Skills or Identities?

Exploring why students struggle and how we can help them towards academic success.
Advice to your younger self....
Advice to your younger self feedback....
How to study effectively is not obvious. Unfortunately, many students begin from the assumption that it is.
How do I know when I have read something?

How do I know that my lecture notes are good enough?

What can I do to be more critical?
Academic success is not just about ways of doing, but ways of being.
“Why do I have to do all this reading just to teach literacy?”

“Why are you asking me what I think? You’re the teacher.”

“You can’t ask us that. It wasn’t covered in the lectures.”

“I’m not an academic.”
‘What’ and ‘how’ questions only make sense when accompanied by ‘why’
How do I know when I have read something?
Why do people struggle with research and what strategies might we use to help them?

**Dyslexia:**

“Dyslexia can be described as a continuum of difficulties in learning to read, write and/or spell, which persist despite the provision of appropriate learning opportunities. These difficulties often do not reflect an individual's cognitive abilities and may not be typical of performance in other areas.”

(Scottish Government, 2015)
Dyslexia Gold, N.D.
Why do people struggle with research and what strategies might we use to help them?

Students whose first language is not English / International Students

- Language
- Culture
- Identity
“People learn and use literacy in specific sociocultural contexts, and the ways they use texts are associated with relations of power and ideology as these inform and underlie meaning-making.”

(Green and Kostogriz, 2009)
“You can critically think in your own language but in English, you have to think about what is being said, about the words, and that takes too long so you don’t critically think. You’re so exhausted from comprehending what is being said, especially with journals because they’re really complicated, that critical thinking is just not an option anymore.” Brookes International Masters Student

“I don’t have the right to say this article is bad.” Brookes International PhD student

“I couldn’t ask for help because I have it in my head that I was here on my own and you study and you do it yourself and asking for help is a kind of failure. You can’t even ask.... I didn’t communicate much with my tutors in the first year, the second year I did much more and I needed to. And I discovered that this was okay, that it was normal. It took a long time.”

Brookes International Undergraduate Student
Why do people struggle with research and what strategies might we use to help them?

1. Big reading lists
2. Too much choice
3. Can’t find what looking for
4. Insufficiently focused research agenda
5. Lack of confidence in creating research agenda that student owns
6. Reading too passively
7. Problems in processing written language e.g. dyslexia
8. English as an additional language
9. Cultural barriers to learning
10. Fear of missing something important
11. Mental health issues
12. Physical health issues
Conclusion

• How to study effectively is not obvious and students need to engaged with reflection on how to study effectively at the earliest opportunity.
• Awareness of the diverse range of student needs leads to more effective practice in supporting students.
• We need to address issues of ‘being’ as well as ‘doing.’
• We need to help students understand not only ‘what’ to do but ‘why’.
• We need to meet every student where they are.
References


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We would love to live in a word where on day one students went into the library and asked how it all worked....
Advice to your younger self....

Need to remember what becoming a university student was like. I was not particularly confident – school had disagreed with me, told I was not university material, but I had a lot of enthusiasm. ACTIVITY: Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to your younger self about how to do well in studying (10 mins followed by feedback)
Advice to your younger self feedback....
How to study effectively is not obvious. Unfortunately, many students begin from the assumption that it is.

Discussion point
It would be great if they came to Upgrade and asked questions like these, questions we frequently get but almost never until a few months into a course. The reality is not like that but in this session we look at how we might help by acknowledging that skills are only part of the issue and that identity matters just as much. We will think about some of the more common issues whilst recognising a huge diversity of different needs.
Academic success is not just about ways of doing, but ways of being.
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“You can’t ask us that. It wasn’t covered in the lectures.”

“I’m not an academic.”

There are several ‘types’ here for discussion: the teacher training student who is not making connections between theory and practice. The international student who thinks the purpose of the student is just to repeat right answers which are whatever the teacher says is the right answer,
‘What’ and ‘how’ questions only make sense when accompanied by ‘why’

On the one hand I talk to academic staff who don’t understand why their students struggle with referencing and on the other hand I meet students who get incredibly worried about whether they have put all their commas and full-stops in the right place. When teaching referencing we have to get to the logic of it; why it is the way it is and that invariably means a broad view of what we mean when we say referencing – more often than not confusion about formatting is also linked to a lack of confidence on how to decide what to read, how to read critically, synthesise and so on.
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At this point I want us to start to think not only about our past experiences but the diversity of student need.
For many it begins with issues of phonological processing - the sounds of words, but there are people for whom it can involve a fair amount of visual stress; it can also be about the speed of processing words – so I have met students who are looking at a page and their eyes are settling on this phrase but the meaning isn’t settling until they’ve moved further on. I have found that it is quite common for many students to display a characteristic of many dyslexic students of getting lost in a sentence so reading in such a close-up way that they don’t get a sense of what the whole piece means.
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Language  Culture  Identity

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