Inclusive Learning: Increasing The Presence, Participation And Achievement Of All Learners
with Sally Farley

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As an experienced counsellor, a special needs support tutor at The University of Kent and also a teacher trainer specialising in creative methodology, it was from an incredibly well-informed perspective that Sally Farley addressed those assembled at Spring Gardens on the issue of increasing the presence, participation and achievement of all learners.

Opening with some germane statistics, Farley revealed how 7-10% of the population are affected by dyslexia. 2 out of 10,000 children have Aspergers Syndrome and up to 1 in 20 children have Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The implications of this are clear; tutors will almost certainly encounter students with learning difficulties at some stage.

Farley explained the '7 Principles of Learning' and her seminar proceeded to address each of these in detail. The principles are-

1. To celebrate diversity, variety and difference
2. To cater for all learning styles
3. Linking and weaving
4. Prioritising high interest subject matter
5. To develop a leadership style based on trust
6. To encourage positive group dynamics in the classroom
7. To accommodate individual needs

1. To Celebrate Diversity, Variety and Difference

Farley encouraged teachers to promote the belief that difference is wonderful. In her first participatory activity of the evening, audience members were given one minute to write down three things they thought they had in common with the rest of the group. ("We all had to make a journey to get to the seminar", "We all have an interest in education", etc.) Then, we were asked to think of three things that are unique about us. ("My name". "My face", etc.)

Farley used the exercise to illustrate how we are only the same on a very broad level. We are *all*, in actual fact, unique. Whilst those with learning difficulties might look towards the 'sameness' that their colleagues all share, this 'sameness' is illusory. In a classroom scenario, it is not only those with learning difficulties who are 'different'. We are all 'different'; recognising and acknowledging this fact will help advance a widening of participation. Our broad similarities are the foundations on which we should construct a celebration of difference.

2. To Cater For All Learning Styles

We were invited to rank the following list of well-known figures in order of the most 'intelligent'.

1. David Beckham
2. David Attenborough
3. The Dalai Lama
4. Sigmund Freud
5. Henry Moore
6. John Lennon
7. George Bernard Shaw
8. Charles Babbage

What is 'intelligence'? The concept is vague and it marks any attempt to rank these figures accordingly as futile. That was exactly the point Farley wanted to make. All these people demonstrate extraordinary skill or knowledge in their particular field and perfectly encapsulate Howard Gardener's Theory of the 'Eight Types of Intelligence'. These intelligences could be appropriately applied to this list as follows-

1. David Beckham   Bodily- Kinaesthetic

2. David Attenborough   Naturalistic

3. The Dalai Lama   Intrapersonal

4. Sigmund Freud   Interpersonal

5. Henry Moore   Spatial

6. John Lennon   Musical

7. George Bernard Shaw   Linguistic

8. Charles Babbage   Logical- Mathematical

Farley then presented a YouTube clip to the audience that was replete with music, pictures and written information. What were we concentrating on when we were watching the clip? Our answer would strongly indicate our preferred learning style. This led neatly into discussions about the research Ross Copper had conducted in 1995, revealing that 33% of the dyslexic population only think visually and 8% of the dyslexic population only think verbally. From these statistics we can draw the conclusion that there will be a variety of preferred learning-styles among those with learning difficulties in much the same way as there would be with those who do not. Consequently, dyslexia friendly teaching= learner centred teaching. So, what strategies can a tutor use to help them meet the objective of catering for the needs of all their learners?

Visual strategies might include Venn diagrams, time lines or mind maps.

Kinaesthetic strategies might include embodying, role play, Cuisenaire rods, shells, stones, cut outs, magnetic letters and modelling clay.

Farley's research in the field had elicited some wonderful anecdotes from learners who had positively benefited from embodiment. One student was able to recall how, during a biology lesson on dental matters, a selection of learners had to stand up and pretend to be teeth while other learners stood between them to represent gums! In a language classroom, learners might be asked to embody verbs or adjectives and be moved around accordingly.

A 'cut out strategy' could see students being presented with an essay that has been cut into different pieces and invited to sequence those pieces correctly. Alternatively, learners could be issued with a sentence printed on a piece of paper and asked to literally cut out those parts which are grammatically incorrect.

Modelling might help some learners grasp a point. They could, for instance, be asked in a geography lesson to shape a particular mountain out of clay to get a better understanding of its dimensions and contours.

A difference between non-dyslexic and dyslexic learners is the way in which they absorb information. Whilst many learn sequentially, regarding their learning as steps that move them from point A to B to C, etc, dyslexic learners are inclined to think holistically. This rationed or 'drip-drip' provision of information may effectively serve sequential learners but dyslexic learners could struggle to retain the earlier 'steps' of the journey. They desire, instead, to see the big picture from the outset and be drawn into the lesson through an irresistible 'Wow' factor.

3. Linking and Weaving

As standard good practice, tutors were advised to link, loop and weave. Put simply, everything should relate to everything else! Lessons should exhibit continuity. This might be engendered by beginning a session with discussions on the last homework task and then leading-in to the topic of the current lesson accordingly. The supportive mantra might be 'Clarify-Paraphrase- Link- Reflect- Consolidate'. *Everyone* can benefit from this approach, not just those with learning difficulties.

4. Prioritising High Interest Subject Matter

The goal, here, is to generate and maintain Active Participation and a way to achieve this is by delivering high-interest learning. "Emotional engagement= intrinsic part of learning process" (Antonio Damesio, 1994).

Farley's research found that interviewees' favourite teachers tended to be those who did not stick to the syllabus. Instead, they engaged with a variety of strategies to deliver high-interest learning that might include discussion around controversial issues, pop songs, video games and movies. Identifying the individual interests of a given group of learners and designing sessions correspondingly was highlighted as a particularly effective way of engaging learners with Aspergers Syndrome. (Farley provided one example of an Aspergers learner who was a technical expert in cars. Having discovered this fact, the tutor would link the content of the lesson in a way that was analogous to the workings of the motor of a car.) It is important to stress that, again, these are strategies that can benefit *all* learners.

Questions to learners should be 'two-footed'. One foot is inside the boundary of the learner's experience and the other is inside that of the target learning.

A session on US democracy, for instance, might include the question- "Where were you when Obhama was elected?"

Strategies of this kind should deliver a 'Virtuous Circle' where multisensory learning creates an interactive experience, generating an enjoyable learning environment which leads to success. Tutors should create "a classroom culture that students want to belong to" (Herbert Puchta, 2009).

5. To Develop a Leadership Style Based On Trust
Effective learning environments are built on trust and the tutor can realise this objective by modelling Carl Rogers' 'core conditions'; namely that we should extend unconditional positive regard, empathy and congruence to our learners. Self-esteem is often something that individuals with learning difficulties have struggled with. Praise can motivate and encourage.

Tutors must ensure that their language is inclusive. "I don't think you tried your best on this piece of work" is a more measured response than "You are very lazy."

We need to consider very carefully the way we deliver instructions in a classroom. Clarity is crucial. "Before you start the question, I want you to look at the board" might be more confusing to an individual with learning difficulties than "Look at the example on the board….now start the question." The latter clearly indicates the order in which the actions should take place.

Equally, our instructions should be explicit. Whilst a learner might know what is implied by the comment "Don't look out of the window when I am explaining this", it is made all the more patent by stating "Look at the board when I am explaining this." The former statement contains an embedded command that some may miss.

The accusatory tone of "Why did you do that?" and "Tell me what happened" is better replaced with "Tell me what happened".

"What are you going to do about this?" How much more supportive it is to say to a learner "What are *we* going to do about this?"

Farley's research had strongly indicated that learners respond favourably to tutors who are empathetic. She remarked how it is easy to forget what it is like to be a student and encouraged tutors to put themselves in the shoes of their learners. Of equal importance is the ability to read and (crucially) respond to the classroom atmosphere. Students should feel as thought they are 'at home'. Consideration should also be given to monitoring and mentoring. The group should move as a unit and no one should be left behind.

Though acknowledging that this is a balancing act, Farley did expound the notion that we should be ourselves in the classroom and that we should be conscious of the formula 'Consistent+ Real= Trustworthy'. Whilst the understanding and approachable tutor may have come out on top in Farley' s research, the 'strict when necessary', confident and strong tutor who commands respect was the second most popular 'type' of teacher.

In the interests of positive group dynamics, Farley advised that at the beginning of term tutors discuss ground rules with their class so there is a shared understanding of the behaviour and attitudes expected. This should help lead to a democratic classroom in which both tutor and learner hold a stake. Successful classrooms are those in which learners are working as a team in a supportive environment. They share a common task, they have established a group identity and have a shared sense of purpose.

On a practical level, dyslexic learners are likely to benefit from coloured overlays and handouts printed on coloured paper.

Farley concluded by reminding us that if we are not sure what our learners need, we should ask them. This, she affirmed, applies particularly to learners with Aspergers. Additionally, we might also want to involve the parents if possible. Ultimately, we should work with the strengths that each individual learner has.

There were occasions during the evening when Farley said that for many of those in the audience what she had to say would be 'meat and drink'. Indeed, the diet may have been familiar at times but there was ingenuity and inventiveness in the way it was served that really did render fresh reflection.

Farley's commentary powerfully disseminated perceived dividing lines between teaching strategies that can aid those with learning difficulties and teaching strategies that can aid those who do not, debunking the notion that the two are mutually exclusive. Ultimately, what is good practice for one will invariably be good practice for all and this point was powerfully driven home in an absorbing and engrossing seminar.

By Scott Sherriff