The New Zealand Dyslexia-Friendly Quality Mark

Literature review

Ako
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Dyslexia-Friendly Quality Mark

Supporting people with dyslexia

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Introduction

The New Zealand Dyslexia-Friendly Quality Mark (DFQM) is being developed to instigate positive change in tertiary education settings for learners with dyslexia. This initiative will increase inclusivity for adult learners with dyslexia and promote an educational experience with appropriate support measures during their learning journey.

Dyslexia does not discriminate, nor is it an indicator of intelligence or ability (Australian Dyslexia Association, 2007; British Dyslexia Association, 2007; Tunmer & Greaney, 2010). Dyslexia is characterised by an unexpected difficulty in reading. It occurs in otherwise intelligent people that hold the necessary attributes for normal development in reading acquisition (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2004). Tunmer and Greaney (2010) describe dyslexia as a discrepancy between reading achievement and intellectual potential, as measured by standardised testing. Moreover, Goswami (2008) states, "reading is one of the most complex cognitive skills that humans can learn" (p. 73).

Where dyslexia was not addressed in earlier school years, adult learners will face significant challenges when studying in vocational and academic learning environments (Snowling, Muter, & Carol, 2007). Dyslexia is often viewed as a childhood condition, and this is because many adults, diagnosed or undiagnosed, will hide their condition. It is thought that it "vanishes in adulthood; it vanishes from sight, but not from society" (Fitzgibbon & O'Connor, 2002, p. 18). Furthermore, Moats (2001); Shaywitz (2003); and Vellutino, Fletcher, Snowling, and Scanlon (2004) substantiate this point, highlighting that people do not grow out of dyslexia.

The DFQM provides an opportunity for Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) to be recognised as taking extensive steps to establish themselves as a dyslexia-friendly organisation. This will benefit learners with dyslexia and other literacy difficulties, upskill educators and promote organisational change. Furthermore, this is an opportunity to make a meaningful difference in people's lives and stimulate positive societal change.

Identifying dyslexia

Effective assessment of literacy difficulties is necessary to inform targeted instruction (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Simple screening tools are available commercially, which can be valuable to indicate the likelihood of a learner having dyslexia. This process can be followed up by a range of literacy assessments. For example, the 'Starting Points Assessment Guide' (Tertiary Education Commission, 2010) is a resource developed in New Zealand to guide educators to develop the essential skills required for an adult learner to read and write. Use of the initial survey in the Starting Points Assessment Guide (Tertiary Education Commission, 2010), followed by a more formal assessment if concerns are identified, such as assessments for listening comprehension, reading comprehension and decoding, could confirm the screening results (Dymock & Nicholson, 2012).

This approach aligns with the 'Simple View of Reading' (SVR) (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Ministry of Education, 2008), a widely cited theoretical model of reading (Dymock & Nicholson, 2012). The SVR is a theory that draws attention to the different types of reading difficulties, including dyslexia. Decoding alone is not adequate to enable proficient reading, but is a vital component of the reading process. The SVR presents the following formula as indicators for reading success: R = D x LC (Reading = Decoding x Listening Comprehension). Therefore, reading problems can include Hyperlexia: good decoding and poor listening comprehension; Dyslexia: good listening comprehension and poor decoding, and Mixed problems: poor listening comprehension and poor decoding (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). SVR categorises different types of reading difficulties (see Table 1).

Table 1 | The Simple View of Reading

	Poor oral language comprehension	Good oral language comprehension
Good decoding	Specific reading comprehension difficulties	No reading difficulties
Poor decoding	Mixed problems	Dyslexia

The New Zealand Dyslexia-Friendly Quality Mark standards

To achieve the DFQM status, an organisation will need to consider their practices, and measure them against the DFQM standards in four key areas: leadership and management; the quality of teaching and learning; the teaching and learning environment provided for learners; and the quality of the organisation's relationships with internal and external stakeholders.

Robertson and Timperley (2011) emphasise the importance of leadership involvement in the promotion and participation of professional development. For that reason, a commitment from TEOs is essential in developing educators' literacy teaching knowledge to enhance learner literacy development (Berghella, Molenaar, & Wyse, 2006; Casey, Cara, Eldred, Grief, Hodge, & Ivanic, 2006; Dymock, 2007).

The importance of educator capability

Increasing educator capability to support learners effectively is critical and could provide life-changing learning opportunities for both learners and educators (Ministry of Education, 2014). However, research indicates that educators require increased knowledge and practical training to better support adult learners with dyslexia (Dymock & Nicholson, 2012; van Lamoen, 2013; Sutton & Benseman, 2012; Bell, McPhillips & Doveston, 2011).

If educators have a better understanding of dyslexia, they can ensure positive reinforcement, be supportive, and focus on strengths rather than weaknesses. A strengths-based approach is vital as the strengths and weaknesses of people with dyslexia are considerably exaggerated and can be closely related (Ryan, 1994). Adult learners need to know that they are not dumb or failures, and that it is possible to succeed in an environment conducive to learning with the right type of instruction, resulting in a positive impact on the learner (Dymock & Nicholson, 2012).

Moreover, Bennett (2009) suggests an effective educator will exhibit the following qualities: create positive relationships; understand the learner's knowledge base; have adequate and appropriate knowledge and skills; use assessment results as a teaching tool; and keep it simple to ensure the learner gains a good understanding.

Kirby and Savage (2008) emphasise that providing learners with effective strategies will be critical to their success. Adult learners who lack essential reading and writing skills will use most of their cognitive resources trying to deal with what they do not know, in turn leaving them with limited capacity for comprehending and constructing meaning (Tertiary Education Commission, 2010; Lambie, 2018).

Adult learners develop avoidance strategies to cope with their literacy difficulties (Ministry of Education, 2008), which can present as undesirable behaviour, class non-attendance, or a seeming lack of engagement. Adult learners also develop a range of compensatory strategies, such as being able to draw on "long-term memory of letters; words and signs" (p. 5) which can disguise their reading difficulties (Tertiary Education Commission, 2015).

Use of a multisensory approach to learning will be advantageous for all learners (Henry, 2010; Walker, 2000; Elliot & Grigorenko, 2014; Kelly & Phillips, 2011). This is instruction linked to visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning. Simple strategies can make a vital difference for adult learners with literacy difficulties, such as chunking learning, use of visual prompts, plain font, clear and explicit instructions, alternative assessment options, use of mind maps and flowcharts (Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand, n.d.). Additionally, technology tools, cooperative learning, and asking the learner how they learn best could further enhance a dyslexia-friendly environment (Ministry of Education, 2008). Tumner & Greaney (2010) also stress that strategies such as allowing additional time and intensive, explicit reading instruction can support someone with dyslexia in learning to read.

Conclusion

Having effective strategies in place validates individuals in their own right, rather than viewing them as learners who struggle. This ultimately supports the learner to reach their true potential and embrace adulthood with healthy levels of social and emotional resilience, and self-efficacy in learning (Long, MacBlain, & MacBlain, 2007). In order to achieve this goal significant change is needed: Learners with dyslexia are not receiving adequate support in a consistent manner; educators need to build their capability in providing this support; and organisations need to commit to a whole-organisation approach to meeting the needs of learners with dyslexia. The DFQM will provide the mechanism to effect this much-needed change and to assist in the creation of dyslexia-friendly organisations.

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