



Dyslexia for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language



Project

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that has an effect not only on literacy skills in students' first language, but also on foreign language learning. In order to ensure that dyslexic students successfully acquire the necessary levels of foreign language competence, they need additional support. Foreign language teachers often lack sufficient understanding of the nature of dyslexia and the difficulties it causes in foreign language learning, and they might not be familiar with the relevant teaching techniques and methods to further the language learning processes of dyslexic students. Therefore, the preparation of teacher training materials for this target group of language learners is both timely and necessary.

In our project we are developing a training course and self-study materials for teachers of English in order to raise their awareness of the foreign language learning needs of dyslexic students. After the completion of a detailed needs analysis survey, which aimed to identify pre-service and in-service foreign language teachers' professional development needs with regard to teaching individuals with dyslexia, the partners have now finished the design of the structure of the course. A successful meeting was hosted by Lancaster University in June 2012, in which the structure of the course was finalized and the teacher training materials in preparation were discussed.



The structure of the course

Three versions of the course are being prepared. The first one is a face-to-face version, which can be used in foreign language teacher education courses on site. The materials to be designed for this version of the course include a printed separate trainee's and trainer's booklet. The second version of the course is made available online on a static webpage, which is freely available to any interested teachers, teacher trainers, educational psychologists, special education teachers, parents any other stakeholders. Finally, an accompanying interactive online version of the course will be set up using Moodle to allow for the exploitation of the course for distance education purposes and for blended learning. Even though the course will exist in three different formats, the same general pedagogical principles will characterize all of the three versions. The three versions will also have the same structure and will use the same or highly similar tasks adapted to the nature of the learning environment.

The course consists of four main topics; the first of which familiarizes teachers with the nature of dyslexia and the associated learning difficulties and raises awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of dyslexic individuals. The second topic helps teachers understand the effect of dyslexia on the cognitive, emotional and social processes of language learning. The activities in the third topic area assist teachers in developing effective teaching approaches and classroom management techniques such as developing phonological awareness and teaching the four skills to dyslexic learners. The course is concluded with the topic of how to assess the language performance of students with dyslexia.

Our course takes a task-based approach to teacher training and employs tasks to enhance learning and reflection. Each unit within the course follows the pattern of the reflective cycle, in which first trainees draw on their existing experiences, reflect on their current practices, attitudes, preconceptions and the context they work in. This is followed by an input phase during which new ideas and relevant background information are presented. Next trainees perform a series of tasks evaluating existing tasks and materials, lesson plans etc., designing new instructional materials and aids that are appropriate for their own context, and finally they reflect on what they learnt in the unit.

Two sample self-study units are now available on our project website, and soon further units will be uploaded (www.dystefl.eu). Registration for the 10-week long taught online learning version of the course starting at the end of November 2012 is now open. Please visit: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?formkey=dHFPcGhYMK4zUmswYk5OWVNFZVN2X2c6MQ#gid=0>

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