

Section A		
Institution: Durham University		
Unit of Assessment: 23 Education		
Title of case study: The Dyslexia Debate and its relevance for policy and practice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: between January 2004 and December 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Julian Elliott	Role(s) (e.g. job title) Professor of Educational Psychology	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: January 2004 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Between January 2014 and December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No.		
Section B		
1. Summary of the impact:		
<p>Elliott's research has impacted on policy, practice, perceptions, and understanding relating to reading difficulties. 1. Influencing public discourse and impacting on public awareness, attitudes and understanding: Extensive United Kingdom (UK) and international coverage on television, radio, printed and social media has engaged the general public and a diverse range of professional groups with the complexities surrounding dyslexia diagnosis and the wider needs of struggling readers. 2. Changing Local Authority policy, guidance, and professional practice: Rather than identifying and resourcing a small proportion of diagnosed dyslexics on the basis of cognitive testing, Local Authority Services across the UK are increasingly tailoring their policies and practices to meet the needs of all struggling readers.</p>		
2. Underpinning research:		
<p>Elliott's research, involving detailed reviews in genetics, neuroscience, cognitive science, psychology, education, and social policy [R1; R2; R3], demonstrates that current dyslexia assessment and diagnosis are scientifically problematic. The term 'dyslexia' has been shown in his research to be subject to multiple understandings and interpretations, and the problems this causes in undermining attempts to ensure that all struggling readers receive support have been made explicit [R1; R3; R4]. On this basis, Elliott advocates that assessment of struggling readers should focus upon relevant literacy skills rather than underlying cognitive processes [R3; R5]. In so doing, he has challenged the belief that forms of cognitive/brain training are effective means of improving reading performance. Instead, tailored educational interventions having research support should be employed within a response to intervention framework. This aims to ensure that all struggling readers are identified, receive early intervention, and are provided with appropriate resources contingent upon their subsequent progress [R2; R3].</p> <p>Elliott's key research insights are: 1.) Dyslexia assessment and diagnosis do not address a discrete condition. While poor readers are more likely than typical readers to present with certain cognitive difficulties (e.g. phonological, memory, processing), there are no clear criteria to differentiate dyslexic from other types of struggling reader; 2.) Current knowledge in the fields of genetics, neuroscience and cognitive science does not support the use of a dyslexic/other poor reader dichotomy; 3) Differentiation between diagnosed dyslexic children and other poor readers has little or no bearing upon the nature of subsequent intervention required; there are no specific evidence-based interventions for dyslexic individuals that aren't equally relevant for other poor readers; 4) Current approaches to dyslexia assessment, diagnosis, and remediation address a small proportion of struggling readers, and leave the great majority, often from less advantaged backgrounds, without appropriate recognition or support; 5) A shift from psychometric assessment for diagnostic purposes, to specific assessment of reading skills and remedial activities tailored to the child's individual needs, will result in more effective and equitable practice. Elliott's research shows how dyslexia diagnosis meets social, psychological, political, and emotional needs, and professional and economic interests of multiple stakeholders. He argues that improving awareness and understanding of all parties is critical to overcoming vested interests, and in helping professionals reconcile scientific understandings with public awareness and interest.</p>		
3. References to the research		
<p>R1. Elliott, J. & Gibbs, S. (2008). Does Dyslexia Exist? <i>Journal of Philosophy of Education</i>, 42 (3-4), 475-491. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.2008.00653.x. Google Scholar (citations) 174.</p>		

R2. Elliott, J. & Grigorenko, E. (2014) *The Dyslexia Debate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139017824> **Google Scholar 495**

R3. Elliott, J. (2020). It's Time to be Scientific about Dyslexia. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 55, S61-S75. <https://doi.org/10.1002/RRQ.333>.

R4. Gibbs, S., & Elliott, J. (2015) The Differential Effects of Labelling: How Do 'Dyslexia' and 'Reading Difficulties' Affect Teachers' Beliefs. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 30(3), 323-337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2015.1022999> **Google Scholar 58**

R5. Elliott, J. & Resing, W. (2015) Can Intelligence Testing Inform Educational Intervention for Children with Reading Disability? *Journal of Intelligence*, 3(4), 137-157. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jintelligence3040137> **Google Scholar 31**

R6. Elliott, J. & Nicholson, R. (2016). *Dyslexia: Developing the Debate*. London: Bloomsbury. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474233767> **Google Scholar 27**

R2 has been rated 4* by external reviewers and received favourable endorsements by world-leading scholars. Wolf, for example, states: "Every decade or two, a book will emerge that is able to synthesize the past and present research on dyslexia in such a way that the future of where we need to go is illumined and propelled. *The Dyslexia Book* is such a book". It has been reviewed in several leading journals including *Science* and *Brain*. Elliott has been invited to speak on this work at many universities including: Cambridge, Exeter, York, Yale, Cornell, Albany, Houston, Varese, Braga, St. Petersburg, Hong Kong, Virginia, Sydney, Melbourne, New South Wales, & Macquarie.

4. Details of the impact: The research has had direct and significant impact on four beneficiary groups: policymakers; clinicians (particularly, educational psychologists [EPs], teachers, specialist teachers and learning support staff); individual students and their families; and the wider public. The 'significant contribution' of Elliott's research to professional practice around reading difficulty in the UK is evidenced by his receipt of the **British Psychological Society [BPS] 2020 Award for Outstanding Contribution to Educational and Child Psychology** [E2, p20], an award that is focused upon contribution to professional practice.

4.1 Influencing public discourse and impacting on public awareness, attitudes and understanding:

Through wide-reaching public engagement, Elliott's research insights and expertise have influenced public attitudes, awareness, and understanding of dyslexia, its diagnosis, and treatment, particularly in local authority settings. Elliott has regularly challenged public perceptions underpinning political and parental pressures for dyslexia diagnosis and resource allocation, to support a shift to equitable evidence-based assessment and intervention policies and practices.

TV, radio and press coverage of Elliott's research [R2] and recommendations for practice have reached a non-academic audience of millions between 2014 and 2020, appearing in 13 countries including: United States of America (USA), New Zealand, Australia, Russia, Poland, South Africa, Canada, Italy, Belgium, Spain, France, and the Netherlands [E1, p2-30]. **TV interviews** with Elliott have featured on BBC Evening News, BBC World Service, BBC Breakfast, ITV Daybreak, ITV News (estimated combined station reach 8,767,000 people; E1, p25; p30), Sky News, Channel 5 News, Loose Women, New Zealand Breakfast TV, and TV documentaries including BBC4 "*Farther and Sun*". **Radio interviews** following publication of R2 include Radio 4's flagship *Today* and *PM* programmes, *The New Zealand One Show*, *The Voice of Russia* and more than 30 regional BBC (combined station reach 552,000 listeners; E1, p27-28). Following *The Guardian* newspaper article (2020) Elliott carried out an interview on Dublin's second largest radio station Newstalk with a reach of 426,000 listeners daily (E1 p37-39). **UK newspaper features** have appeared in *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Sun*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times Higher*, *The Spectator*, and *The Times Educational Supplement* [estimated combined circulation 5,470,614, E1, p89]. Accessible summaries of Elliott's research have received 47,677 views, 75 comments, 270 likes and 104 dislikes on YouTube [E1, p77].

Since 2014, **professional organisations and practitioner networks** in the UK, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand have engaged with Elliott's research [R2] by releasing public statements documenting: increased awareness and debate; changes in attitude; clarification of their understanding and stance, and to lobby for policy change [E2]. These organisations include The International Dyslexia Association, The British Dyslexia Association, Dyslexia Scotland, Dyslexia Action, The Dyslexia Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) Trust, and The Dyslexia Adult Network (on behalf of 11 dyslexia organisations). In May 2019 an open letter from the Reading

Recovery Council of North America, signed by 60 leading USA literacy scholars, cited Elliott's research [R2] as "*one of the most highly regarded and least biased contemporary analyses.*" [E2, p23]. **Wisconsin State Reading Association** [WSRA] have used Elliott's research [R2] to lobby the Wisconsin Legislative Council Study Committee for amendments to the Wisconsin Dyslexia Bill. In March 2020, Elliott met the State Governor's Senior Aides, State Senators, and School Superintendent leaders to advise on new reading difficulty legislation [E3]. The former president of the WSRA affirms that "*Joe's research has played an influential role in reframing the dyslexia policy debate in Wisconsin and preventing mandatory dyslexia legislation for schools from being passed in full which would have a negative impact on literacy instruction for students*" [E3, p2]. Elliott was interviewed by New Zealand civil servants in 2015, and the **New Zealand Psychological Society** (NZPS) and **The Institute of Educational Developmental Psychology** (IEDP) have used his recommendations to lobby for change to Ministry of Education policy in New Zealand. The former President of the NZPS states that: "*Elliott's research continues to be profoundly influential in the New Zealand Psychological Society's position in these matters and the psychology community in our country.*" [E2, p16]. In November 2020, Elliott accepted an invitation to join a working party to revise professional guidance on dyslexia assessment led by the **Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) Assessment Standards Committee** (SASC) [E9]. This body is the primary authority for guiding dyslexia assessors working in schools, colleges and universities. Elliott is also a member of a **BPS** working party currently preparing revised guidance on dyslexia [E2, p21]. Elliott is a member of a **Royal Medical Colleges' Working Party** reviewing the operation of dyslexia assessments in relation to their professional examinations [E2, p19]. Elliott was also consulted by [REDACTED], about special educational needs, and by [REDACTED] when considering reforms to the Disabled Student Allowance (2015) for university students [E2, p33].

4.2 Changing Local Authority policy, guidance and professional practice:

Impact on professional practice has taken place in England since 2014 both at a Local Authority (LA) level and individual clinical/educational level, with practitioners changing personal assessment practices, interventions, and communications with children, parents, and staff. In January 2019, Elliott hosted a conference where approximately 43 LAs were represented [E4, p45-47]. To date, 13 LAs have published policy documents which, in total, cite Elliott's research 20 times, and/or have actively worked alongside him to seek specialist advice for making changes to policy documents and professional practice; namely: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Elliott's research [R2; R6] has provided teachers and educational psychologists (EPs) with a more scientific understanding of reading difficulty, how it is best identified and assessed, the role of cognitive deficits in identification, assessment, and intervention, and how professionals can best provide appropriate, equitable support.

[REDACTED] LA in the UK, has drawn extensively upon Elliott's research [R2] in drawing up its Literacy Practice Guidance [2014] [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In recommending "*skills-based assessment ... [and] evidence-based intervention as indicated by The Dyslexia Debate*" [E5, p2], the LA guidance seeks "*to ensure all pupils have effective literacy teaching, and their needs met, not just a few who are said to have 'dyslexia'*" [E5, p5]. All [REDACTED] EPs and specialist teachers in the LA received detailed training, including written summaries of R2 and tailored professional "scripts" for use with schools and parents, including example wording for EP reports. A detailed programme of training to schools, grounded in insights from R2, was subsequently initiated [E5, p4]. As a result of this practice guidance and training, since 2015, [REDACTED] staff have no longer undertaken dyslexia assessments, offered dyslexia diagnoses, required dyslexia designation to access specialist literacy support units, or included the term dyslexia in [REDACTED] Educational Health and Care Plans. Instead, they refer to '*severe and persistent literacy difficulties*' [R2] and work with schools to provide meaningful assessment over time and evidence-based interventions [E5, p6]. "*45% of pupils made 15+ months of progress over 5 months with reading comprehension*" [E5 p4]. In [REDACTED], his work is considered as *the crucial foundation... to develop effective support for pupils with literacy difficulties.*" [E5, p1].

Through longstanding and close liaison with Elliott, his '*research provided the main research base*' [E6, p1] for [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Citing Elliott's research insights [R2; R6] that '*there is no universally*

agreed definition of dyslexia, no agreed dyslexia pathway, and the interventions for dyslexia are beneficial for all poor readers” [E6, p2], this guidance “does not separate one select sub-group of poor readers” and instead commits to “an ethically driven practice for raising literacy attainment for all” [E6, p2] through equitable distribution of resources and expertise. Elliott’s research is “bridging the gap between research and practice in the classroom” [E6, p2] by supporting ‘assessment for intervention rather than assessment for diagnosis, to guide assessment, teaching, intervention or resourcing’ [E6, p.7]. Beneficiaries have included over [redacted] schools, Special Educational Needs (SEN) support services, parents, and children (particularly those who are unable to access a diagnosis or specialist support) [E6]. Since 2018, [redacted] have delivered training to staff at over 25 schools, including specialist teachers and other psychologists. Practitioners have ‘appreciated the clarity and consistency of the message which make it very easy to implement’ [E6, p1]. [redacted] report that their guidance has benefited individual student reading attainment for all children, both with SEN and high achieving [redacted].

[redacted] Indicatively, one secondary special school in [redacted] recorded an average rate of 2.9 months reading progress within 3 months, with improvements to students’ accuracy and fluency in the reading of 100 words; blending skills, and accuracy and fluency in the reading of real books. An average rate of 15.6 months progress in 6 months and 8.6 months progress in 3 months was recorded in other schools and cohorts [E6, p3]. [redacted] critical comments [redacted] by 2 peers in the House of Lords in October 2018 [E1, p68]. In response, Elliott and LA colleagues organised a national conference in January 2019 to debate these issues. Approximately 43 Local Authorities were represented with other EP Services watching live online (8,256 views as of 04/07/20) [E1, p85]. The controversy was examined in an in-depth analysis in *The Guardian* which has received more than 171,000 online viewings [E8, [redacted]]

In [redacted], “Elliott’s work around the use of the term ‘dyslexia’ has provided the cornerstone of our Dyslexia Guidance [2018] ... [and] has allowed us to cut through the wider collateral distraction surrounding the use of the term ‘dyslexia’ and to focus instead and at last on how we can identify and respond to literacy difficulties for all children in [redacted]” [E7, p1]. This guidance is available to all [redacted] (supporting [redacted] children and young people) and ‘is also being used in a number of other LAs’ [E7, p2]. [redacted] has introduced a three-tier training programme on assessment and targeted intervention of literacy difficulties for classroom teachers [n=2,287], which is being adopted for use by Newly Qualified Teachers in [redacted]. To date, Tier 1 has been delivered to at least half of schools (approximately 176 schools) in [redacted] and Tiers 2 and 3 to around 15% so far (approximately 38 schools) [E7, p2].

“Joe’s research has been very central” since 2014 in transforming [redacted] service’s dyslexia pathway ‘away from the idea that the dyslexia label forms a subgroup of poor readers’ to ensure “there was equity of opportunity and access to SEN resources for all children with literacy difficulties” [E4, p6]. The research findings [R2] have provided a rationale for senior professionals on why the service should not be spending “time and money on resources that the evidence does not support” [E4, p6]. EPs have commented that the research has enabled “more confident conversations with Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) in schools and parents” [E4, p7]. In consultation with Elliott and his recommendation that assessment of specific literacy difficulties is more effective for literacy progress than specialised diagnostic dyslexia assessment [R2], [redacted] is planning to devise a new ‘Literacy Pathway’ based on teacher-led assessment [E4, p7].

Elliott’s research [R1; R2; R6] is cited in [redacted] guidelines for supporting literacy difficulties (March 2017) and ‘has been extremely influential’ in informing their approach where “support and intervention is not based upon a diagnosis, but on identification, assessment and appropriately planned and monitored intervention” [E4, p3]. The guidance is applicable to all SENCOs, Teachers [redacted] Learning Support Assistants and parents in [redacted] [E4, p48]. In

consultation with Elliott, [REDACTED] Educational Psychology Service has produced guidelines for the assessment of reading difficulties which await ratification.

[REDACTED] has outlined Elliott's research impact in a detailed testimonial [E4,p28]. [REDACTED] has been '*directly influenced*' [E4, p.41] by Elliott's research in the development of draft practice guidance for [REDACTED] Service which emphasise the importance of addressing the needs of all struggling readers. Whilst awaiting approval for publication, it "*has already helped to promote a sense of shared understanding and approach to the use of the term 'dyslexia'*" [E4, p41]. Elliott's 2015 Durham symposium position statement, involving 17 of the world's leading experts in the field of reading disability and dyslexia, significantly informed [REDACTED] *Policy for Literacy Difficulties and Dyslexia* (September 2017). Elliott's work [R2] is cited on 3 occasions [E4, p.34]. This policy applies to '*all teachers and advisory staff*' [REDACTED] ... [and] *children and young people* [REDACTED] [E4, p56].

[REDACTED] acknowledges Elliott's contribution to their [REDACTED] guidance (September 2017), which is disseminated to all schools [REDACTED] parents, SENCOs and other professionals in [REDACTED] [E4, p35;57]. Elliott's research and guidance was '*very influential*' [E4,p35] in informing this guidance, which states, "*our priority is to ensure that all children with reading difficulties receive appropriate and tailored support regardless as to whether they have been given a label of dyslexia or not*" [E4, p37]. Elliott has worked closely with [REDACTED] to produce draft guidance, drawing substantially upon his research [R2], recommending that, rather than diagnosing dyslexia, teachers and psychologists should seek to ensure that all children with reading difficulties are identified, assessed and receive appropriate intervention [E4, p13]. [REDACTED] has drawn on Elliott's work to create an internal guidance document for EPs on evidence-based interventions, whilst a service dyslexia guidance document is being designed to inform new LA policy [E4, p17]. In [REDACTED] Elliott's research [R2] is one of 3 research items cited as underpinning LA guidelines on the assessment and intervention of literacy difficulties since 2017. *The guidance is applicable to "all schools settings, parents/ carers, children [REDACTED] and services in [REDACTED]"* [E4, p32; 55].

[REDACTED] has been working with Elliott and professionals from [REDACTED] to review its current Dyslexia Policy. Elliott's research has been used in **SEN Tribunals** to defend a service position that offers broader support for reading difficulties, rather than targeted towards dyslexia diagnosis. "*Elliott's work has impacted on EP written reports, preparations for, and arguments presented in tribunals*"; '*EP Tribunal reports no longer conclude that a pupil has "dyslexia", and instead use the term "severe and persistent literacy difficulties"*' [E5, p6]. Similarly, [REDACTED] "*have directly quoted Joe Elliott's work in some tribunal reports*" [E7, p2] whilst [REDACTED] EPs report "*using this debate [R2] in a SEN tribunal ... [where] the 'tribunal accepted our claim that a particular child with dyslexia would not automatically require a specialised setting to achieve literacy'*" [E4, p29].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact:

E1. 54 media items from all sources specified across 13 countries.

E2. [REDACTED]