



The **dyslexia** debate

University of Exeter, November 24th, 2020

A universal scenario

Perceived benefits of a dyslexia diagnosis

- **At last someone has worked out what is the problem**
- **At last they will know what to do to help my child**
- **At last my child will have access to necessary resources**
- **Now I can reassure my child that it is not their fault**

“Does dyslexia exist?”

...is a daft question...

Differing conceptions of dyslexia

Source: Elliott, J. (Autumn, 2020). It's time to be scientific about dyslexia. *Reading Research Quarterly*

- **Synonymous with reading disability**
- **A sub group of those with RD diagnosed by cognitive tests**

The place of genetics, neuroscience and cognitive science in the dyslexia debate....

Lopes, J. A., Gomes, C., Oliveira, C. R., & Elliott, J. G. (2020).
Research studies on dyslexia: participant inclusion and exclusion criteria.
European Journal of Special Needs Education (on Online First)

The background is a solid blue color with a gradient, lighter in the center and darker towards the edges. There are several realistic water droplets of various sizes scattered across the surface, primarily concentrated in the top-left and bottom-right corners. The droplets have highlights and shadows, giving them a three-dimensional appearance.

Problems often found in those
who struggle with reading



JOHN IS NOT REALLY DULL

HE MAY ONLY
NEED HIS EYES

EXAMINED



TOWN OF FENHIRSTEAD - W. RUNCIE, M.D., HEALTH OFFICER - WRATED ART PROJECT

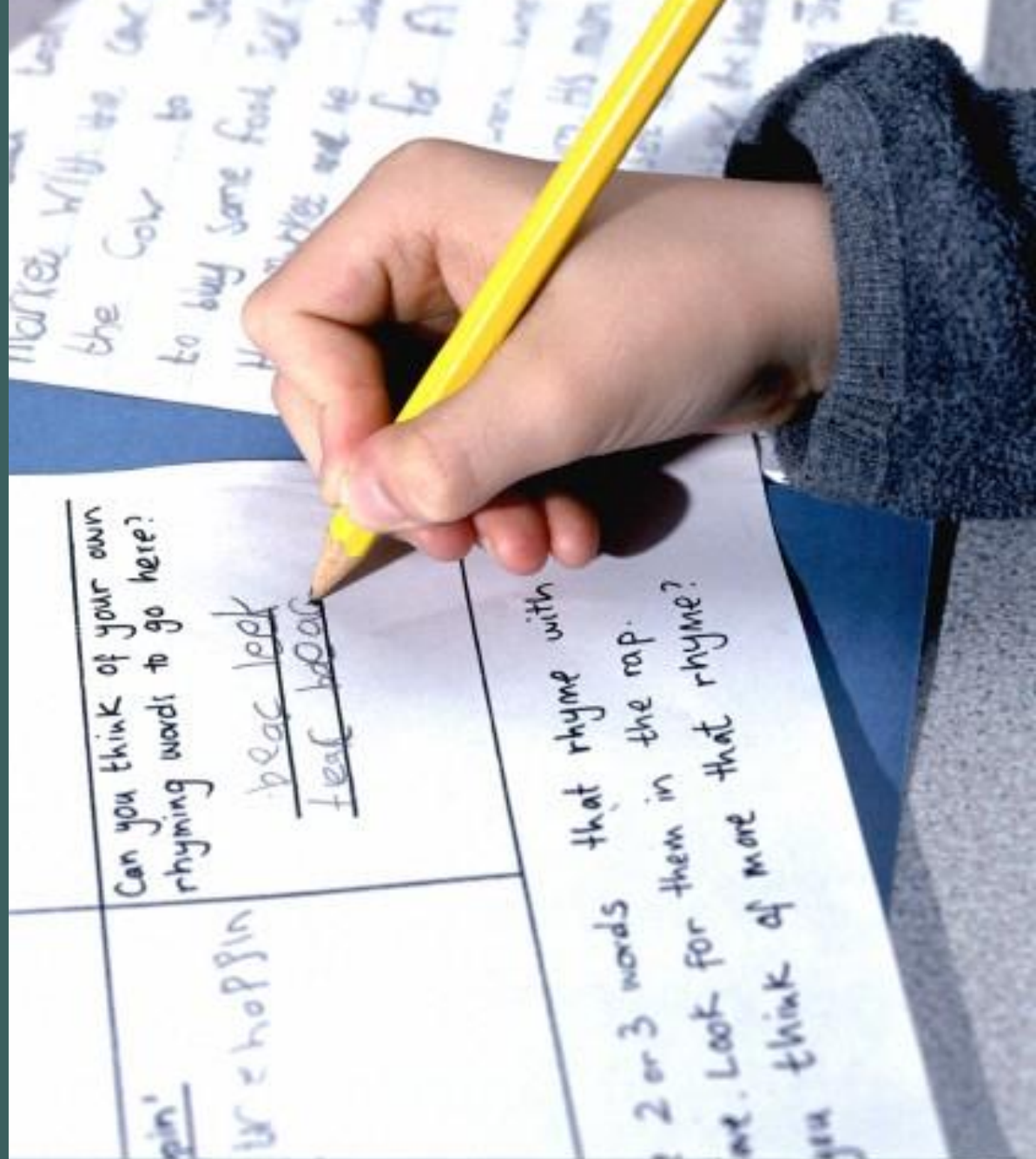
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So if it makes someone feel
happier, that it's not their fault,
what's the harm?

Differing conceptions of dyslexia

- **Synonymous with reading disability**
- **A sub group of those with RD diagnosed by cognitive tests**
- **Intractability to reading instruction**
- **A neurodiverse condition that goes far beyond reading**

To what extent
does a
diagnosis of
dyslexia
guide the
educator in
devising
appropriate
forms of
treatment?



• FORMS OF TRAINING

- Cognitive
- Auditory
- Visual
- Motor



Practitioners should:

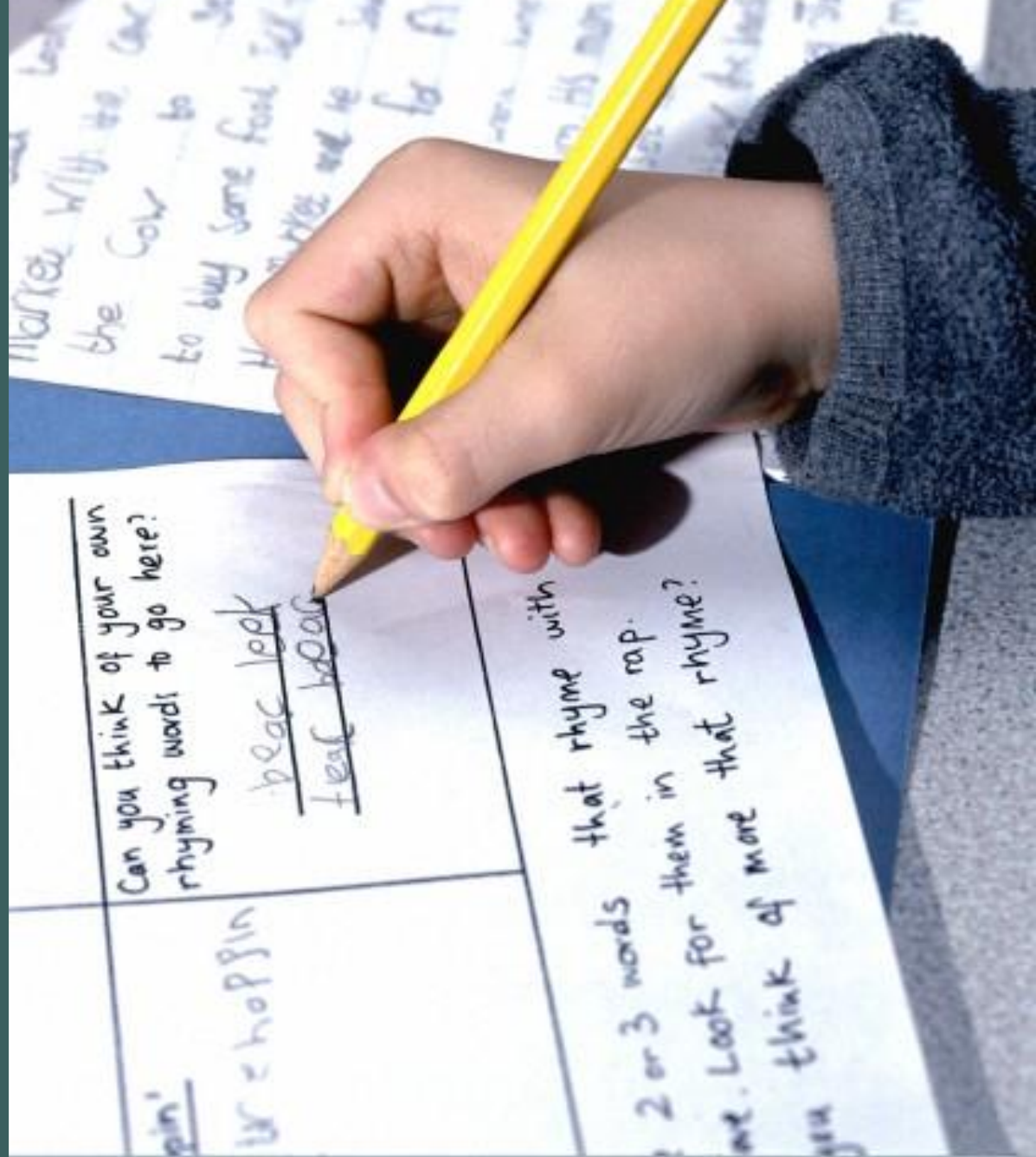
“...shift the focus of their clinical activities away from emphasis on psychometric assessment to detect cognitive and biological causes of a child’s reading difficulties for purposes of categorical labelling

.... in favour of assessment that would eventuate educational and remedial activities tailored to the child’s individual needs”

Vellutino *et al.* (2004)



Should a
dyslexia
diagnosis lead
to differential
levels of
resourcing?





(MUM)... HAD PAID AROUND £2,000
ON COMMISSIONING FIVE
INDEPENDENT REPORTS SHOWING
HOW BRIGHT AND INTELLIGENT ALEX
WAS DESPITE HIS CONDITION – AND
HOW MAPLE HAYES WAS THE PERFECT
PLACE FOR HIS SECONDARY
EDUCATION, WITH ITS SPECIALIST
PROGRAMMES AND INTENSIVE
TEACHING.

“ALEX IS NOT STUPID, HE IS DYSLEXIC,”
SHE HAD SAID. “EVERY CHILD IS
ENTITLED TO THE EDUCATION THEY
NEED. THIS IS CLEARLY NOT BEING MET
IN ALEX’S CASE. HE NEEDS SPECIALIST
DYSLEXIA TUTORING BEFORE IT IS TOO
LATE. MY SON IS BEING LET DOWN
SEVERELY BY THE SCHOOL SYSTEM.”

Science, politics ...and follow the
money

Sirin Kale... Guardian journalist,
The House of Lords and belief
that the Earth is flat.....

The way forward?



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Elliott, J. G. (2020). It's Time to Be Scientific About Dyslexia. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 55, S61-S75.

Elliott, J. G., & Grigorenko, E. L. (2014). *The Dyslexia Debate*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Channel 4 Dispatches (2005)...The Dyslexia Myth
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lrAQedApVg>

Sirin Kale (2020). The battle over dyslexia.
(<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2020/sep/17/battle-over-dyslexia-warwickshire-staffordshire>)