



CREATING AND DESIGNING AN ART WORKSHOP FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DISORDERS

General Objective

The aim of this Practical Sheet is to present the different type of Specific Learning Disorders (SLDs), the difficulties such learning disabilities bring to students, and how to adapt, and design your art workshops to the needs of these learners.

In this practical sheet, you will:

- ✓ learn more about SLDs in general,
- ✓ learn how to adapt written and visual information in a more inclusive way,
- ✓ learn different adaptation technique to make your workshops inclusive.

You will need:

- ✓ a retrospective outlook on your teaching practices,
- ✓ old lessons already given to practice adapting content to students with specific needs.

Challenges and settings

Workshops, whether they are focused on art or not, are usually not automatically inclusive of students with specific needs and learning difficulties. This does not imply that the content of the lesson is not appropriate, but rather that some tweaks and modifications need to be made to include every student. Indeed, researchers have found that European citizens with dyslexia and specific learning disorders encompass between 9 and 12% of the population. These numbers, transferred to a classroom, show you that you are most likely working with students with SLDs, diagnosed or not.

Most **Specific Learning Disorders**, use the affix 'dys' to signify the partially lacking ability. The “dys” family of learning disorders is defined by specialists as a neurological issue that occurs independently of intelligence. SLDs have a neurobiological cause that affects the way the brain processes information and can disturb the cognitive development of a learning ability such as reading, writing, speaking, doing mathematics, or planning and coordinating motor tasks. To be more precise, the brain of a person having a Specific Learning Disorder functions differently when it comes to receiving, integrating, retaining, and expressing information, which can result in difficulties to process certain information or stimuli. However, they are not unitary disorders and affect each person in different ways, at different ages and stages of development, and to different degrees.

What types of DYS are there?

- **Dyslexia:** Difficulty with reading and spelling
- **Dysgraphia:** Difficulty with handwriting and some fine motor skills



- **Dyscalculia:** Difficulty with arithmetic and mathematics
- **Dyspraxia:** Difficulty with gross and fine motor coordination
- **Dysphasia:** Difficulty to produce and understand spoken language
- **Dysorthographia:** Difficulty with spelling and/or writing.

There is a few additional 'Dys' that will not be mentioned in this practical sheet as they are less relevant to the skills necessary in these activities. However, educators should always be aware of their audience and tailor the content to their needs.

Adaptation

Now that we understand a little more about SLDs and DYS, we can address some of the easy steps that can be implemented when creating workshop, activities and lessons for students with special needs.

Multisensory approach

First, using a multisensory approach to teaching is paramount when working with DYS students. This approach means that the workshop is not solely focus on written exercises and production tasks. Rather, think of stimulating the different senses: sight, hearing, touch, but also the senses of taste and smell and balance. DYS students respond really well to stimuli (careful however, not to be overstimulating and overwhelming them with information), and usually, all type of students appreciate the variety of exercises offered to them. This approach can take the form of manipulation or auditory exercises when working on understanding content but can also take place in the production stage with activities such as acting, drawing and more.

Universal Design for Learning



Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an instructional planning intended to increase meaningful access and reduce barriers to learning for students with diverse learning needs and those from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Educational researchers, policymakers, and practitioners have embraced this framework for meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. There are three main principles: Engagement, Representation and Action and Expression.

The work environment

Second, improving the work environment of students with Dys helps them create a stronger presence, but also increase their self-confidence overall.

Collaboration and cooperation are essential when working with an heterogeneous classroom, as this allows for each student to shine on their own strength. When designing your workshop, try to use a variety of activities, skillset, and tools. Students with DYS are not less competent, but rather show their strength in other fields.

Provide the information for the workshop in various ways, both visual and verbal, but also with the use of the blackboard,. Give them extra time to complete various tasks, especially if they are production tasks. Another useful advice is to display the instruction or process on a clear sign on the walls of the classroom if the activity is going to be over a few days.

General advice

Here is a series of advices and general guidance in designing activities for students with DYS.

When preparing activities:

- Use accessible fonts. Sans serif fonts such as Arial, Comic Sans or Verdana, Tahoma, Century Gothic, Trebuchet are ideal.



- Line spacing should be 1.5 and size should be between 12-14 to allow for clear reading.
- Think of the thickness of your paper when printing, thick paper will help with prevent transparency and help with concentration.
- Avoid italics and underlining but write in bold when you need to put emphasis.
- The text should be broken down into small, easily readable paragraphs and short, clear sentences, with distinguishable titles and subtitles.
- Use bullet points whenever possible.

During activities:

- Giving clear and systematic instruction is paramount to help students with SLDs follow properly. Do not just give oral instructions, provide your students with written support as well. Sequence the instruction in short and manageable steps (using visuals whenever possible). State the learning objectives and the goal of each task.
- Structure the content of the workshop from the easiest to the most complicated tasks, using short steps to maximise the success.
- Favor cooperative large tools instead of small individual tools that requires precise motor skills.
- Try to make creative, constructive activities, rather than exclusion or competition-based activities.

After activities:

- Do not mark or correct the students' homework or test with red ink, or great strokes across the paper, that can be discouraging for students who are struggling, but provide constructive comments on what needs to be improved.
- Allow for alternative methods of assessment. For example, instead of an essay, agree to a presentation with less writing.
- Summarize what you have done during the activity and what is going to happen during the next one.

Practical examples and inspiration

An interesting exercise to do is to take one of your old lessons, and note the adaptations and changes you would have to make to ensure that it is inclusive. Once you have identified what needs to be changed, try to create a new workshop on the same topic.

Here is an example of text adaptation:

Lucinda Calligraphy, 11pt. 1 spacing. Justified.

Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice. At that time Macondo was a village of twenty adobe houses, built on the bank of a river of clear water that ran along a bed of polished stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs. The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point.

Century Gothic, 12pt. 1.5 spacing. Left justified.

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One Hundred Years of Solitude - Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Additional resources

- Different fonts that are more accessible:
 - <https://opendyslexic.org/>
 - <https://www.luciole-vision.com/luciole-en.html>
- A tool to check your text for level, to ensure that your instructions are clear:
 - <https://hemingwayapp.com/>
- A website that provides information as regarding Dys in the world:
 - <https://eda-info.eu/what-is-dyslexia/>
- A Mooc created to teach more about DYS in general, adaptation, teaching methods and much more:
 - <https://moocdys.eu/>
- The UDL Guidelines website:
 - <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>
- More information about the classroom environment:
 - <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/creating-inclusive-classroom-environments-practical-advice-ideas-vulnerable-sen-looked-after-pupils-wellbeing-inclusion-pedagogy-schools-1/>

