or in groups (Pavey, 2016). The International Dyslexia Association (2017) mentions this approach can be flexibly adapted to suit the learning needs and age of the child who needs support, it can include other resources such as music, story sacks and digital devices (Davis, 2001: Davies, 2012). An example of a multisensory learning approach is the Orton-Gillingham Approach, this approach is a instructional and highly structured approach which breaks down the rules of language and literacy into smaller steps for children to learn (Orton Academy, no date: Pavey, 2016). Selmi et al (2014) believes that structured activities can have a negative impact on children's learning because it can controls what they learn and provide a boring learning environment. Schlesinger (2016) emphasise the importance of structured language approaches because it can help children to develop their visual memory and expand their knowledge. Montessori believes this as well, by giving children some structure it can help them to develop basic information and develop an understanding of responsibilities (Isaacs, 2018). The Orton-Gillingham approach is commonly used in America and available in a few settings in the United Kingdom, for practitioner who are willing or wish to learn about this approach will have to attend training (Reid, 2017). However, most of the training takes place in America, this could be because the approach is more popular in America, but practitioners from the United Kingdom or countries in the world would have to travel to America which can be costly and time consuming (Reid, 2017).



(Source: Greengate School, no date)

Advantages and Barriers

There are many advantages of using the multi-sensory learning approach for children with dyslexia, this approach supports inclusion because it can provide children with a different learning experience which may suit their needs and allow them to participate in the setting (Frederickson and Cline, 2009). This approach can help dyslexic children to develop skills such as memory, phonological awareness, comprehension, letter knowledge, mathematics and handwriting (Birsh, 2011). The multisensory approach can also include other resources such as music, story sacks and digital technology to suit the child's learning needs and the early years' curriculum (Davis, 2001 Rodgers and Wilmot, 2012). The Foundation Phase stresses the importance of providing children with different learning experiences and resources during their play to help promote their development, develop an understanding of themselves and the environment around them (Department for Education and Skills, 2015). The multi-sensory approach can be carried out in groups which can benefit dyslexic children's social development, they have the opportunity to socialise and interact with other children who may not have disabilities (Frederickson and Cline, 2009). Vygotsky's social development and Bandura's social learning theory both stress the importance of social interaction for children because it benefits their cognitive and language development (Johnston and Nahmad-William, 2009: Gray and MacBlain, 2015). However, this approach can also be used during one-to-one sessions which means that the child may be withdrawn from the classroom to have these session and may miss out on educational and social opportunities happening in the classroom (Armstrong and Squires, 2012). However there are some barriers that could affect how effectively the approach is carried out in practice, Squire and Mckeown (2006) emphasise that practitioners must have a good understanding of dyslexia and the multisensory approach to support dyslexic children. The settings limited finance and flexibility can be a barrier, practitioners may have limited time to research or attend training due to their job and personal life (Peer and Reid, 2016: Brown, 2016). The practitioner's attitude could also be a barrier because they may not see the benefit of training because that have become comfortable with their practice (Cable et al. 2010), which can affect how the approach and resources are used to support the child affecting their learning and development (Rogers and Wilmort, 2012).

Conclusion

Dyslexic children may face some barriers due to their learning disability along with the additional barriers from people's attitudes. The multi-sensory support strategy does have advantages and disadvantages, but it can help to ensure that dyslexic children are able participate and interact with others in the setting which supports inclusive practice.

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