This power point has been developed for busy teachers who have heard the term dyslexic, know they may have students within their class who possibly could be dyslexic but have no further knowledge of how to adapt their teaching style to assist these students. My purpose is to introduce you to dyslexia, and to show you ways you can adjust your teaching, taking very little additional time, to make a world of difference to dyslexic students and at the same time reach many other students with learning difficulties. Research has shown that when you apply teaching strategies that will assist dyslexic students in your classroom, the whole class will benefit, including gifted and talented students (MacKay, 2006), so what have you got to loose?

Let me tell you what you have to gain.

For those of you who don’t know me, my name is Michaela Nicholas. I have a son who is 9 and a husband of 21 years who both have dyslexia. My quest for understanding of dyslexia has been prompted by them. I have watched the lasting affects of schooling that did not understand the dyslexia difference in my husband, and daily I appreciate the self defeat that threatens my son. As a graduating teacher, I have made it my mission to appreciate this difference in my classroom, making it a place where they feel welcome and can discover their brilliance. I want to share with you what I have learnt, in the hope that you also will want to make a difference, as one day, you too, may teach a son or daughter like mine.
Most people have heard of dyslexia but it is not a term well understood, mostly because dyslexia manifests differently in every child (Tarica, 2009).

Laughton King describes dyslexia as a bucket and each person who has dyslexia is but a drop of water placed in different parts of the bucket, meaning you cannot measure one dyslexic person against another as their difficulties and brilliance vary. This, in my view is why it has taken so long to get schools to recognise dyslexia properly. It has been hard to actually pinpoint what dyslexia is and therefore what recipe to use to assist it in the classroom.

For many dyslexic people, they have days that are better than others. Some days, ‘dyslexic days’ are just plain hard, nothing comes easily, remembering instructions long enough to do them is like climbing a mountain and school can be filled with instruction. Dyslexic students are thought to have to exert 5 times as much energy to learn than a non dyslexic student, so the idea of doing more work for homework at the end of the day, can be down right discouraging.

“The neurological differences give some dyslexics visual, spatial and lateral thinking abilities that enable them to be successful in a wide range of Careers” (ibid). Neil Mackay says “One specific learning difference may be the ability to ‘think in pictures’” (2006, p.6). This allows them to see things in a way others would not. I heard an interview on TV where a mechanic in working on old racing cars that contained an eclectic mix of parts, was able to fix them in a way other mechanics could not because of this ability. Interestingly, and sadly, this was the first time my husband had heard of the positives of dyslexia.

“The latest neuroscience issuing from the world’s experts points to it as being first and foremost a hard-wired way of thinking – a learning difference – that tends to confer upon dyslexics strengths in critical thinking, logical problem solving and visual-spatial abilities – the sort of out of the box, creative thinking our technology-dominated, innovation-hungry economy can’t get enough of right now” (Courtney, 2009, p.2).

It is extremely important that this distinction is made, and dyslexia is seen as a difference not a difficulty. To see it only as a difficulty can rob an individual of the ability to see the benefits dyslexia can bring for years if not longer, they only see the hardship, failure and despair.
“Dyslexia is used to describe a range of persistent difficulties with reading, writing, spelling and sometimes mathematics that result in a child performing significantly below their chronological age” (Tarica, 2009).

Dyslexics can sometimes **miss out written words or numbers** when reading or at times **swap them around or substitute** one word for another (Courtney, 2009), for example when reading, the word **was** can be read correctly at the top of the page but substituted as **saw** further down the page. This can make grasping the meaning of what is being read, difficult. In writing and therefore spelling, words are written as they sound and often letters like b and d or p and q are confused. This also adds to the difficulty of then reading ones own work.

“Their differences can give some dyslexics visual, spatial and lateral thinking abilities.”

Dyslexics are by no means stupid, in fact they can be highly intelligent. You can hold conversations with people, know them well for years, without ever knowing they are dyslexic. p.2)

Low self esteem can be an issue for a lot of dyslexics because of the constant position of being measured and falling short in these areas.

Often, their **behaviour can be misinterpreted** because unless the teacher has been watching, by secondary, students are **very good at covering** their inadequacies with a **couldn’t care less attitude**, hence they become known as the uninterested learner to put it politely. For some the ability is there if they really try but they have **simply lost the confidence** to try because so often they are measured and have fallen short, it is **safer not to try, therefore not to fail again**.
By this definition Neil is referring to an internal conversation the learner has saying “What I’m doing here isn’t working and I don’t really know what to do here, so what I’ll do is....” (MacKay, 2006, p. 11).

This view is contrary to popular belief where intelligence is found in one’s ability to read, write and spell accurately.

“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’. They focus on strengths and use these strengths to address unexpected problems that dyslexic learners seem to experience in certain areas” (ibid).

By using Neil’s definition of intelligence, we are creating students who will be adaptable to the working environment they will find themselves in when they leave school, when there is no one on hand to spoon feed them with appropriate responses and they really do need to think for themselves.
There are many famous people who have overcome great hurdles to achieve in their field, and they are not ashamed to admit their difficulties with dyslexia.

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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
1. The teachers disapproval/lack of understanding.
2. Failure, in particular the ‘baggage’ from previous failures, present or future failures.
3. Tests.
4. Reading out loud.
5. Being shouted at
6. Being thought of as dumb by peers (I’ve added)

Laughton King adds
1. Fluctuation in teaching styles: lots of structure and predictable to spontaneous and unpredictable.
2. Fluctuation in teaching speech: Use of pictorial language by some and not others.
3. Some teachers are sympathetic to students need while others are intolerant and blaming.
4. Some teachers use reinforcement techniques (practical/visual) while others do not.
5. 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.

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. That so many inventors, artists, architects, computer designers and creative types have dyslexia is ‘no longer reducible to coincidence’” says Maryanne Wolf, world renowned neuroscientist(as cited in Courtney, 2009, p.3).

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 (ibid).
Nola Firth, who is running a pilot program at Wedge Park that could change the way dyslexia is dealt with in Victorian schools talks of research done in the US, which found that the way students dealt with their learning difficulties had more of an influence on their life’s progress than the difficulty itself.

She says “it’s your attitude that is of crucial importance. It isn’t how much difficulty you had with your reading and spelling, it is how you approach it that is the incubator of whether or not your outcome 10 or 15 years later was successful or not” (Tarica, 2009, p.3).

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.

“Research shows that without intervention these students risk developing behavioural problems at school, giving up, withdrawing socially and eventually dropping out of school and suffering depression, delinquency and unemployment” (ibid, p.2).
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.
Now lets understand reading from a dyslexic point of view.

Dyslexic people don’t see the value in reading without meaning.

Dyslexic students can feel like you have placed Mount Everest before them, when you place a page of writing in front of them to read. For some this mountain looks like a stack of text books when in reality it is just a page, but for them it might as well be a stack, such is their abilities. Some find the words might as well be Chinese characters, the words simply make no sense. For others the words move, making it hopeless to get them to behave long enough to read, while others are so busy trying to make sense of the words they are reading, understanding each words meaning, that the overall meaning of the text is lost, even though they eventually read it all.
To cope, they simply shut down.
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).

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.

(Mackay, 2006).
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”? 
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.
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 are wanting 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 RTLB teacher, their parents or any other person you can think of that has their support and respect.

I believe any genuine attempt that is made to appreciate their needs within a class room will be greatly appreciated. I am sure that anything they can tell you maybe echoed by at least someone else in the class.
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.

If we turn them off to learning at school because they do not perform as we think they should, they will be more likely to remain closed to learning in adult life. Their confidence in their abilities will remain low, they will be less likely to try new things in case of failure and their overall perception of self can add to their interpretation of life’s problems, creating a downward spiral.

Our support can make such a difference in their lives!
MacKay says what’s happened is academics have been searching for the magic bullet. They’ve seen dyslexia as a ‘disability’ and they’ve tried to fix it. They think reading cures everything. And this attitude causes schools to become obsessed with reading accuracy, almost to the expense of thinking. What we have discovered is if you’re a weak reader with great thinking you succeed. If you are a strong reader with weak thinking you go no where. We need a paradigm shift (Courtney, 2009).

We need to start appreciating those with dyslexia for the difference they can bring to the classroom. Our classrooms will be the better for it.
In talking with people with dyslexia, an often heard complaint is peoples lack of understanding when dealing with them. Try as I might, it is something I will never completely understand, simply because I do not function that way. What I can do is listen and appreciate what they tell me, and be open to making changes where possible. During my time spent at Garin College watching Sue Kersten with her students, I have learnt things I have then used when working with my son during homework. I have seen him go from struggling to want to do 1 question a night, to wanting to choose the hardest question to conquer, such was his confidence. My key has been empowerment by using what he does know, praise and freedom to use the strategies that work for him.

In closing then, let me summarise.

**What are the key things to remember to make a dyslexia friendly classroom?**

- **Smile and be happy to answer questions** this creates an environment where they will feel safe and secure to be themselves, knowing they can learn.

- **Be open to their suggestions, where possible** as the chances are they represent unspoken others in the classroom.

- **Use pictures and picturesque language where possible** for clarification. This also makes the work more exciting for you as a teacher and the class.

- **Appreciate their differences** as they will bring great contributions to the class, if you let them.

- **Make work exciting & relevant** as this helps them remain on task and can reduce behavioural issues.
I would like to acknowledge:

My husband and son, and the incredible patience with which they have taught me about their differences.

The wonderful insight gained by the following books:

- Reaching the reluctant learner. Third edition by Laughton King, Psychologist, 2006

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

And the following references:


Famous Dyslexic people Retrieved September 2, 2009, from http://images.google.co.nz/imgres?imgurl=http://www.learningmasteryassociates.com/famousdyslexics.jpeg&imgrefurl=http://www.learningmasteryassociates.com/famous.html&usg=__HgbaDw-HmnkkHxtvDS5kUqGxgbAA=&h=571&w=464&sz=220&hl=en&start=12&slg2c=5D4A4f5yCEjDCJxFBIgwn&tbm=isch&tbnid=pa6kIdpUjz2W5BM:&tbnh=134&tbnw=109&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dfamous%20dyslexic%20learn%20abled%205%20h%3Demb%20em%20%3D%20s%20a%20%3D%20g%20&ei=0Gzc5gpaPF2mEYfaP3Dw&bih=716