



Website context: Thinking about Dyslexia → Module design

Overview: Other specific learning difficulties

Other specific learning difficulties (SpLDs) include dyspraxia, dyscalculia, attention deficit disorder (ADD) attention deficit disorder with hyperactivity (ADHD) and Asperger syndrome. These exist separately with their individual criteria and methods of identification but they can also co-exist and overlap with each other and with dyslexia. A student may be identified as dyslexic, but their profile may also include characteristics of other SpLDs.

An all encompassing term sometimes used is 'neuro-diversity', that they are learning differences, neurological in origin, which can become disabling in particular kinds of environments. They do not in themselves imply lack of ability, in fact the difference can lead to enhanced creativity. In all specific learning difficulties, effects vary according to experience and opportunity. See <http://www.brainhe.com/>

Dyspraxia (also known as Developmental Co-ordination Disorder DCD)

The dyspraxia foundation defines dyspraxia as 'an impairment or immaturity of the organisation of movement. Associated with this, there may be problems of language, perception and thought'. By the time students reach university, they may still appear uncoordinated, (though some will have been involved in sports or martial arts training that has helped); they may seem socially awkward (from difficulty with 'reading' social situations and inappropriate body language); their handwriting (a fine motor skill) is usually slow and illegible; there may be pronounced difficulties with organisation, affecting both time management and organising thinking; concentration may be a problem. The effects would be apparent in meeting deadlines, structuring essays, organising a sequenced series of actions as in practicals for example. For more information see: <http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/>

Dyscalculia

The DfES defines dyscalculia as "...a condition that affects the ability to acquire arithmetical skills. Dyscalculic learners may have difficulty understanding simple number concepts, lack an intuitive grasp of numbers, and have problems learning number facts and procedures. Even if they produce a correct answer or use a correct method, they may do so mechanically and without confidence."

There seems to be a fundamental difficulty in grasping the size of a number and its value in relation to other numbers. It is in this respect that it is usually described as differing from dyslexic difficulties with maths. (See Overview: Dyslexia and Maths). Until recently there has been little research into the maths difficulties of university students, nor an appropriate assessment tool. The University of Loughborough is pioneering work in this area. See <http://ddig.lboro.ac.uk/pages/tutors.html> See DDIG leaflet for 'Facilitating mathematics learning for dyslexic and dyscalculic students'. See 'Ideas Exchange' for a vivid personal description of being dyscalculic.

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD(H)D)

Indicators are inattentiveness with or without hyperactivity and impulsiveness. People with AD(H)D are easily bored, disorganised, enjoy multi-tasking but may not

complete tasks, attracted by highly stimulating activities, fidgety and easily distracted. They will have shown these behaviours since childhood. Often academic potential is not fulfilled in spite of creativity and inventiveness, high energy and sometimes, when interest is aroused, the capacity for intense concentration for a time. Students with ADD(H)D can become very distressed at repeated failed attempts to change these patterns. For suggestions for working with students with ADD(H)D see http://www.dmu.ac.uk/study/student_services/lss/diversity/inform_staff_adhd.jsp

Asperger Syndrome

Asperger Syndrome is characterised by difficulties in the following three areas: **Social Interaction** (Severe impairment in reciprocal social interaction; desire to make friends but difficulty in achieving this; difficulty seeing things from another's perspective; difficulty in interpreting people's intentions); **Language and Communication** (Unusual style of speech and language; literal interpretation of language; unusual eye contact and other non-verbal communication; difficulty describing feelings and emotions); **Rigidity and Inflexibility** (All-absorbing narrow interests and obsessions; imposition of rituals, routines and interests on self and others; resistance to change).

Extract from Jamieson, J. and Jamieson, C. (2004) *Managing Asperger Syndrome at College and University: A resource for students, tutors and support services*. London: David Fulton Publishers. Available for loan from Academic Support.

See also <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/disability/resources/asperg> for Guidance on working with students with Asperger Syndrome