A qualitative exploratory study of learning practices, challenges and strategies.

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MacCullagh et al. (2017)

A summary by Emma Manicaro

Introduction

- Name
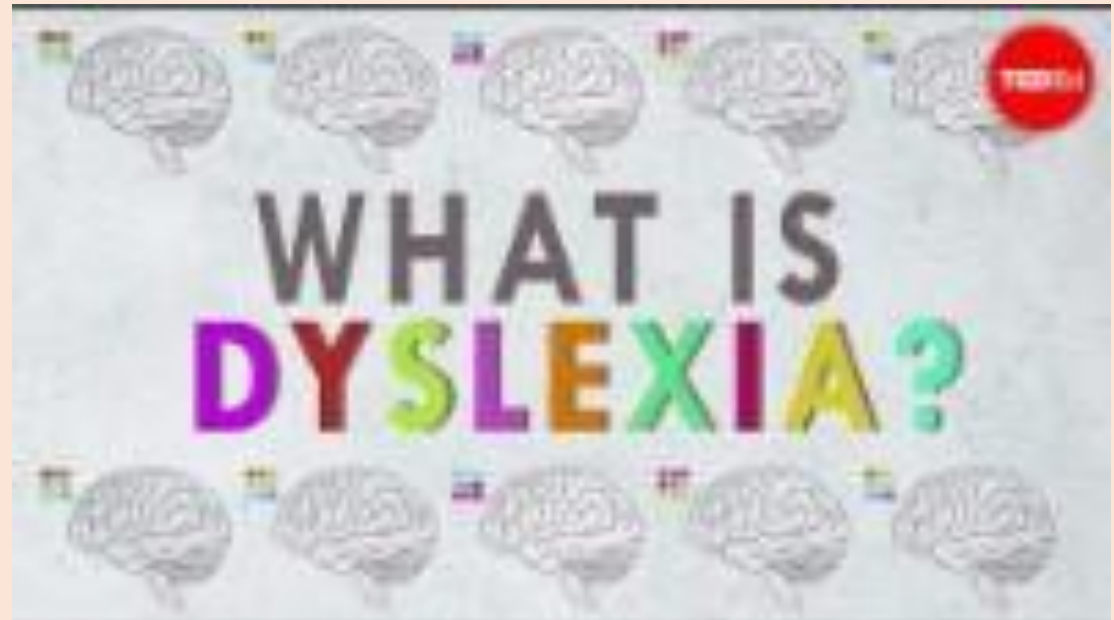- Age
- 2 things about you
- What are you bringing into this meeting?

Dyslexia

- People with dyslexia are vastly under-represented in universities.

- This situation is of concern for modern societies that value social justice.

Dyslexia

University experiences and strategies

Till today, very few studies have explored day-to-day learning experiences of university students with dyslexia.

Literature, has explored overall university experiences of students with a wide range of disabilities, including some data about students with dyslexia.

Studies reported difficulties with physical access, social stigma, and access to reasonable adjustments.

Study Skills Include:

- Making notes from books

- Accessing materials in multiple mapping

- Discussing verbally

- Downloading lecture slides prior to lectures

- Obtaining copies of lecture notes

- Making lecture recordings

- Diagrams

Data Collection

01 Participants were recruited via email invitations to students with a research participation requirement for course credit and those registered with the university's disability service.

02 Advertisements were also posted on campus noticeboards.

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03 Participants were provided with verbal and written information about the study, and gave written consent

04 Where course credit was not required, participants were reimbursed $15 for their time.

Positives

- **Appreciation for face-to-face lectures**

"I enjoy coming and listening to lectures on campus. I feel more confident if I've listened to lectures in person." – Dyslexic student, age 19, 1st year

- **Appreciation for engaging speaking style**

"It purely comes down to the style of the presenter for me. It's helpful if I enjoy them, and I enjoy them if they're engaging and interesting and knowledgeable." – Dyslexic student, age 28, 1st year

- **Convenience of recorded lectures**

"I use the recorded lectures to re-listen to the face-to-face lectures." – Dyslexic student, age 28, 1st year
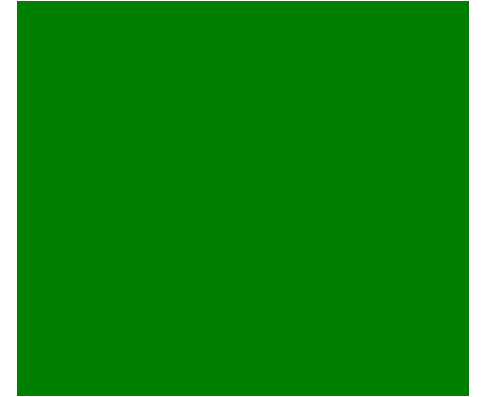
Challenges

- **Difficulty following lecture slides**

"The slides are generally a lot of words, which I almost never read" – Dyslexic student, age 28, 1st year

- **Managing auditory and visual distractions in learning spaces**

"In my face-to-face lectures, I sit at front to the right. I don't know why but that seems to work for me." – Dyslexic student, age 37, 1st year

- **Issues with recorded lectures**

"The quality of the recordings was often bad. With some of them the sound quality was so bad I couldn't hear it" – Dyslexic student, age undisclosed, graduated

Difficulties

- **Technical issues**

"Some lecturers aren't savvy with technology, which is fine because different people have different capabilities, but it wastes time. I think that perhaps there wasn't much training for everybody when they first brought in the system, so that can sometimes be a bit frustrating both for us and for them." – Dyslexic student, age 19, 1st year

- **Difficulties resolving grievances**

Strategies

- **Finding additional videos online**

"I YouTubed quite a few things from the lectures and textbook that I still didn't understand, and I found videos that explained it with pictures, and it stuck in my mind a lot quicker." – Dyslexic student, age 36, graduated

- **Reading selectively and strategically**

"I don't read any non-compulsory readings, I do read the printed course readers" – Dyslexic student, age 37, 1st year

- **Listening to recorded lectures**

"[Online lectures are] really helpful because I can listen multiple times are re-check stuff" – Dyslexic student, age 19, 1st year

"I use the recorded lectures to re-listen to the face-to-face lectures" – Dyslexic student, age 28, 1st year

Assessment challenges

- Almost all students, indicated that they disliked high-stakes written examinations and felt they were poor method of assessing knowledge and skills.

- Many mentioned stress associated with written examinations, and some commented that this assessment method is rigid, artificial, stifles creativity and does not real-life situations or abilities.

- Students with dyslexia also described particular difficulty in written examinations due to noise and other distractions.

Help or not?

- Despite these difficulties, fewer than 25% of students with dyslexia received adjustments to examination conditions, such as a smaller room, extra time and extra breaks.

- The students receiving these adjustments stated that they were of limited usefulness.

- For example, extra time was not much help for a student who fatigued easily.

- One student with dyslexia had requested written examinations to be printed on a particular coloured paper and in a designated font, and stated that this was helpful.
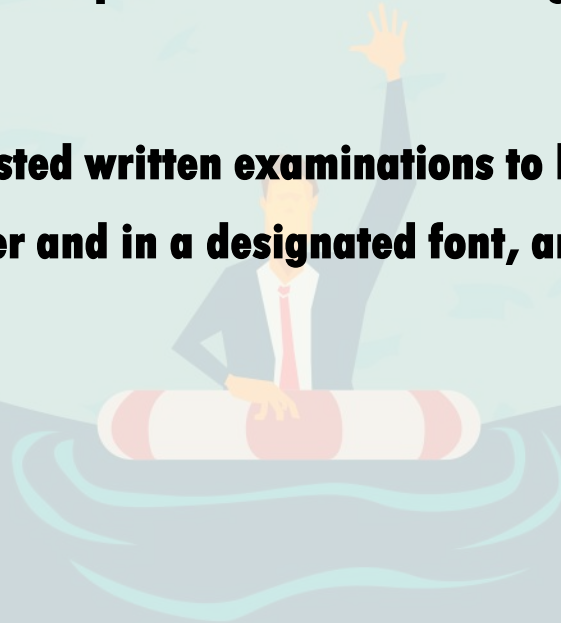
Students' solutions

- Many students felt that assessments should be divided into more frequent, shorter, lower weighted tasks.

- Some also felt that a wider choice of assessment modalities should be offered, including individual conversations with a tutor, practical skills demonstrations and video assignments.

Limited uptake and suitability of disability support

- Only three of thirteen dyslexic students reported receiving support from the disability service, which primarily took the form of examination adjustments.

- Only one received day-to-day learning support including note-taking, tutoring and assistive technology, and stated that these services were somewhat helpful but had been difficult and time-consuming to organise.

University Programme

- Two students with dyslexia raised issues relating to adverse treatment by staff and subsequent difficulties with the complaint management process.

- It was clear that these two students felt unsupported.

- A mentoring and coaching program recently implemented by the university's disability service may help such students to better negotiate these circumstances and feel more supported.

Gender

- It is interesting to note the difference in gender ratio in this study, with females representing 85% of the non-dyslexic group, compared to 54% of the dyslexic group.

- The average age of dyslexic students was also slightly higher than the non-dyslexic group (26.3 years compared to 21.95 years).

- However, no clear patterns emerged regarding age or gender differences and learning strategies.

Emergent Themes

- Positive themes included appreciation for engaging speaking style and flexible lecture formats, deep engagement with learning tasks and use of many self-directed learning strategies.

- Negative themes included difficulties and frustrations. The patterns reported by students with dyslexia in this study broadly confirm and support those reported in previous research.

Frustration and Effort

Although some students will overcome these difficulties, the additional effort may lead to greater frustration and lower completion rates than might otherwise be expected.

An important finding from this study was that the dyslexic students reported spending a great deal of effort on learning tasks. Participants with dyslexia described engaging with learning tasks intensively and frequently, using multiple strategies.
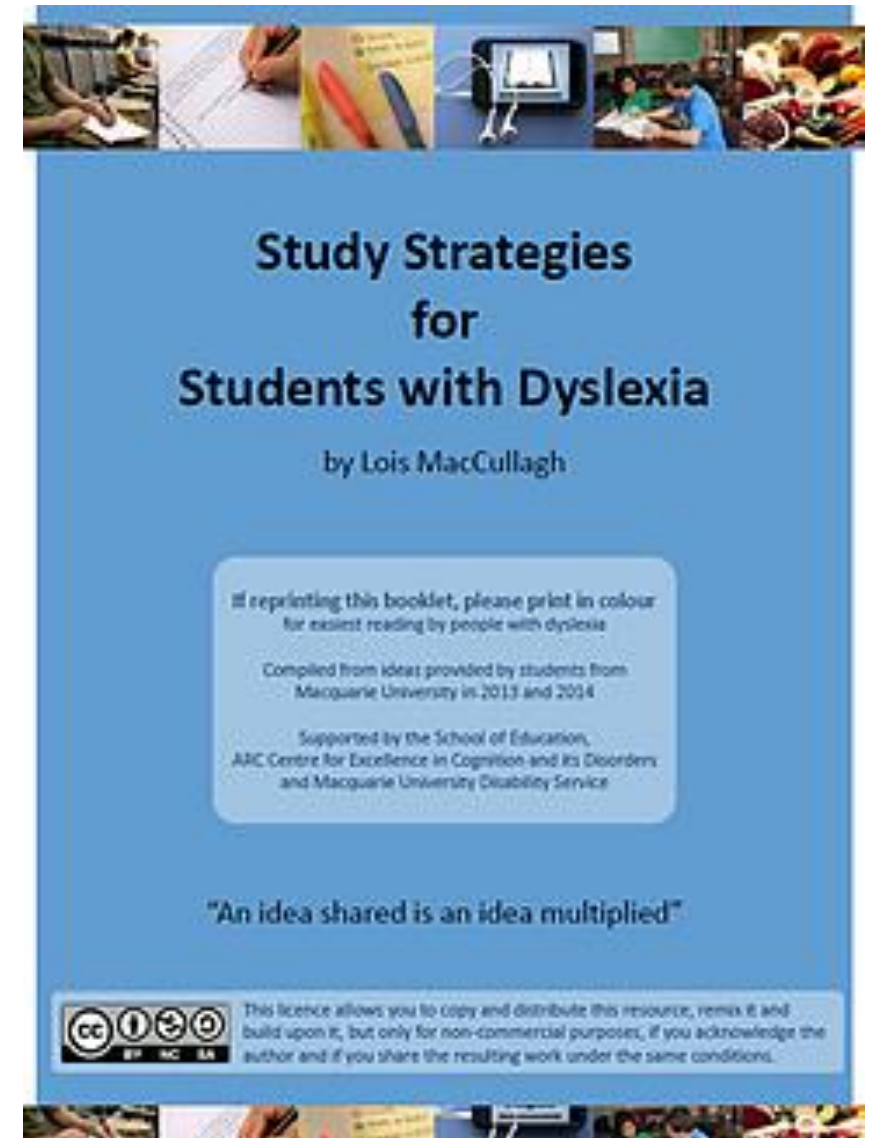
Study strategies booklet

I was amazed by the wide variety of strategies students told me about

Students who I interviewed towards the end of the study benefitted more than those who participated earlier because I could tell them of strategies earlier students had told me about.

One student said about a strategy I shared:
"OMG that is going to change my life!"

So I decided to gather all the strategies together into a booklet and share it with all the students from the study, and also for free on my website
www.onelittledyslexic.net

Study Strategies for Students with Dyslexia

by Lois MacCullagh

If reprinting this booklet, please print in colour for easiest reading by people with dyslexia

Compiled from ideas provided by students from Macquarie University in 2013 and 2014

Supported by the School of Education, ARC Centre for Excellence in Cognition and its Disorders and Macquarie University Disability Service

"An idea shared is an idea multiplied"

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Follow-up study (2020 thesis)

- Which strategies are most likely to be most helpful?

(What to try first if time and energy are limited)

- Conducted an online quantitative survey

- 70 students with formally assessed dyslexia and 58 non-dyslexic peers

- Estimated helpfulness = number of students with dyslexia using the strategy x their average helpfulness ratings

Top 10 strategies rated by dyslexic students

1) **Reducing contrast**
2) **Quiet space**
3) **Reading on phone**
4) **Reducing glare**
5) **Highlighting / underlining**
6) **Audiobooks**
7) **Soft music**
8) **Narrow columns**
9) **Spell checkers**
10) **Grammar checkers**
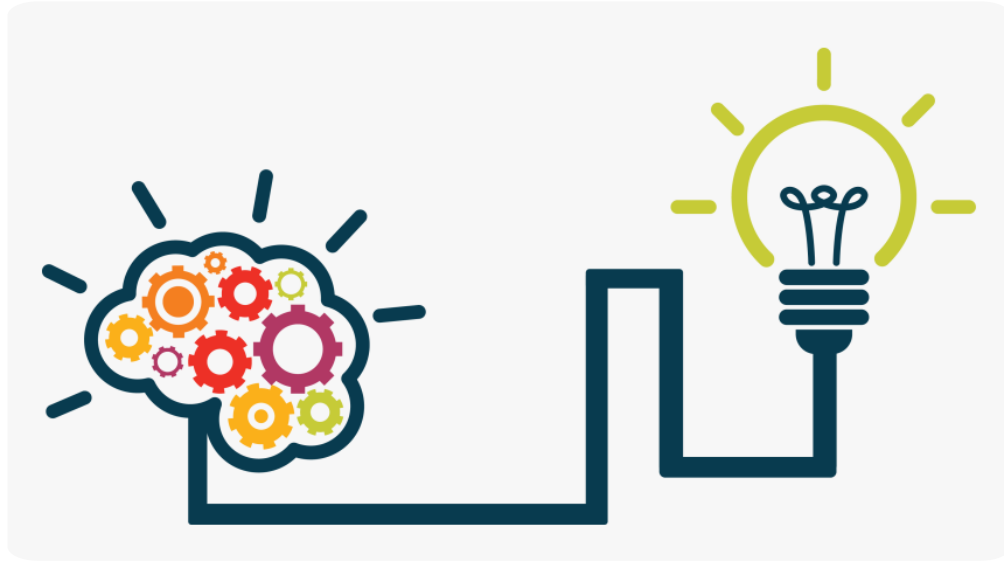
Note: Video substitution was rated equal 14th

A quick story about John and George

Questions

- Describe your findings in a sentence. Were you surprised at your findings?

- Why did you base your study on this topic?

- What interesting things did you find from your research?

Conclusion

- University students with dyslexia face considerable learning and assessment challenges and also exhibit various strengths.

- Strategies perceived as helpful are identified at both individual and institutional levels. They include individual study techniques, adjustments to course materials, offering a variety of teaching and assessment formats, and providing specific staff and student training.

- The current findings offer some valuable insights into factors that may contribute to university success for students with dyslexia.

Discussion

- **What do you think can be done so more students with dyslexia can progress to higher education?**

PMI – Evaluation of today's session

- https://padlet.com/emmamanicaro19/uj0zldhxvwjka9ms

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Positive Minus Interesting

Thank you for your time ☺

This power point is :