

Reaching Every Student in the Classroom

Jon Hird, Poland September 2016

Overview

- Dyslexia is thought to be one of the most common learning difficulties.
- 5 - 10% of all schoolchildren in England have some degree of dyslexia.
- Dyslexia tends to be identified more in boys than girls.

What is dyslexia?

- Dyslexia is often a result of issues with executive function, in particular working memory and information processing.
- Dyslexic people may have difficulty processing and remembering information they see and hear.
- This can affect general learning and in particular the acquisition of literacy skills.
- Dyslexic learners thus have difficulty in learning to read and/or write despite normal intelligence and conventional instruction.
- In the UK, dyslexia is when there is a differential of 2 or more years between literacy skills and chronological age, assuming average or above intelligence and general cognitive ability.

A typical dyslexic student may:

- not fully participate in class
- have difficulty concentrating and remaining on task
- be slow, disorganized and forgetful
- have difficulty organising him/herself
- have a substantial gap between her/his oral and written abilities.
- have generally poor, 'creative', reversed or phonetic spelling.
- write slowly
- have bad / illegible handwriting
- have problems with grammatical analysis and synthesis
- have poor sentence and paragraph structure
- have other issues such as dyspraxia or dyscalculia (affecting 50-60% of dyslexic learners)

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How can we help in the English language classroom?

- be aware of each individual's precise issues
- minimise the processing load, focus on key language
- give more time
- give short, concise, linear instructions, one task at a time
- if appropriate allocate a peer-helper
- give handout of whiteboard work
- encourage joined-up handwriting
- be understanding, patient, encouraging and build confidence

Material should:

- be well-structured / clear / linear with logical, predictable progression
- involve a minimum of jumping about (eg backwards and forwards, from box A to box B etc)
- have sentences on single lines where possible
- keep new language to a minimum
- provide review and consolidation
- avoid too much contrastive word input (eg *their / there / they're*)
- avoid tasks designed to 'catch out' or 'test'
- be multi-sensory and multi-media where possible
- have larger, dyslexic-friendly font / larger spacing / darker background (eg off-white/cream)

Remember:

The sensitivities, classroom management approaches and materials that can help the dyslexic learner will also largely be appropriate for a range of associated learning issues.

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