

THE NEW READER

I am leading the R&D department at Nota – a very small and effective crew consisting of myself.

Situation: by Danish law you cannot register dyslexia in a central register – so until now it's been difficult to conduct surveys and research on dyslexia on a national level.

But in the past years Nota has had a vast increase in dyslectics – giving away free audiobooks and a large societal focus – today we have 20.000 and 10.000 of them below 20yo – so now we are close to have statistical representation.

In this study we are looking at young people between 12 and 16 years of age. We are working with an estimate of 3-5 percentage dyslexia, this means that around 17.000 Danish kids struggle with this condition. We interviewed 500 respondents enrolled at Nota and thus dyslectic and a comparison group of 200 random kids same age. What we were interested in in this survey was a comparison of:

- Perception and use of public libraries
 - Media use and habits
 - School and reading habits and well-being
1. With respect to library use,
 - a. The survey showed that both groups are using public libraries fairly rare, which we knew. But as a dyslectic use is considerably lower – 25% of the population answer that they use the public library often, against only 15% of the dyslectic group.
 - b. Interestingly however, when asked how often these two heavy-user groups take something home from the library, the stats are similar – 90% of both groups take something home from the library monthly or more often. This of course means, that the Danish libraries has stuff to offer even to weak readers – but for some reason weak readers are less likely to visit.

- c. When asked what kind of material they take home the dyslectic users more often answer school material, audiobooks, movies, easy-to-read books, games and other alternative media than the comparison group.
- d. This fact has led us to suggest that the dyslectic group could be seen as a frontmover for libraries with respect to new media and other materials

2. With respect to Media use and Habits,

- a. The survey showed that both groups are of course heavy media and technology users as expected, almost everyone has cellphones, laptops internet connection, facebook profiles etc. The differences are hard to see here, though it's interesting that dyslectic youth are remarkably better equipped when it comes to having a laptop and using it in school. This of course have to do with the Danish support model, where dyslectic students are given and allowed to bring a laptop in school, but still it again means, that being young and dyslectic you are much more likely to have high computer skills and equipment.
- b. One of the more interesting facts in the survey however had to do with the difference in use of Audiobooks; It turned out that only 3% of the population at this age, listens to audiobooks often – 80% never does. Contrarily 1/3 of the dyslectic group listens to audiobooks often (several hours a week) while only 28% never does. These statistics are important from a political perspective, because they mean that the use of audiobooks may increase literacy among weak readers.

3. With respect to school and reading habits, the study showed that,

- a. We were able – for the first time to my knowledge – to prove a positive statistical coherence in listening to audiobooks, well being in school and reading frequency – so the guys who listened to audio books often had a significantly higher reading frequency and felt better in their everyday school life.
- b. We were actually surprised to see how high the dyslectic group scores on reading frequency – 77% read more than half an hour every day against 85% in the comparison group. I should say that this is considerably higher than the average Danish citizen.
- c. Also it turned out that few of the young use audiobooks for mere pleasure – 2 out of three answer, that they always somehow follows the text, while listening to audiobooks. Of course this fact was surprising to us, but it also cements that the Daisy format and other hybrid ways of combining media, plays a very important role for dyslectic readers.

This study has led us to believe that giving dyslectic young better access to audiobooks, for example as school materials, would probably be able to raise general school performance. One important task for the libraries is to be able to pass on to the weak readers, that they actually have something to offer. At Nota we try to promote the idea of seeing weak readers as a sort of future super-user – thus using this group strategically to support user oriented development processes.

Another way of doing this is of course to make the library materials ever more accessible and close to the user. Of course this all is presented very positively with the notion that 1/3 uses audiobooks often etc – but of course behind that fact lie a question about the remaining 2/3s. Our aim is of course to be able to move more of the passive users into active use as much as possible. To do that we are developing our services and materials to be more accessible, online and attractive.

This year we have introduced a new online player for audiobooks that we hope can push more young dyslectics to read audiobooks often. I'm not going to take you through the whole product presentation, but will just shortly show you an example of a new multimodal material – cartoon audiobooks - in the player.

So this is one new way of following text and audio thus being able to train both reading skills and improve literacy – of course there are many more. But we believe these hybrid formats are both interesting for the general public – and therefore an important focus for public libraries. And for weak readers they might actually be life-changing in terms of opportunities and desire towards education and literacy.