



... as long as positive learning outcomes based on high levels of literacy remain connected to 'intellect'*, learning barriers attributable to even a *social* construction of dyslexia are likely to remain, no matter how the syndrome is defined**.

* MacDonald, 2009
** Cameron & Billington, 2015

Fix the learner? Change the system?

- So a dilemma arises about whether or not to (somehow) identify learning differences. On the one hand, there is a clear and strong argument that favours changing the system of education and learning so that difference is irrelevant, whilst on the other, the pragmatists argue that taking such an approach is idealistic and unachievable and that efforts should be focused on finding better and more adaptable ways to 'fix' the learner.
- In the short term at least the pragmatists' approach is the more likely one to be adopted but in doing so, constructing an identification process for learning differences that attributes *positiveness* onto the learning identity of the individual rather than burdens them with negative perceptions of the reality of difference would seem to be a preference.
- This is important for many reasons, not the least of which is that an assessment/identification/diagnosis that focuses on deficit or makes the 'subject' feel inadequate or incompetent is likely to be problematic however skilfully it may be disguised as a more neutral process. Not the least this may be due to the lasting,

negative perception that an identification of dyslexia often brings, commonly resulting in higher levels of anxiety, depressive symptoms, feelings of inadequacy and other negative-emotion experiences which are widely reported (eg: Carroll & Iles, 2006, Ackerman et al, 2007, Snowling et al, 2007).

- A more enlightened view is one that rails against the deficit-discrepancy model of learning difference. It seeks to displace entrenched ideology rooted in medical and disability discourses with one which advocates a paradigm shift in the responsibility of the custodians of knowledge and enquiry in our places of scholarship to one which more inclusively embraces learning and study diversity.
- There is a growing advocacy that takes a social-constructionist view to change the system rather than change the people (eg: Pollak, 2009), much in line with the Universal Design for Learning agenda briefly presented earlier.
- Bolt-on 'adjustments', well-meaning as they may be, will be discarded because they remain focused on the 'disabling' features of the individual and *add* to the already burdensome experiences of being part of a new learning community - a factor which of course, affects everyone coming to university.