Humanities Academic Development

Research Informed Teaching Project

2008-2009

Improving Academic Guidance Resources for Dyslexic Learners in the Faculty of Humanities

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Project contacts

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The Humanities Academic Guidance Centre (Clephan 0.24) has over 100 study skills handouts. A representative sample of these handouts was evaluated by dyslexic students in focus groups.

Student likes and dislikes

Students generally liked:

- ✓ visuals
- ✓ pastel coloured paper
- ✓ variety
- ✓ not to much text
- ✓ bold headings
- ✓ text boxes

Students generally disliked:

- ✗ black print on white paper
- ✗ too many pages
- ✗ too many bullet points
- ✗ long paragraphs
- ✗ small print

Examples of language used by students about study skills resources

Students used emotional language:

- love it
- brilliant
- scares me
- panic
- jumble
- horrible
- off-putting
- boring

And also more detached language:

- calming
- stand-out
- readable
- contained
- to the point
- manageable chunks
- clear
- concise

Project dissemination

Workshop:

6th symposium, *Learning Development in Higher Education Network*, Bournemouth University (April 2009)

Poster (see next slide):

Many Voices, DMU (June 2009)

Diversity Awareness & Inclusive Practice Showcase, DMU (December 2009)

Improving Academic Guidance resources for dyslexic learners in Humanities

Anne-Kathrin Reck, Claire MacTavish

1 Introduction

A RIT project collaboration between the Academic Liaison Disability Coordinator (ALDC), Academic Guidance (AG) and e-learning Coordinator in the Faculty of Humanities at De Montfort University.

The aim is to get students with dyslexia involved in the evaluation of AG study skills materials and resources in order to improve the current provision.

Dyslexia is an important area of investigation for the faculty of Humanities where a large number of assessments are word based.

2 Methodology

Literature Review, e.g. learning styles, dyslexia traits, visual-spatial learners

Focus Groups = The 'Student Voice'

Collaborative Enquiry ➡ WORLD CAFÉ

Q 1 - What challenges are there for supporting different learning styles?
Q 2 - What makes a useful resource for dyslexic students?
Q 3 – Why and how do we move away from paper-based resources?

3a Statistics – snapshot

Structure
Space: 2 liked, general; needs more (1 Numeric, 1 Plan/Struct); good (1 Style, 1 Notes; 1 Model, 1 Impr Yr Wr); 'jumble' (1 Impr Yr)
Paragraphs: layout good (1 leaflet, 1 Impr Yr Wr); specific para/s too long (3 Plan/Struct, 1 Leaflet); specific paras OK (1 Plan/Struct)
Broken down: needs to be (4 Numeric; 1 Impr Yr Wr; 2 Exams; 1 general); liked (1 Impr Yr Wr)
Amount of text: a lot/too much (4 Numeric,1 Plan/Struct, 4 Notes, 1 Exams, 1 general); not too much (2 Style, 1 Impr Yr Wr); 1 liked alongside visuals; not too much writing – liked (3 leaflet)
Vocabulary: clarity/less academic terminology: liked 1 general
Headings: liked (1 general, 1 Analysis); not clear (1 Numeric; 1 leaflet); should be bigger (1 leaflet)
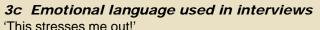**Text box**: wanted (1 Analysis)
Indents/Bullets: short ones good (1 Style, 1 Analysis, 1 Notes): wanted (1 Notes); too many (1 Exams); 1 bullets liked alongside short text
Line spacing: wanted (2 Exams; 1 general)

3b Issues identified by Focus Group students:

Handouts too wordy, background colour; visuals, content, print, structure of text, etc.

Students' ranking of handouts (out of 10):

3c Emotional language used in interviews
'This stresses me out!'
'My brain switches off – can't do it.'
'Too much information, creates panic.'
'The referencing handout is scary!'
'Dates give me trouble – all blurred.'

4 Recommendations & Output
1 Cream paper + improve font, size, spacing
2 Blackboard – visual representations
3 Podcasts of handout content + add ons
4 Dyslexic students peer support group (e.g.using 'wetpaint' wiki)

One of our Wordles:

5 Conclusions
Our assumption that dyslexic students might need more multi-sensory stimulations are strongly confirmed through our 'students' voices'.
The main recommendation is for the improvement of the accessibility of resource materials in the faculty.
This we hope to achieve through the implementation of e-learning applications. We also recommend encouragement of a social network of dyslexic learners.

6 References (selected)

Coffield, F. et al (2004) *Should we be using learning styles? What research has to say to practice.* The Learning and Skills Research Centre.
French, J. and Herrington, M. (2008) *Theorising dyslexic student discussion/ action groups in UK higher education: research in practice.* In: Educational Action Research Vol. 16, No. 4, 517-530.
Griffin, E. and Pollak, D. (2009) *Student Experiences of Neurodiversity in Higher Education: Insights from the BRAINHE project.* In: Dyslexia 15: 23-41.

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