Innovation in Inclusive Curricula

Understanding Dyslexic Difference: What are the Wider Implications for Inclusive Practice in HE?

The aims and objectives of the session

Dyslexia research and pedagogy is a relatively well-explored aspect of inclusive educational research. For this reason, there has developed an extensive body of literature which tests the effectiveness of pedagogic strategies and interventions in relation to the literacy difficulties of dyslexic children and adults. My session will advocate the wider application of this knowledge.

The session aims to explore the implications, practicality and potential impact of using strategies which have been proven to help dyslexic learners, more widely in Higher Education (HE). The reasons for this are outlined below. I will argue that these strategies can be learned from and may effect change in relation to the literacy difficulties experienced by many other students. This could be particularly significant for students from groups traditionally marginalised from HE because many of the barriers that they must overcome in order to succeed, are connected to literacy difficulties.

Background

My session arises out of a research project which took place at University of the Arts London: London College of Fashion (UAL: LCF) and was funded by the Retain, Achieve, Succeed (RAS) research initiative. Current outcomes of this research are an initial report (Davies 2016) and a book chapter (Davies 2019). An *Audio Resources Pilot Study (*Ongoing). Initial findings from this are encouraging.

One of the key recommendations of my initial study (Davies 2016) was that embedding strategies understood to help dyslexic learners more centrally in teaching and learning resources would be beneficial for dyslexic students.

This session extends this recommendation and argues that this may be useful for *all* students who experience difficulties in the development of higher-level literacy skills. The reasons for this are as follows:

- The additional teaching and learning strategies advocated for dyslexic learners do not differ significantly from those advocated for non-dyslexic learners who are experiencing literacy difficulties (Elliot 2016, Reid 2009);
- Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are now being encouraged to integrate the provision made for dyslexic students, more centrally, in mainstream teaching and learning provision (Williams, et al 2017);
- Differentiating between dyslexic and non-dyslexic students is not straightforward so there are many students who may be dyslexic but who do not have a formal diagnosis of dyslexia.
- Some students are resistant to both the dyslexia and disability descriptors because of the negative connotations of these two terms. This may be more

significant amongst some ethnic groups and amongst white working class boys.

- Dyslexic international students are not usually able to apply for Disabled Students Allowance (DSA).

Session Outline

My project is innovative in that it uses strategies proven to be useful for one category of student who come under an inclusion agenda and uses this to address similar needs in a wider range of those students traditionally marginalised from HE. The body of pedagogic research into dyslexia has explored, trialed and advocated many alternative and creative ways to address different learning needs and styles.

The session advocates utilizing this resource to address the achievement deficits of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students, white working class students and international students.

The centrality of literacy issues to the barriers to learning these students face is significant to this approach as is the ongoing lack of consensus about all aspects of dyslexia research and pedagogy (Davies 2019).

Reach and Impact

Interim findings from the first phase of the *Audio Resources Pilot Study* (ongoing) are encouraging. The pilot study aimed to encourage and assess the use of audio-resources on one unit taken by all first year undergraduate students at UAL: LCF. It is assessed by a 2000 word academic essay. The rationale for this approach is that, it is currently very unlikely that students will do well in the assessment task if they have not carried out additional, academic reading. However many students lack the traditional literacy skills necessary to effectively carry this out. There is also a significant issue with attainment which is why looking for alternative learning strategies and assessing their effectiveness is so important.

It is hoped that the implications of this intervention will be an increase in student satisfaction and achievement on the unit, for the institution and the wider HE sector.

Davies, M.G. (2016) 'What Kinds of Strategies, Situations and Interventions are Useful for Dyslexic Students on Creative Fashion Courses at One Arts University in the South of England?' University of the Arts London (UAL), Internal report: unpublished.
Davies, M.G. (2019) 'Naming Pedagogic Difference in the Art School: A Cultural Studies Approach' in Hatton, K. (ed) (2019) *Inclusion and Intersectionality in Visual Arts Education,* London, UCL, IOE Press.
Elliot, J. (2016) 'Dyslexia: Beyond the debate'. In A. Davis (ed) Dyslexia: Developing the Debate. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
Reid, G. (2009) Dyslexia: A Practitioner's Handbook. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Williams, et al. (2017) Models of Support for Students with Disabilities: A Report to HEFCE. Available at: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports... [Last accessed: 21-1-19]