

# Learning Difficulties Australia

Learning Difficulties Australia is an association of teachers and other professionals dedicated to assisting students with learning difficulties through effective teaching practices based on scientific research.



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# Dr Bec Marland

## Academic/ Teacher - Inclusive Education

- PhD in dyslexia policy and practice
- Master's in Dyslexia (UK) England
- Teacher (UK and Australia)
- Initial Teacher Education
- Inclusion advocate (education and employment)
- Victoria University



# Acknowledgment of Country

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, the Woiwurrung and the Boonwurrung of the Kulin nation.

I acknowledge First People joining us today and to pay our respects to Elders past and present.

I recognize First Nations enduring connection to country through the land, waters, and all living things, and their ongoing custodianship, through cultural and spiritual practices.

I acknowledge sovereignty of the land has not been ceded.



# Bridging the Gap: Strengthening Dyslexia Provision Across Australian Schools

How well are schools supporting students with dyslexia-and what needs to change? This presentation explores new research on **best practice** and **systems-level gaps** in dyslexia provision across Victoria Schools. This research has implications for schools in Australia and beyond. It identifies **what's working**, where **challenges** remain, and how teachers and principals can drive **change to create more equitable**, inclusive and effective learning environments **for students with dyslexia**.



# Who is our audience today?

**Please respond in the chat** with your role in supporting students with dyslexia?  
(i.e. Teacher, Parent, Private Dyslexia Consultant, Speech Therapist)



# Today

1. 'The Why' of my Research
2. The Research Questions and Design
3. Policy Challenges (Systemic Gaps)
4. School level Challenges (Systemic Gaps)
5. Who are the Learners?
6. Primary vs Secondary Schools
7. What is working well in Dyslexia Exemplar Schools?
8. Universal Design for Learning
10. Dyslexia diagnosis and the label
11. A focus on strengths
12. The future



## From my PhD

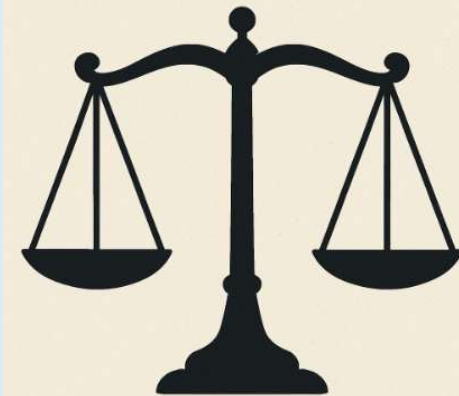
"At the heart of education policy are the students and their right to full participation. The schools in my research offer hopeful examples of proactive innovation—to develop solutions that move beyond government mandates—intended to improve outcomes for students with dyslexia. It is my aim that this research gives rise to future directions of policy and practice."

QR Code – PhD Thesis.



## 'The Why' of my Research

- My interest in this research - Social justice lens.
- Experiences in my teaching career - systemic gaps.
- Motivation - UK experiences and the Rose Review (2009).
- The students who are central to the work.
- The Victorian Government Dyslexia Reforms (2016).



# The Research Questions

1. How is dyslexia being approached in the Victorian education system?
2. How are students with dyslexia being included in the Victorian education system?
3. How might dyslexia exemplar schools and practice from England further our understanding of dyslexia policy and practice?



# The Benefits of the Research

- Highlight gaps in dyslexia policy and practice in Victorian education.
- Opportunities to inform policy, strengthen practice, and reframe dyslexia support in schools.
- Proposes a novel dyslexia response model for systemic change and cohesive school practices.
- Positions dyslexia within human rights and disability theory, shifting responsibility to education systems.
- Challenges stigma and deficit views, enabling strengths-based understandings of dyslexia.



# Research Design

<b>Theoretical Framework</b>	Social justice and human rights-based framework; disability conceptualised through human rights frameworks and critical disability theory; “research puzzle” lens.
<b>Research Design</b>	Qualitative, interpretative multi-method case study. Combines: 1. Single case study – Victorian Government Policy (policy documents) 2. Multiple case studies (three government schools).
<b>Case Study Sites</b>	Three Victorian government schools: two primary, one secondary (identified as being dyslexia exemplar schools).
<b>Data Collection</b>	Document analysis of policy texts related to literacy, disability, and dyslexia. Semi-structured interviews (9 total) with school leaders and teachers.
<b>Participants</b>	9 participants: Principals and specialist dyslexia teachers across 3 schools
<b>Sampling Strategy</b>	Schools identified via website sampling; purposive selection of exemplar schools.
<b>Data Analysis</b>	Thematic coding across policy and interview data; comparative analysis of school responses; aligned with broader social and disability theory.
<b>International Context</b>	Comparative insights drawn from England’s dyslexia policies and practices.



## Topics addressed in the research

UDL, Student Strengths,  
Myths, Dyslexia Politics,  
Business, Reform, England,  
3 Tiers,  
Principals, Teachers, Diagnosis,  
Speech Disability Rights, Deficits,  
SOR, Self-Esteem,  
AdHoc, Systemic Barriers,  
\$\$,



## Policy Challenges (Systemic Gaps)

- Victorian policy on dyslexia remains inconsistent and unclear, particularly in secondary schools.
- Practices to support students with dyslexia are often undocumented, limiting system-wide accountability.
- Government policies frame inclusion as conditional, creating ambiguity around the educational rights of students with dyslexia.
- Funding, and external supports.
- Dyslexia a 'disability' and deficit but not afforded disability protections (DSE, 2005).

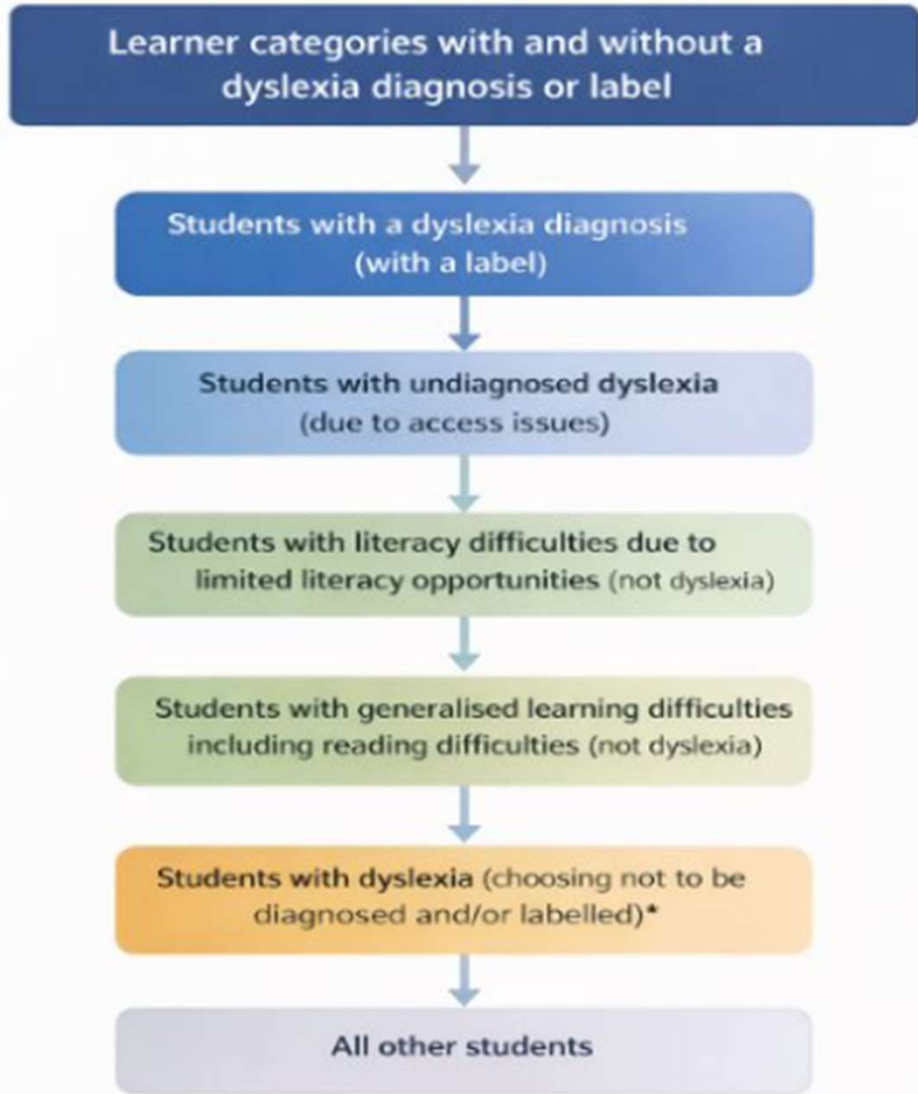


## School level Challenges (Systemic Gaps)

- Exemplar schools vary widely in how they define dyslexia and deliver support.
- Schools are sometimes reliant on private dyslexia organisations.
- Teacher expertise and retention.
- Time and costs in staff training.
- Funding, external supports, and policy inconsistency challenge wider adoption of best practice.
- Gov intent to address dyslexia - implementation challenges English Online Interview.
- Knowledge of the issues (complexity) is sometimes held by a few but needed by many.



# Who are the Learners?



(Marland, 2023)



# Primary vs Secondary Schools

## Primary

- Advocacy for students
- A focus on wellbeing
- Evidenced-Based practice
- Explicit Instruction
- Structured/Coordinated
- Science of Reading
- Phonological perspectives of dyslexia
- UDL Tier 1 + MTSS

## Secondary

- Advocacy for students
- A focus on wellbeing
- Non-Science of Reading
- Unstructured
- 'Irlen' Approach
- Adapted curriculum
- Accommodation focused



# What is working well in Dyslexia Exemplar Schools?

- Exemplar schools demonstrate proactive, inclusive practices despite policy limitations.
- Innovation, beyond mandates.
- Dedicated Principals, Teachers and Teaching Assistants.
- Exceptional therapists (speech and psych).
- Advocacy, and strengths-based.
- Solutions-focused.
- De-stigmatizing practices.
- Multi-disciplinary teams, and partnerships.
- International influence.
- Professionals engaged in contemporary research.
- (Multi-disciplinary – SOLAR).



["The Old School, Scawby" by D H Wright is licensed under CC BY 2.0](#)



# Supports

## Internal

- Knowledge and understanding of dyslexia
- School Wide Approach
- SEN/inclusion leader of practice
- Strengths / Celebration
- Proactive measures
- Skills and adjustments
- Access to assistive tech

## External

- Navigating the system
- Access to affordable diagnosis pathways
- Recommending positive professionals in the network
- Transition points kinder-prep, G6-7, post-secondary.



# Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

## UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

### MULTIPLE MEANS OF ENGAGEMENT

The elements  
that motivate  
students to learn

### MULTIPLE MEAN OF REPRESENTATION

Representation  
of information  
and concepts

### MULTIPLE MEAN OF ACTION & EXPRESSION

A variety of ways  
for students to  
express what  
they know

Developed with AI ChatGPT-5



# Universal Design for Learning

Special education approaches	Universal Design (UDL)
Segregated	Inclusive
Reactive	Proactive
Deficit	Strengths-based
Pathologizes	Normalizes
Labour intensive	Enhanced capacity/reduced Labour



# UDL High Impact Teaching Strategies HITS

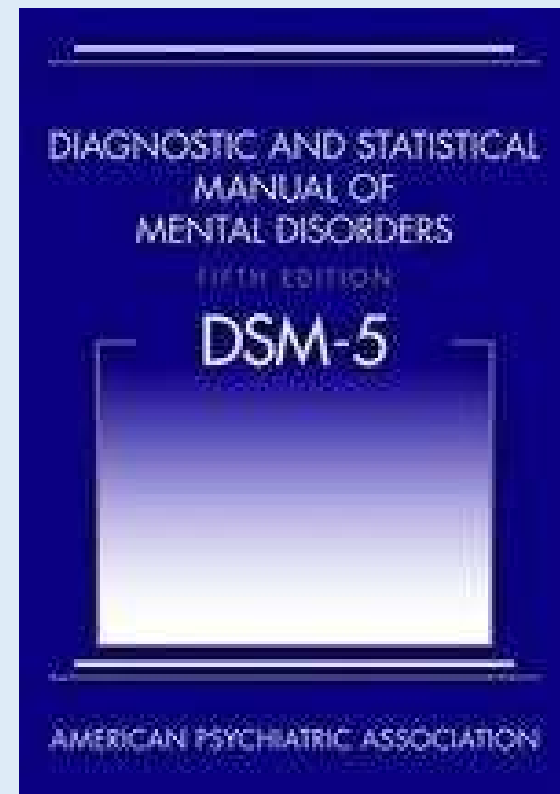


(DET Vic, 2025)



# Dyslexia diagnosis and the label

- Dyslexia diagnosis – DSM-5
- Deficit perspective – 'Medical Model'
- Terms such as 'severe', 'delay' and 'disorder' are found in the DSM-5
- Alternatively, the 'Social Model of Disability' places the onus on education systems to support students with dyslexia
- SMD encourages a focus on strengths



## A Focus on Strengths



**Strengths:** capabilities, skills, and a focus on what students can do. Sees the world as holding opportunities and resources to support the student (a commitment to problem solving).



**Deficits:** focuses on what students can't do.



How do you recognize the strengths of dyslexic students? (respond in the chat)



# Assistive technology

- Access to curriculum content
- Support for written expression
- Reduction of cognitive load
- Increased independence and self-efficacy
- Inclusive and flexible learning environments
- Participation and assessment equity

What types of assistive technology do you use to support students with dyslexia? (respond in the chat)



# Are Smart glasses the future?

- "Ask Meta" function – AI Assistance
- Real-time translation
- Amplification of ambient voices
- Photo, video, and voice recording
- Audio transcription
- Discreet audio playing in the frames (audiobooks, podcast and other apps).



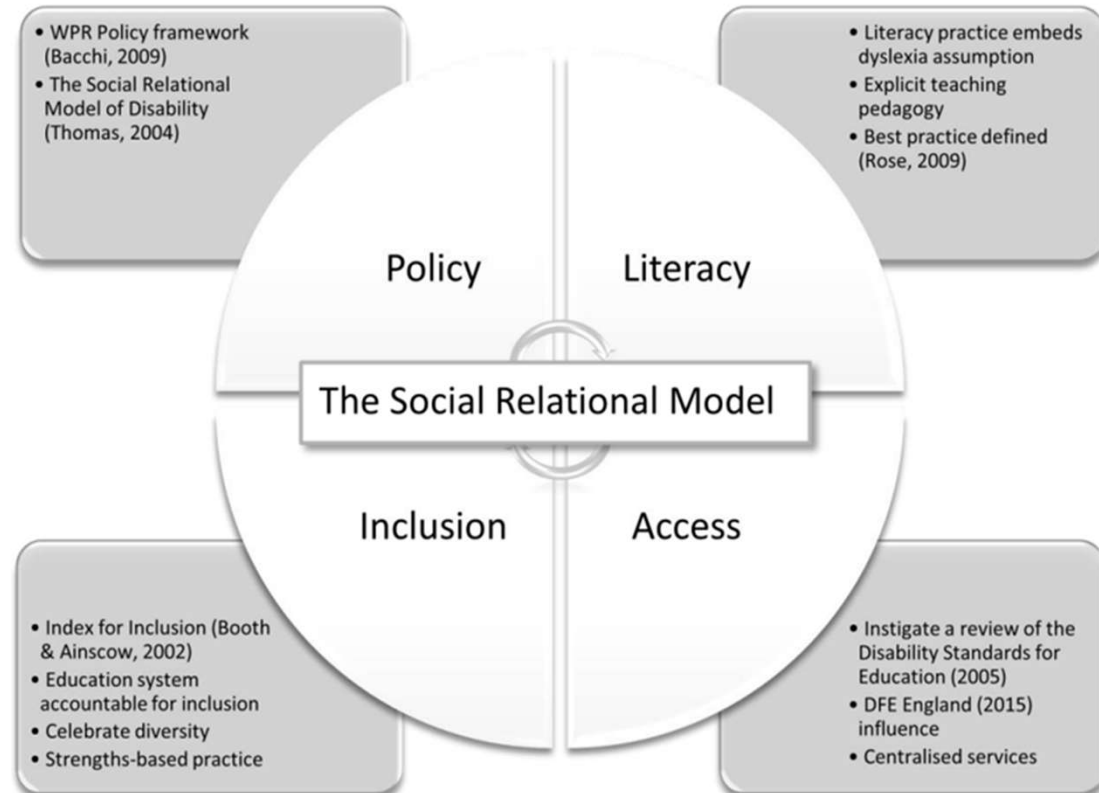
(Arantes & Welsman, 2025).



# Where to next? Reform model (Marland, 2023)

**Figure 6.1**

*New Four-Dimensional Dyslexia Reform Model*



*Note.* Key concerns for policy, clockwise from the top. 1. Policy 2. Literacy 3. Access 4. Inclusion.



## Final words – From my PhD

"At the heart of education policy are the students and their right to full participation. The schools in my research offer hopeful examples of proactive innovation—to develop solutions that move beyond government mandates—intended to improve outcomes for students with dyslexia. It is my aim that this research gives rise to future directions of policy and practice."



QR Code – PhD Thesis.



## Exit ticket

What is one thing you're taking away from today's presentation?

(respond in the chat).



## References

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## Q&A



QR Code – LinkedIn

