



Supporting students with dyslexia in higher education

Key Words

dyslexia, assistive technology, narrative enquiry

Abstract

This presentation will examine and discuss, 'What is the best pedagogical approach when working with university students with dyslexia and how can we best support these students?' Dyslexia is estimated to affect some 10% of the Australian population (Australian Dyslexia Association 2014). Therefore, there is a high probability that we will work with students who have dyslexia. The difficulties displayed by individuals with dyslexia involve difficulties in acquiring and using written language (Australian Dyslexia Association 2014). Therefore, as Language and Learning Advisers, how are we able to assist students with dyslexia with their written language? Many adults do not realise they have dyslexia until they reach university and find they are struggling with their studies or even failing and then receive a diagnosis of dyslexia. This was the case with a student I was working with, who was recently diagnosed with dyslexia, and part of their Learning Access Plan was to see a Language and Learning Adviser regularly. This presentation will reflect on my work with this student and my need to develop my own understanding of how to effectively support this student. I will discuss some of the strategies which I employed in 1-1 appointments. I will also discuss some of the challenges I found and how self-reflection allowed me to revise and adjust my teaching at times. I will also discuss how working with this student involved not only developing their study skills but also understanding that students with dyslexia often experience anxiety which can impact on their studies. As found by Carrol and Iles (2006), students with dyslexia in tertiary education demonstrate anxiety levels well above those of students who do not have a learning difficulty. Therefore, I will also add the 'voice' of this student to inform practice, as stated by Chanock (2007) 'What we most need is more of the experiential discourse emanating (too infrequently) from students with dyslexia' (p. A40). In this sense, my presentation is a sample of "narrative enquiry" as discussed by Chanock (2014) as a research method which gives us 'access to learners' own accounts, and to the meanings that they and the researchers construct around their learning' (p. A122). This approach also allows for practitioners like ourselves to reflect on what we learn from practice that is meaningful not only for ourselves but also for our colleagues (Chanock 2014, p. A122). This presentation will also examine how teaching and learning in the 21st century allows for assistive technology, such as computer programs and aids to help students with dyslexia. I will present some of the assistive technologies that can be used by students with dyslexia at university. As found by Chanock (2007) assistive technology can be 'very helpful to many students and can make the difference between passing and failing in their studies... However, technology cannot be solely relied upon to "level the playing field"' (p. A38). Therefore, this presentation will examine how as Language and Learning Advisers we can support students with dyslexia in higher education.

References

Australian Dyslexia Association 2014, 'Dyslexia in Australia', retrieved 5 April 2017 <<http://dyslexiaassociation.org.au/what-is-dyslexia>>. Australian Dyslexia Association 2014, 'Could it be Dyslexia?', retrieved 5 April 2017

Carrol, JM & Iles, JE 2006, 'An assessment of anxiety levels in dyslexic students in higher education', *British journal of educational psychology*, vol. 76, no. 3, pp. 651-62, retrieved 20 April 2017.

Chanock, K 2007, 'How do we not communicate about dyslexia? – The discourses that distance scientists, disabilities staff, ALL advisers, students, and lecturers from one another', *Journal of Academic Language & Learning*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. A33-A43, retrieved 19 April 2017.

Chanock, K 2014, "'Telling" insights from experience: Establishing resonance with readers, theory, and participants', *Journal of Academic Language & Learning*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. A121-A129, retrieved 20 April 2017.