Open Research Online

THU: Listening To Students With ASD In Higher Education (Gill Marshall)

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Cloud created by:

Gill Marshall
4 January 2018

Abstract:

⟩ **What is the experience of students with ASD in higher education?**

⟩ **What are the challenges for students with autism in HE?**

⟩ **What kinds of learning work best for students with ASD?**

⟩ **What technologies can be used?**

⟩ **Is universal design the answer?**

It should be recognised that young people with autism who are starting university have often come from a school system that produced the following statements:

"We are stuck in a system that wants the child to fail before help is offered." (Parent)

"Autistic pupils are probably the SEN group I need the most guidance with and have received the least guidance on." (A teacher)

"The school shattered my confidence – they had no understanding … they were unable to provide 'reasonable adjustments'." (Young person on autism spectrum)

(Quotes from NAS campaign email launching the #HeldBack campaign, http://nas-email.org.uk/YA3-5BI2K-FFA2G5ROAC/cr.aspx?v=1)

It is imperative that, on entering higher education after such a negative experience, students should feel that they no longer have to fight to achieve basic rights to study and work towards their personal goals. Students on the autistic spectrum are relatively invisible in the disabled student community unless they disclose. Disclosure is an issue for many who will have experienced years of bullying and spent much of their lives trying to 'fit in' with the norms and expectations of their society. Understanding of

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the condition is poor both in society generally and among their teachers and peers. Support in campus-based universities exists but is patchy and frequently depends on the student asking for help, thereby disclosing to their teachers and peers. This often happens only when the student has reached crisis point.

I will look at the challenges that face students with autism by exploring their social online spaces and listening to their stories. More and more of these blogs, videos and presentations are beginning to shine a light on ASD and give a voice to those who have previously been ashamed of who they are. Some 'Autistics' are radicalized, taking control of their media, championing neurodiversity and demanding to be heard and respected for who they are rather than being labelled as disabled and needing support.

Many autistic people have unique skills and abilities that current educational practices, and society in general, are unable to even see, let alone unlock and develop to their true potential.

I will investigate current academic research that looks at how students with ASD are being supported, or not, and what recommendations are being made.

I will touch on the political and economic climate that determines how these students are currently treated and how social and technical solutions can encourage and achieve inclusion. Policy and practice should be based on listening to students' voices. ASD students know what kinds of learning and support might work for them, we just have to listen.

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[Anita Naoko Pilgrim](#)
6:33pm 4 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

This looks so great, Gill.

Are you looking at a way of collecting the students' own stories, which they have put up in open resources such as blogs and vlogs? Then those of us who will be teaching them could get a better understanding of their world from the inside by reading them through?

That would be so helpful. I guess that would be turning an open resource into an open educational resource - as it would educate us teachers about the world of ASD students. And it would support their education. There is a nice kind of circularity to that! I bet you could get a cool diagram of it in one of those animation apps :-)

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[Gill Marshall](#)
3:06pm 5 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

Thanks for the suggestion Anita. I was thinking of this but perhaps not in the clear way that you've expressed it. I will try to include this idea in the final version. It helps to know that as a teacher you would find it a useful resource.

[Steven Durant-Burgin](#)
9:33pm 21 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Gill,

I am really looking forward to your presentation as I have only recently discovered that I am on the ASD (more towards Asperger's) and at being 46 years' old it has allowed me to understand myself better than I did when I completed my BSc in Computing and was only diagnosed with Anxiety & Depression. I found it very difficult as a mature student and found myself being easily distracted away from my studies.

It will be interesting to see your findings around the support that is available in HE. I work in the FE sector (mainly those in-work and unemployed) and the support around ASD is very patchy, solely depending on how the company sees mental health as well as ASD. Thankfully the company that works for Inspire to Independence are very good and we do have people who have disclosed and they get as much support as they need.

[Richard Sharp](#)
11:04pm 24 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Gill.

I'll be interested to hear what you're covering about Universal Design. Perhaps you will be referring to Meyer, CAST, and/or National Centre for Universal Design for Learning ? Will you be discussing forums and systems of online social learning from the point of view of UD - as a method of supporting choice and supplying 'multiple means of enagement' ?

[Claire Richardson](#)
3:37pm 4 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

I am looking forward to your talk, Gill.

It is my impression that there are an increasing number of students with autism choosing to study online course, for example with the Open University. For some of these students, participation in online forums and tutorials may be a barrier to education, so I will welcome more resources on how to most appropriately support these students in that context.

[Denise McDonough](#)
6:38pm 10 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Gill, A reference in your abstract statements would help defend your assertions. I got called out on this and it is an easy way to show your reading research and gain a few points. Such an important topic, so many people have been misdiagnosed, as mentioned above and often made to feel worse or ostracised in the 'slow class' as it was called in my school. Learners and teachers need to understand how differently we all see the world and learn.

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