



Detail of the door of the Adult Dyslexia Centre, Thames Valley in Maidenhead, UK

Investigating and Documenting UK Best Practices for Supporting Adults With Specific Learning Disabilities (LDs)

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Location: England, United Kingdom

- England is a constituent country within the United Kingdom, a country of 66 million people in western Europe. I traveled to several cities and villages in the **Southeast of England** to carry out my research and fieldwork.
- England has a well-developed "socialized" social welfare system, which was of interest for this project because of how it supports people with disabilities including those with specific learning disabilities.
- The UK is internationally known for its excellence in supporting those with specific learning disabilities, which I experienced first-hand when I studied abroad there during my undergraduate education.



About Specific Learning Disabilities

Specific learning disabilities (LDs) are neurodevelopmental disorders that occur in between 10% and 20% of the population. They characteristically impair learning in such areas as reading, writing, and math. While LDs are commonly thought of as problems of childhood, in fact, they are life-long disabilities, which impact on adults in very significant ways. According to the National Center on Learning Disabilities, individuals with LDs currently attend college at half the national average, face over fifty percent unemployment, and are included among a third of all incarcerated people in the United States. Behavioral health problems frequently co-occur with LDs.

Goals:

1. Conduct a qualitative interview study to find out how UK LD practitioners conceptualize the work they do with their adult clients with LDs.
2. Film a simulated session demonstrating how UK LD professionals work with their adult clients with LDs
3. Visit, observe, and engage with UK-based organizations, clinics, and individual practitioners who are working with adults with LDs. Try to understand:
 - Their methods of practice and practice models
 - The policies that support and hinder them
 - How their best practices can be translated to a US context

Participants and Outcomes

- I conducted individual and focus group interviews with research participants in Southeast England
- I visited the following organizations:
 - Adult Dyslexia Centre, Thames Valley (Maidenhead)
 - GroOops: Dyslexia Aware Counselling (London)
 - Genius Within: Neurodiversity Solutions (East Sussex)
- I worked with a British LD practitioner to devise and film a training video on how to work with adults with LDs

Ongoing Work:

- This fall, I will analyse the results of the qualitative interviews and hope to publish the results (contact me if you are interested in helping!)
- I will also be editing the training video

Skills Utilized/Developed

During this experience, I:

- Gained experience in designing and carrying out a qualitative research study
- Engaged with international organizations and practitioners
- Listened to community stakeholders
- * Learned more about the policy environment in the UK and how it has shaped current practices in the field of LDs.

Classroom Connections

- **SW683: Evaluation in Social Work**
 - This course provided a basic overview of research methods which I was able to build on when investigating how to design and carry out a qualitative research study
- **SW511/521: Social Work Practice Classes**
 - These courses gave me the idea of making a training video of a simulated LD support session and helped me to develop the simulated clients that I portrayed in the simulation
- **SW530 and SW637: Social Work Policy Classes**
 - These classes helped me critically evaluate and understand the UK policies I encountered and learned about

Lessons Learned

- Most people are eager to share of their time and expertise if you show interest and seek them out
- UK practitioners, at least in the field of LDs, are interested in engaging with counterparts in the US.
- If you are doing a research study, start your IRB early, especially if you are doing so within the European Union due to additional requirements of GDPR!
- Britons like to take expansive "holidays" (ie vacations) in August. Americans should promptly follow their example.



This photo shows the Oxfordshire ADHD Support Group banner flying in front of St. Leonards Church Hall outside Oxford, UK

Career Connections

- I learned a great deal about qualitative research methods which I hope to expand on and apply again
- I formed some professional connections with I hope to maintain as I move forward in my career
- I learned a lot about UK best practices for LDs which I would like to put in practice in the US

Advice

- If traveling to developed countries with advanced telecommunication technologies, think carefully about why you need to travel there in-person. Focus your time abroad doing and seeing things you can't do remotely
- If you are doing a research study, start your IRB early, especially if you are doing so within the European Union due to additional requirements of GDPR!
- Network with other students doing IRBs to avoid reinventing the wheel.

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