

Understanding **Dyslexia** Teacher Handout



Remember dyslexia manifests differently in every child

Students behaviour can be misinterpreted because by secondary, students are very good at covering their inadequacies with a 'couldn't care less' attitude.

Teachers who believe that thinking and conceptual development are key measures of intelligence and who find creative ways to empower pupils to show what they know in a variety of ways are naturally Dyslexic friendly because they are 'learning friendly'.
Dyslexia is not something you outgrow. It will not go away and the only way to make it easier is to have recognisable support for the learning differences.

80% of learning difficulties could be due to stress. Removing the stress leaves 20% of the problem. We can work with that (Mac Kay, 2006).

Neil MacKay suggests that stress may be caused by"

- The teacher's disapproval/lack of understanding.
- Failure, in particular the 'baggage' from previous failures, present or future failures.
- Tests.
- Reading out loud.
- Being shouted at
- Being thought of as dumb by peers (I've added)

Laughton King adds:

- Fluctuation in teaching styles: lots of structure and predictable to spontaneous and unpredictable.
- Fluctuation in teaching speech: Use of pictorial language by some and not others.
- Some teachers are sympathetic to students need while others are intolerant and blaming.
- Some teachers use reinforcement techniques (practical/ visual) while others do not.
- Under overt pressure the student may be able to perform for a short time but may not be able to maintain performance constantly. This can create major stress with an unsupportive teacher.

Some facts:

When you teach for dyslexia, you also reach other areas of learning difficulty. "Get it right for the dyslexic kids and you get it right for every kid in the class" (Courtney, 2009, p.3).

One third of all entrepreneurs are dyslexic according to a US study.

Overseas research has shown 30-50% of serious young offenders have dyslexia, 70% of pupils expelled from UK schools had difficulties in basic literacy and 40% drug dependents were dyslexic (Courtney, 2009). Imagine what would happen if schools became dyslexic friendly. The NZ Dyslexia Foundation (NZDF) maintains the number of under-achieving school leavers could be slashed by up to half if schools introduced dyslexia-friendly teaching strategies (Courtney, 2009, p.3).

It's the student's attitude that is of crucial importance. It isn't how much difficulty they had with reading and spelling, it is how they approach it that is the incubator of whether or not their outcome 10 or 15 years later was successful or not" (Tarica, 2009). What is relevant to us as teachers is that how we treat

these students directly feeds into that attitude development. If we create an environment that constantly delivers failure to measure up as a message to these students, we breed low self esteem issues.

In the classroom:

Laughton King describes many things that are associated with being dyslexic that can be difficult in a classroom environment.

- ❑ **Classroom performance:** This can be inconsistent day by day which can be disconcerting for teachers and parents. It can also be devastating for the student especially when they are blamed for being lazy, stupid or un-co-operative. Difficult days are known as dyslexic days and are easier to cope with by all if they are accepted and can be worked around by teacher observation and altering tasks instead of pushing through, which will only feed teacher frustration and students sense of failure.
- ❑ **Sensitive:** They are very loving and are easily insulted or emotionally hurt. At the same time they often have the ability to become abusive, angry and violent, and may range from one emotional extreme to the other in a very short space of time, They like to tease, but can't stand being teased back, they will often verbally abuse, but cry unfair if they get abused in return (King, 2006, p.25).
- ❑ **Focus:** Can be seen to have a short attention span and highly distractible. Where as most people are able to concentrate on one thing and filter out distracting and extraneous noise, dyslexics can not. All sounds hit with equal impact, thus the child is bombarded with sounds they can not filter out, some more interesting than the teachers voice. Rather than an attention deficit, they really have an attention overload.
- ❑ **Language:** Often suspected as being deaf by their inability to hear unless shouted at, dyslexics can have difficulty taking in information audibly, making it meaningless and confusing, especially if given in large chunks, without translation time. Reading we will look at soon.
- ❑ **Learning style:** Experience suggests that an opportunity to 'look, see or do' supports verbal information. Picturesque language, written language with pictures and computer/video type presentations create images that they can see in their mind's eye are all preferable ways for dyslexics to learn.

Some ideas:

- ❑ **Use handouts instead of copying from the board.** The time taken in copying from the board can be put to better use. For dyslexics, to copy from the board is incredibly hard as each time they generally have to read the whole lot to find where they are up to in copying. If you have to write on the board number points at each side, both left and right for easy tracking, alternate colours also to aid tracking and summarise each point.
- ❑ **Don't use dictation.** Simply don't!
- ❑ **Take a photo of the board and make it available to those that need it.** If an unplanned classroom discussion does take place, perhaps take a photo of the board, or have a scribe take notes, that can be made available for students after. Maybe a classroom wiki or email system can be set up in advance for situations like this if they appear to be cropping up frequently or can not be avoided.
- ❑ **Smile and thank the students for asking questions to clarify understanding.** Always remember to do this, as it provides security for a dyslexic student, showing them that it is ok to ask for clarification. By doing this it enables the student to participate and although you may find it frustrating, the alternative is they will remain off task until they do understand.
- ❑ **Praise and support.** Acknowledge their effort, remembering that they are exerting far more effort than normal learners to achieve small successes.
- ❑ **Mark for success.** According to Neil Mackay, "**Unconditional acceptance** of a learner's finished product is important, especially in the early stages of the relationship. Although the work may actually disappoint both parties, it may represent all that was achievable at that time, especially if the learner was experiencing a 'dyslexic day'" (2006, p.33).



Keep the passion to learn alive:

Not all dyslexic students will shine at school, the environment is simply not right for them. The key is to keep the passion to learn alive. As long as they know how to learn, when the desire to learn comes along, they will aspire to it.

In the classroom, freedom can be given by the teacher in the methods used for delivery and recording that fit with the students abilities. Simplifying what is required can also help, as many students will simply be defeated by the enormity of the task before them, often appearing disruptive, but in reality feeling boxed in with no where to go and no one to help.

Reading any written work aloud to the class allows students with dyslexia to focus on the content of the reading without having to struggle with the reading itself. Their comprehension is vastly improved. Understanding that their repeated questioning means that they want to be involved is a good sign. If you notice that they are talking when initial instructions are given, a quiet word like "while I appreciate you asking questions, it would be better for me if you listened when I gave the instructions to the whole class instead of talking" or "Let me get the rest of the class underway, then I can come and work with you". Breaking the instruction down for a dyslexic student, giving the first chunk, then perhaps checking on other students then returning to deliver the next chunk, maybe a helpful way of helping them retain enough instruction to produce the desired action and keeping them on task. Scheduling in one 2 one time in order to clarify instructions is a way of appreciating the differences of a dyslexic learner and ensuring they are able to progress through the work given. Praise them on what they have accomplished, encouraging them through the next step rather than criticise the lack of work. Ask them what they intend to do next, and say you will be back soon to see. Set them a challenge saying, "Do you really think you can get that done this period"?

Homework:

When we consider the difficulties that dyslexic students have in class and the fact that they can extend up to 5 times more energy than other students during their classroom time, we need to be very careful in the homework we set. Most dyslexic students have had quite sufficient in the day without being required to do more after school. They need time to release all the pent up frustrations of being in an environment not largely suited to them, and will be the better for it the next day. There will be times where it is necessary; such is the nature of school. Be creative in delivering the task, hooking their interest and make it relevant to what they are learning so they can see the purpose of doing extra work.

Before giving it out, ask yourself:

- Is it necessary? Is there really a purpose to doing it?
- Have I given it in a manner that they can understand at home, in which parents can support?
- Have I given them sufficient time to do the homework knowing there are other commitments and there must be downtime also, or am I adding undue pressure and stress?
- Have I made it to where it is deliverable in media other than written work?

Don't give it out as the students rush out the door. This is unfair to the student who may require clarification, and translation time. Make sure it is given in the first half of the lesson so they have time to see the relevance, ask any questions and are confident in the manner in which it is to be given in and the timeframe.



Listening to each student:

As a teacher it is important to be able to listen to students needs. Although these needs may not all be communicated audibly, they will be communicated by their body language. If students ask you to repeat, or slow down, take it for what it is, a request for help, not an insult to your teaching. In fact, if they ask, it means they want to take part, so you can view it as a compliment.

Take them aside and ask them how they are managing in your class, ask them if there is anything you can change that would make a difference to their learning. This strengthens your relationship and they will respect you all the more, because you are trying to bridge the gap.

If the relationship is not in a place to where you feel able to ask, make use of their dean, their RTL teacher, their parents or any other person you can think of that has their support and respect.



In summary:



Smile and be happy to answer questions



Be open to their suggestions, where possible



Use pictures and picturesque language where possible



Appreciate their differences



Make work exciting & relevant

Sources of reading:

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Laughton King, Psychologist, (2006). R/Teaching the reluctant learner. Third edition.

Neil MacKay,(2006).Removing Dyslexia as a barrier to achievement. Second edition.

The wealth of information and support given by the dyslexia foundation available on <http://www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz>

