"Feeling better about myself": An examination of the strengths and weaknesses of a tool developed to explore the impact of dyslexia support on the self-esteem and motivation to learn of dyslexic young offenders

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Abstract

Evidence suggests that the prevalence of dyslexia is higher in the offending population. Kirk and Reid (2001) hypothesize there may be a link between crime, dyslexia and self-esteem. It has been suggested that individuals who are involved with the criminal justice system and have had a negative schooling experience linked to their dyslexia may benefit from specialist dyslexia support to the extent that it can help reduce re-offending rates (Klein 1998; Jameson. & Ward 2001). However UK government agencies place their main emphasis on working on literacy taking a Basic Skills approach to tuition despite evidence that there is equal need for self-esteem and life-skills support. Without quantifiable evidence of the impact that dyslexia support can have on offenders' self-esteem, funding agencies are reluctant to support projects. This paper explores the strengths and weaknesses of a tool designed to quantify the impacts of one to one dyslexia support on self-esteem and a range of behaviours. It considers lessons learned from the use of the questionnaire with a group of young people at risk of offending who had been excluded from school. The paper concludes that providing the questionnaire is used in conjunction with qualitative interviewing and is tailor made with the objectives of each project in mind, it is completed consistently, and considers a range of issues exploring both perceptions and actual behaviour, the data collected can provide useful quantification of qualitative information that can help to convince funders of the importance of the softer outcomes of dyslexia tuition.

Despite criticism of the lack of research into dyslexic adults and the difficulties they experience, some work has been undertaken which demonstrates that cognitive impairments continue from childhood into adulthood (Riddick, Sterling, Farmer & Morgan, 1999; Bruck, 1992; Van Izendoom & Bus, 1994). Much of this work focuses upon continuing literacy difficulties with little attention given to the wide range of other cognitive problems. The main exception to this is the work by Riddick *et al.* (1999) which provides evidence to suggest students experienced low levels of self-esteem which had a negative impact on their general well-being. Following on from this study, Kirk and Reid (2001) have hypothesized that the relationship between crime and dyslexia may have its origins in the low levels of self-esteem experienced by dyslexics, a problem which itself emanates from negative schooling experiences and failure to diagnose and support their dyslexia.

Whilst there is a body of evidence to suggest the prevalence of dyslexia is far higher in the offending population than in the general population (Davies & Byatt, 1998; Klein, 1998; Morgan, 1996) little research has been undertaken to explore the relationship between dyslexia and offending, and the extent to which the range of cognitive aspects of dyslexia and self-esteem might relate to offending behaviour. Jameson and Ward (2001) point to the likely impacts of a range of features of dyslexia on an individual's interaction with the criminal justice system. The relationship between non-literacy aspects of dyslexia, self-esteem, and offending behaviours, was also stressed by adult offenders in an evaluation of the Dyspel project (Phillimore & Goodson, 2003). However, schemes providing support for dyslexics in contact with the criminal justice system are under pressure to focus on literacy. This is because funding agencies tend to measure success through quantitative measures of literacy achievement. This paper considers the relative merits of different data-gathering tools and, in particular, explores the merits of a pilot client-monitoring questionnaire that was intended to collect essentially qualitative data in a robust quantifiable way. The questionnaire covered a range of issues including monitoring changes in students' self-esteem, time-keeping and ability to self-organise. The paper concludes by considering how a tool of this kind might be used in future studies and evaluations of dyslexia learning support programmes.

Evidence about dyslexia and offending

The possibility of a relationship between dyslexia and crime was first raised by Critchley and Critchley in 1978. Subsequently, a number of studies have been undertaken which suggest that the prevalence of dyslexia indicators is higher in the offending population than in the general population. The statistical evidence of a link between dyslexia and offending is strong. Klein's (1998) study found that 38% of the custodial sample showed indicators. The STOP project (Davies & Byatt, 1998) found that 31% had positive indicators of dyslexia and Morgan's (1996) study showed 52% had strong indications. These results are consistent with studies in Sweden (Alm & Andersson, 1995) and the US (Haigler, Harlow, O'Connor &

Campbell, 1994) where results of 31% and 52% respectively were found. Increased propensity was also noted in the UK Department for Education and Employment (DFEE) report *Freedom to learn* (2000). The main detractor from this argument is Rice (1998) who contends that dyslexia is no more prevalent in offenders than the general population. He believes dyslexia studies are flawed due to sample bias and inappropriate screening methods. More recent research by Reid & Kirk (2001) disputes Rice's argument. This project involved the screening of 50 imprisoned offenders using QuickScan[1]. Some 50% showed at least borderline dyslexia indications. The researchers argued that the cumulated evidence of all the above studies demonstrated that the percentage of dyslexic offenders is higher than the highest estimate of 10% in the general population.

Jameson & Ward (2001) point to the implications of dyslexia for individuals involved in the criminal justice system. These range from literacy difficulties such as poor reading and a consequent inability to cope with official letters, to poor organisation, and poor time-management and sequencing problems. Such difficulties may impact on an individual's ability to attend critical meetings or to give evidence accurately, making conviction more likely. A combination of factors may lead to a failure to comply with Probation procedures, leading to a custodial sentence. Kirk & Reid (2001) warn against uncritical acceptance of a causal link between dyslexia and offending because the acceptance of dyslexia as genetically-predisposed might allow for the argument to be made that criminal behaviour is, as a consequence, genetically-predisposed. Instead it is suggested the link is indirect and related to self-esteem. Riddick *et al.* (1997) found that there was a significant difference in the self-esteem and levels of anxiety between dyslexic and non-dyslexic students. Little research of this nature has been undertaken with offenders but Kirk & Reid (2001, p.78) argue that low self-esteem might lead to "*anti-social or maladjusted behaviour which could lead to more serious forms of deviant behaviour and ultimately to imprisonment*". Research with adult offenders in London found that many reported feeling "bad about myself", "thick" and "angry" from the emergence of their difficulties at school and linked those experiences and feelings with behaviours that had led both to expulsion and involvement with the criminal justice system (Phillimore, Beasley, Goodson & Hall 2002; Phillimore, Beasley, Goodson, Hall & Oosthuizen 2003)

Dyslexia, self-esteem and the relationship with offending

Riddick *et al.* (1999, p. 229) discuss the concept of self-esteem and also consider the term 'self-concept' because the terms are often used interchangeably. The latter term is therein defined as "*an individual's evaluation of himself or herself at a cognitive, affective and behavioural level*" whereas self-esteem is defined as "*the extent to which an individual considers that their present self matches up to their ideal self*". It is possible that adult dyslexic offenders experience both low self-esteem and low self-concept if the difficulties they experience at cognitive level are coupled with a feeling of failure and being excluded from mainstream society. Findings from an

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[1] QuickScan is a commercial computer based diagnostic test

evaluation of the Dyspel[2] project suggested that adult dyslexic offenders did experience a combination of the two (Phillimore & Goodson, 2003). The Dyspel study employed in-depth qualitative interviewing with 58 dyslexic offenders and found that interviewees had entered the project feeling "*thick*", "*ashamed*", "*incapable*", and considering themselves to be "*useless*" largely because of their failure to achieve at school. For these interviewees, the biggest impact of the project on both their self-concept and behaviour was increased self-awareness enabling them to understand why they struggled to complete tasks which "*normal*" people seemed to accomplish easily and to acknowledge they had a disability so the difficulties they experienced were "*not my fault*". Also important was the learning of basic life skills such as telling the time, punctuality, self-organisation, goal-setting and the learning of coping strategies. Following these improvements in ability to undertake basic tasks and a re-framing of their perceptions of self, the majority of interviewees reported a new interest in self-development and learning and an ability to envisage alternatives to offending behaviour. Interviews with these individuals, their dyslexia tutors and the Probation Officers revealed that the most important impact of the project was on how offenders conceived themselves. Officers noted that improved self-esteem and life skills in their students affected behaviour in that individuals appeared less aggressive, less confrontational, more reflexive, more positive, more punctual and less likely to forget appointments thereby "breaching" their Probation Order. The study concluded that support and education programmes should provide assistance with self-esteem and life skills as well as literacy skills.

Dyslexia support for adults involved with the criminal justice system

Whilst evidence from the Dyspel evaluation suggests that the non-literacy aspects of dyslexia need to be tackled before literacy, present UK funding regimes mitigate against this approach. At the time of the Dyspel study major changes were underway in UK funding which impact upon the ability of support projects to focus on non-literacy issues. The Probation Service has moved from part-funding dyslexia support, to a Basic Skills approach where it competes for funds in order to provide in-house numeracy and literacy training. Probation Service funding is now dependant upon students reaching literacy targets. There appears to be confusion regarding the distinctions between dyslexia and Basic Skills with assumptions being made that dyslexia is purely a literacy issue that can be tackled through dyslexia-sensitive Basic Skills training (Basic Skills Agency, 2002; DFEE 2000).

Funding for dyslexic students to receive dyslexia specific support has been ceased on the grounds of high unit costs and the inability of projects to provide quantitative evidence of success. Such evidence might include dyslexic young offenders re-engaging with the schooling system, reduced recidivism rates amongst dyslexic students, or set numbers of students being accredited for reaching general literacy targets. However, sufficiently detailed data are not collected to compare

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[2] Dyspel is a dyslexia support project which provides help for adult dyslexics at Probation offices in many parts of London

recidivism rates and many offenders entering support programmes have multiple problems around esteem, literacy and drop-out rates which make accreditation extremely difficult (Phillimore *et al.* 2003). Without being able to provide quantifiable evidence of their students' progression, it has become exceptionally hard for dyslexia projects to obtain funding and the long-term viability of these projects has come into question.

Measuring the softer outcomes of dyslexia support

An obvious route to exploring issues around self-esteem and the development of life-skills is to use qualitative methods. Research with dyslexic offenders can be challenging because many have experienced interviews only in relation to their problematic or offending behaviour and view the interaction negatively. Many have low levels of confidence and fear that they will not be able to answer questions "correctly". Non-attendance is high, perhaps due to lack of organisational skills or confidence. However the interviewing approach is useful in this context because it enables researchers to build trust with an offender through thorough explanation of the research process, carefully worded questions and adapting questioning to meet the needs and comprehension of the interviewee (Berg, 1989; Babbie, 1995). Indeed this technique has been used successfully to evaluate the efficacy of several projects aimed at reducing offending behaviour (Phillimore *et al.* 2002; Phillimore *et al.* 2003; Phillimore & Goodson, 2003). On these occasions, qualitative data provided a wealth of information about the self-esteem and self-concept of participants. Although, with care, it is possible to employ sensitive interviewing to work with offenders, there are problems using interviews to determine the impact of a programme if an evaluation takes place at the end of a project. On these occasions researchers must ask interviewees to remember how they felt before they entered the project, and compare those feelings to their current state. Consequently, they are reliant on the subjective memory of participants, an approach that has been questioned because of the selectivity of memories (Faraday & Plummer, 1979; Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault & Benton, 1992; Brewin, 1998).

Nonetheless, when seeking information about confidence, self-esteem and life skills, interviewing remains the most appropriate approach for this group. The main difficulty arises from the reluctance of funders to give credence to qualitative findings. This is because the ontological viewpoint of UK Government agencies is that social life consists only of that which can be seen and recorded. As a consequence, their epistemological outlook is grounded in the positivist research paradigm whereby findings are only viewed as valid if they are based upon quantification (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Flick, 1998; May, 1993; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). The reluctance of funders to accept qualitative findings leads to a dilemma for social researchers exploring issues around self-esteem particularly that of how it is possible to demonstrate progression to funders. The use of inventories consisting of a range of sub-scales might be appropriate when exploring esteem issues with dyslexics who have some degree of literacy. Indeed Riddick *et al.* 's (1999) use of the Culture Free Self-esteem Inventory (Battle, 1992) and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, Gorsuch & Lushene, 1983) worked successfully with university students. The use of self-completion questionnaires is

inappropriate for participants who can barely read or write, and who view any written activity as intimidating (Phillimore & Goodson, 2003). Also these inventories are research tools aimed at exploring the more abstract measures of self-esteem. They will not allow the researcher to explore the efficacy of specific aspects of learning or support programmes. Such a task requires a tool tailor-made for the study. Clearly, in order to satisfy a number of objectives there is a need to find a way of making the qualitative approach more quantifiable and it is necessary to be able to demonstrate the levels of rigour that agencies associate with quantitative techniques.

Methods

It was with issues of quantification, robustness and appropriateness in mind that the author approached the evaluation of the Breaking Barriers pilot dyslexia project. This project was aimed at providing holistic dyslexia support for a small number of young people at risk of offending, enrolled on more general courses with three organisations working with Breaking Barriers. Breaking Barriers was a Single Regeneration Budget funded programme that initiated the Dyslexia Pilot in its fifth and final year. The pilot ran for six months and the researchers were fortunate to be asked to undertake the evaluation before dyslexia support commenced. All research tools were developed in consultation with dyslexia tutors and project directors to ensure that the data collected examined the extent to which the project's aims and objectives had been met. The researchers undertook the research on a longitudinal basis, engaging with students before support on week 1, halfway through the programme on week 12, and at the end of the programme on week 24.

Having experienced, through previous evaluations, the difficulties that projects supporting offenders had in trying to demonstrate the efficacy of their work with qualitative findings, whilst being aware of the focus organisations wished to place on esteem issues, the researchers sought to design a questionnaire that would enable the collection of qualitative information in a robust and quantifiable fashion. The questionnaire was designed specifically to explore the extent to which it was possible to assess the effectiveness of support provided by the Breaking Barriers pilot. It was not intended to be used to assess the relationship between dyslexia and offending or as tool to be universally applicable to all evaluations of this nature. However, it was hoped that the piloting of the so-called client-monitoring tool would provide some indications about how this type of approach could be used to assess 'soft' outcomes in a more quantifiable fashion. The questionnaire sought to monitor changes in students' self-esteem, time-keeping and organisation, communication, ability to set goals and progression in basic literacy skills. The questionnaire was designed so that dyslexia tutors could complete it at the three stages in the project, through a range of approaches including discussions with students, and monitoring of their behaviours. It was piloted with project workers and directors in an attempt to make it as accessible to the students as possible. The questionnaire was always completed separately from the undertaking of tuition so that the impact of any anxiety associated with tuition would be reduced. The approach was part of a wider evaluation that included qualitative interviews with project directors, dyslexia tutors, project workers and the students. Whilst focussing

on the client-monitoring questionnaire the paper will refer to some of the qualitative findings to consider the relative merits of the different techniques, and the extent to which the different findings support, or detract from, each other.

The participants

Breaking Barriers project workers selected young people who had been demonstrating some of the indicators of dyslexia (particularly poor literacy, organisational and time-keeping skills) to be screened for dyslexia. Each individual was assessed by qualified dyslexia tutors using a range of cognitive and language based tests. Fourteen young people aged between 14 and 24 were diagnosed as dyslexic and agreed to take part in the pilot support project. All took part in the evaluation. A small number of young people were diagnosed but refused to take part in the pilot. All participants were classified as 'at risk of offending' because they had multiple contacts with the criminal justice system. Most were not attending, or had been excluded from school, they had all been convicted of minor offences and two were compelled to attend the project as a Probation Service direction. Once referred to the pilot project, each young person received dyslexia tuition from a tutor on a one-to-one basis. The emphasis was placed primarily on non-literacy aspects of dyslexia, including the raising of self-esteem through discussion of the nature of dyslexia and exploration of individual strengths, the learning of coping strategies and life skills, and learning organisational skills. Interviewees undertook some basic literacy work at a later stage in the process. Twelve of the participants later took part in two group sessions either with dyslexic peers or with participants in the wider project. It was hoped that, if successful, the dyslexia programme would enable these dyslexic students to take full advantage of the learning opportunities available in the wider programme provided by their project.

The client monitoring questionnaire

Self –esteem

For the first part of the questionnaire, tutors were expected to ask students how they were feeling at the time of the discussion, and how they felt generally. This would enable researchers to assess the extent to which responses given might have been affected by the respondents' feelings at the session. The tutors who undertook the discussions did not consistently undertake this task so data collected were of little use. Tutors then discussed with their students what type of person they described themselves as most of the time. They were asked about some positive characteristics such as wheter they saw themselves as being motivated, determined, persistent, outgoing, confident, self-aware, assertive, friendly and sociable, and some negative characteristics such as unsure, worried, anxious, quiet, distractible and nervous. The number of positives and negatives were calculated with one point allocated for 'yes', zero for 'no' and half for 'sometimes'. We sought to assess whether the number of negatives had decreased and the number of positives increased at the end of the programme to give some indication of changes in self-esteem (see Table 1). This exercise indicated that the majority of interviewees had experienced some improvement in self-esteem in that they held a more positive view of themselves

than previously. When data from the questionnaire were compared to the findings from the qualitative interviewing, those young people who reported improved feelings of self-worth and the development of more positive attitudes towards life were those whose positivity scores increased and negativity scores decreased. The two students who felt the programme was not working for them showed no changes in scores.

Table 1: Summarised results of the monitoring forms for all students on the programme.

Client	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Kind of person														
Positives														
1 week	4 ½	-	-	6	7 ½	8	3 ½	3 ½	2	6	4 ½	-	-	6 ½
12 weeks	4 ½	-	-	8	9	8	5 ½	8	7	7	-	-	-	7 ½
20 weeks		-	-	-					N/A		7	-	-	-
Negatives														
1 week	5	-	-	4	3 ½	2 ½	2	6	3	1	3	-	-	4 ½
12 weeks	4	-	-	4	2 ½	2	2	5 ½	3	0	-	-	-	4
20 weeks	-	-	-	-							2 ½	-	-	
Good at														
1 week	1 ½	-	-	6	8	5 ½	4	3	1	6	6 ½	-	-	6
12 weeks	5	-	-	8	8	6 ½	7	8	7	6 ½		-	-	4 ½
20 weeks	-	-	-								6 ½	-	-	-
Punctuality Y= punctual	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Punctuality changes	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N/A	N	N/A	Y	N/A	N/A
Goal setting +/-/no change (NC)	+	NC	+	+	+	+	NC	+	NC +	NC +	NC +	+	NC +	+
Communication Peers = P, Strangers = S, Groups = G	NC P + S NCG	NC	NC	NC P + S + G	NC P + S + G	NC P NCS + G	NC P + S + G	+ P + S + G	+ P + S + G	NC P + S + G	NC P NC S + G	-	-	NCP + S NCG
Self advocacy +/-/no change	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
Ask/secure help	+	-	++	NC	++	++	++	NC +	++	+	++	NC	-	++
Spellings[3] NQ = not quantified	+ NQ	+ 4-8	N/A	+ NQ	+ 0-10	+ 3-9	+ 0-10	+ 3-10	+ 15-60	+ 10-30	+ 10-30	NC	+ 5-10	+ 7-10
Reading +/-/no change	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	-	-	+	+	+

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[3] The first figure denotes spellings achieved at commencement of the course. The second figure is the number achieve at last testing.

Interviewees were asked to tell their tutor which of the activities listed they would judge themselves good at. The activities included talking, listening, planning, time-keeping, getting on with people, getting things done, solving problems and explaining what you need. A scoring system was used to assess whether there were any changes (see Table 1). The data collected indicated an increase in ability or an increase perception of ability. The findings in this part of the questionnaire reflected those from the interviews with the majority of participants discussing how their understanding of dyslexia and how it affected them '*made me feel better about myself*' and more likely to attempt things such as solving problems. Interviewees reported increased levels of motivation, self-belief, determination and perseverance. In this area both questionnaires and interviews showed improved self-understanding and an impact both on perceptions of what was achievable and upon actual behaviour.

Punctuality, goals and communication

Tutors were asked to assess whether there were any notable improvements in particular behaviours. Tutors assessed the punctuality of their interviewees through a discussion about their general behaviour and by recording levels of tardiness. Of the six who did have problems with timekeeping, four demonstrated some improvement (see Table 1). Tutors also assessed interviewees' ability to set goals for themselves through discussion, evaluating of goal setting and consequent achievement in coursework generally. Of the ten who were initially unable to set realistic goals, eight developed the ability to do this whilst two experienced no change (see Table 1). Increased ability to set goals was reinforced by the interviews as students outlined how they were beginning to set achievable goals and giving examples of situations where they had accomplished tasks. Project workers also reported that students were better able to meet goals and to speak out if they felt that a target was unrealistic. Once again those students who showed no changes in scores continued to report inability to reach goals.

Tutors explored with students levels of confidence communicating with peers, people they did not know and in groups. Interviewees were asked to rate their levels of confidence where one was very confident, and five extremely unconfident. When considering ability to communicate with peers most were already reasonably confident and only two had seen an improvement in their levels of confidence (see Table 1). There were some indications that the course had helped the majority of interviewees improve their confidence to communicate with people they did not know and with people in groups. Again the scores were supported by interviews as those students with reduced scores reported feeling more inclined to talk to strangers and to speak out when in a group. Support workers reinforced these findings giving examples how students had begun to join in during group sessions and volunteer to take more active roles in group tasks. Much of the improvement was put down to '*feeling better about myself*'. As tutees' levels of self-esteem were raised, there appeared to be an impact upon their willingness to attempt to communicate and an impact on their observable behaviour.

Impact on life outside the course

Tutors were asked to explore whether the course had led to tutees making any changes in their lives. The questions in this section required tutees to list changes experienced at weeks 12 and 24 but did not explore the nature of the changes. This section merely counted the number of individuals able to demonstrate through discussion that they had made changes. Seven had seen some improvements such as increased ability to organise or to plan for the future (see Table 1). Interviews with students and project workers enabled more in depth examination of the changes, which included enrolling on courses, or locating employment for the first time.

During the Dyspel evaluation interviewees rated their newly-found ability to understand and explain to others, their dyslexia, as one of the most critical factors in their route to rehabilitation (Phillimore & Goodson, 2003). A further area explored in the client-monitoring form was students' ability to advocate for themselves by being able to articulate the nature of their dyslexia to their tutor and to ask for help with any related problems. Their ability to do this was rated on a scale and they were assessed for any improvement in score over the duration of the project. All respondents demonstrated improvements in their ability to articulate the nature of their dyslexia and ten were better able to ask for help (see Table 1). In the qualitative interviews respondents discussed the ways in which their dyslexia affected them and how the acquisition of this knowledge helped to bring a greater understanding of the difficulties they had experienced in the past. Project workers reported that students were now able to ask to complete particular tasks in a range of alternative ways to a written format. This ability appeared to have had an impact on self-esteem and behaviour as tutees felt able to explain their dyslexia and were less embarrassed about admitting that they were struggling with their learning.

Spelling and reading

In an attempt to quantify any change in interviewees' ability to spell and read, we asked tutors to assess the number of spellings achieved at weeks one, twelve and twenty and to consider the extent to which they had achieved certain reading goals i.e. understanding reading strategies. Twelve of the interviewees could achieve more spellings by the end of their course (see Table 1). Eleven demonstrated some improvements in achieving reading goals. Twelve of the interviewees felt that although they had made few advances in literacy ability they had begun to acquire the building blocks for progression and explained how they could use strategies to read more effectively. However, in this area, students felt that they were just beginning to make progress and wanted more time with their tutors in order to develop their skills.

Discussion

Strengths of the student-monitoring questionnaire

The questionnaire was useful in a number of ways. Firstly it enabled researchers to assess progress over the duration of the pilot. In this respect the form reflected some of the key strengths of anxiety and self-esteem scales in that it could be used to

collect longitudinal data. Researchers were able to assess actual changes over the timescale rather than relying on the memory of participants which is the case in most evaluations. There were a number of key differences between scales and the questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed by tutors and, as such, was accessible to students unfamiliar with and often intimidated by questionnaires. Avoiding a self-completion approach also ensured that all participants, regardless of literacy ability, were able participate in the evaluation. The client-monitoring questionnaire was also designed so that it could be applied in a flexible fashion. It is often the case when questionnaires are used that the interviewer is expected to apply the survey in exactly the same way to each respondent (Oppenheim 1992). In this study questions were asked in a manner to which each respondent could relate. Such flexibility was possible because of the collaborative manner in which the questionnaire was constructed with focus placed on ensuring that the tutors understood the core meaning of each question and had considered, in advance, how they might vary questions to ensure that they conveyed the nature of the question to every respondent.

The questionnaire was also particularly useful because, unlike off-the-shelf research tools, it was designed specifically to evaluate the aims and objectives of this project. The wide range of data collected all related directly to the work of Breaking Barriers. Clearly, the choice of terms to assess self-perception and ability were critical. These were agreed with all the parties involved in the pilot and selected because they best reflected the aims of the pilot: to increase positivity in those dimensions, decrease negativity and encourage young people to be more prepared to take on certain tasks. Other projects employing questionnaires of this kind would need to ensure that the terms and tasks selected relate to the aims of the project being evaluated. A further strength was the use of a range of measures, including punctuality, self-advocacy, and goal setting that could be discussed with students *and* assessed through their actual behaviour and achievements within the dyslexia tuition sessions. This approach went beyond the self-perception of ability - often a difficulty when using scales because of the subjective nature of self-evaluation (King, 1997), to examining actual behaviour. In this respect, the use of tutors to complete the forms was critical because they held the knowledge about students' achievements and were able to assess performance in relation to the different measures.

The monitoring forms were intended to give some quantifiable assessment of progress in terms of soft and hard outcomes of the course. This analysis is tentative, given the innovative nature of the forms, and should be used in conjunction with the feedback from qualitative interviewing. There was a high level of comparability between the scores achieved in the questionnaire and the qualitative findings. For example, those students who had improved positivity scores also discussed improved feelings of positivity with interviewers and showed increased signs of positivity in their interactions with support staff. In every dimension the quantitative results, both in terms of the group generally and in terms of specific individuals, were reflected in the qualitative findings. The only minor disparity was between students' *feelings* about their literacy improvements, which they considered minor, and the scale of increase in the number of spellings achieved. In view of this,

researchers were careful not calculate percentage improvements in achievement. The strength of relationship between quantified and qualitative findings indicate that the client-monitoring tool, despite its wide remit, was capable of assessing changes in self-esteem, cognition and behaviour.

Limitations of the client monitoring questionnaire

The failure of tutors to evaluate how students were feeling before they responded to the questions could have been problematic. This oversight meant that researchers struggled to evaluate the extent to which students' perceptions of themselves as people, as communicators and as goal setters, was affected by the anxiety they were feeling at the particular time. Fortunately, the qualitative data collected from students, project workers and the dyslexia tutors have enabled the validity of findings to be checked through data triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Without this approach it would have been difficult to assess the robustness of the data in the self-esteem questions. A further problem included the failure of dyslexia tutors to collect all the data at each stage assessment. This sometimes occurred because a student dropped out of the course for a period, gave insufficient information to provide a response to a particular question or because it was simply overlooked by tutors who did not understand the importance of full completion in each category. The forms were completed by four different tutors and approaches were not always consistent. Although the form was designed at an initial meeting with tutors, there was no subsequent meeting to discuss progress. Some of these difficulties could have been overcome by improved monitoring of the process by researchers as the project progressed and also by increasing the numbers involved in the evaluation so that more data is available overall to enable statistical testing even where there are some missing responses. It was not possible to increase the sample size because all participants were involved in the evaluation.

The self-esteem section of the questionnaire counted the number of participants who recorded an increase in positive scores or a decrease in negative. However, the extent to which scores changed over the 14-week period varied enormously between students from a single to a five point change out of a possible maximum of seven points (see Table 1). Participants might also present their changes in a wide range of different areas. Thus, the extent of change and the area to which the change applied differed between individual students. More careful analysis would help to identify the main areas where changes took place but, without statistical testing, it is not possible to establish which changes are significant.

It is important to consider that individual student's understanding of the terms used to signify positivity *etc* will have varied considerably. Although each term was explained and discussed by the dyslexia tutors, they too would each have a different interpretation of the terms, which meant that no question was asked in exactly the same way. Nonetheless, as discussed above, interpretations stressed the positive or negative characteristics of each word and thus, even though subjective understandings may have been different, would still have provided some indication of an increase or decrease in positivity, ability and so on. The problem of subjective interpretations is not unique to the client-monitoring questionnaire. It is also now

recognised that within the use of scales and surveys respondents invariably read questions in a multitude of ways even if the text is exactly the same each time (King, 1997; Maynard & Purvis, 1994). This would certainly be the case with dyslexic respondents. The approach taken in this study ensured that the substance of each question was equivalent for each respondent.

Perhaps the biggest potential difficulty associated with the questionnaire was its completion by tutors whose performance, it might be argued, was being monitored. In the case of this particular project, the innovative approach to providing dyslexia support was viewed by all parties as an experiment from which the organisations involved could learn. Whilst tutors were keen to ensure success for their students, there were no performance targets. The difficulties associated with using tutors to complete the forms could be overcome by using researchers. These benefits would have to be balanced against the loss of data that may occur without tutors being able to accurately monitor behaviour. In this project the potential difficulty was also overcome by comparing quantified findings to the findings from the various interviews. Questionnaires might be less useful if data triangulation was not possible. This contextualisation of quantified data providing a vital checking mechanism but also richer data about the nature of changes or feelings which were not available in a quantified format and yet gave vital information about how the support given actually worked.

Conclusion

The client-monitoring questionnaire enabled researchers to quantify the number of students demonstrating an improvement in a range of areas and in that respect it has achieved its original goal. However, in its present form the questionnaire fails to explore the various dimensions of these achievements in any depth, which dimensions saw the greatest improvements, or how improvements were facilitated. Overall findings indicated that the majority of interviewees experienced improvements in a wide range of areas. There were strong indications that participants experienced an improvement in self-esteem and in self-perception. These changes were supported by in-depth qualitative study suggesting that the data quantified could prove a robust measurement of change. It is harder to judge whether the young people in this study experienced actual improvements in cognition and behaviour. Whilst the evidence exists that they achieved more than they had prior to the tuition, they may have been able to accomplish these tasks previously but, with incomplete self-knowledge and low levels of self-esteem, were not prepared to make an attempt. Further, more detailed work is needed to assess the actual abilities of participants prior to receiving one to one dyslexia tuition. It could also be argued that the changes recorded related to the therapeutic nature of the one-to-one relationship and that such changes might have been achieved by any young person at risk of offending in receipt of counselling. A comparison group would be needed to test whether the support offered impacted specifically on dyslexic offenders.

The questionnaire could be refined to explore the dimensions of achievements in further depth. When considering the self-esteem questions, it would

be necessary to graduate the possible responses introducing a more-scaled approach and ensuring that data are recorded in such a way that it is feasible to explore not only the number of improvements in positivity, but to examine the key areas in which increases in positivity occur. In addition, rather than simply recording a dichotomous 'yes' or 'no' when exploring whether there are changes outside of the course, tutors could explore the number of achievements or even the nature of those achievements. Perhaps most importantly, care should be taken to improve the consistency of completion and, where possible, to increase the number of participants in order to provide a large enough sample for statistical testing. This questionnaire was never intended to be a tool to explore the relationship between self-esteem and offending in dyslexics. The approaches outlined in this paper may have some function in this regard. It might be possible to combine some of the tried and tested concepts used in the Culture Free Self-esteem Inventory (Battle, 1992) and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, Gorsuch & Lushene, 1983) with the monitoring of behaviours and completion by a trusted other to explore this relationship in some depth. Further work is needed in this area.

On a practical level it could be argued that the client-monitoring questionnaire has been a success. Riddick *et al* (1999) have stressed that the lack of quantification of the problems surrounding low self-esteem and the tendency to focus on measures of literacy attainment alone has made the evaluation of the effectiveness of the general support which they receive difficult. This questionnaire has been successful in meeting its original goal: to generate quantified data to explore the impact of the Breaking Barriers dyslexia project on young people at risk of offending which would be of use to the Breaking Barrier projects when seeking funding. The form was used successfully within a group of respondents known to be reluctant to answer questions and to discuss their self-esteem and feelings. The ability of organisations to point to a percentage increase in students' ability to overcome the non-literacy aspects of their dyslexia and re-enforce these outputs with qualitative outcomes has already resulted in some success in seeking funding. There is considerable potential for a technique of this kind to be used in other evaluations. However, it is not intended that the client-monitoring tool in its existing form should be used to evaluate other projects. Some of the principles of the approach have been found to be particularly useful. The combination of questions exploring self-perception with self-assessment and monitoring of behaviours can provide a powerful tool to quantify the qualitative. The development of a tool to be completed at a number of different stages, thereby providing longitudinal data, and the completion of the questionnaire by a trusted individual with an understanding of perceptions and behaviours, is also important. Questions will need to be tailored to explore the aims of the specific project being evaluated. Where possible, the use of larger samples and encouragement of thorough completion would increase the ability to test for statistical significance and provide yet more evidence to help secure funds. It is also important that this tool, like any other attempt at quantification, is used as one of a selection of research methods. Stand-alone questionnaires can only tell us how many people changed their behaviour or felt differently. Qualitative work is needed to understand how and why changes took place (Berg 1989). This level of understanding is critical in the development of

support projects for dyslexics and should not be overlooked in the quest for quantifiable data to satisfy the epistemological leanings of funders.

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