Rory Lees-Oakes: “I'm really pleased to welcome Yvonne Lomas who is a teacher. She holds a Master’s degree in teaching, a first degree in information and library management where part of that is teaching people advanced and rapid reading skills. She also holds a level six teaching qualification with a module of advanced needs. And there’s something else that we need to share, isn't there Yvonne?”

Yvonne Lomas: “Yes, there is. Are you going to share it or do you want me to share it?”

Rory Lees-Oakes: “You want to share it?” Yvonne Lomas: “Yes, so I’m Rory’s daughter and he’s asked me to come on the show and talk about the challenges we face in our studies and around the work place with being dyslexic, and also to provide some tips on handling these challenges.”
Rory Lees-Oakes: “A big part of your work is helping children with additional needs. This is also an interest of yours because you're borderline dyslexic. I seem to remember that before you went to university, you had a dyslexia test and you were considered borderline dyslexic. And in fact, you were treated as dyslexic when you went through your studies, weren't you?”

Yvonne Lomas: “I was "yeah". So, basically all the way through primary school and secondary school I found it quite challenging. To get work completed and reading books was an absolute nightmare and to be honest with you, to this day is still a bit of a nightmare for me. This is because I read from the top of the page to the bottom, just like everybody does, but by the time I get to the bottom of the page I sometimes forget what’s been said at the top. So that was quite a challenge.

It was in secretary school especially when I was studying for my GSD, that the door really opens form. When I got to college and was doing my qualifications, I found it quite challenging to get the written elements completed. Student services actually said that I could be dyslexic and sent me for the assessment.

When you do get to be assessed during adulthood it may not always come out that you are dyslexic. It may come out that you are borderline, like myself. You usually find that with people with dyslexia who were adults who haven’t had it kicked off, and because you learn coping strategies.
Even if you are borderline, you are still eligible for help and support. The support that I got really helped me and it opened quite a few doors for me so it is something that I'm really passionate about and is something that you know. I want to share this with everybody and try to give some tips to people to try and help people as much as I can."

Rory Lees-Oakes: "Well thank you Yvonne, and I think you make a really important point there and I'm so pleased that you've inherited your father's dyslexia gene." I don't know if this is genetic but it's really interesting about the coping strategies you talked about which you developed when you were assessed as an adult or at least a young adult.

It was quite difficult to determine if you were dyslexic, because you've developed so many means of working around it, or coping with it. This really leads me on to the first question, Yvonne. There'll be a lot of people listening to what you have to say. What exactly is dyslexia? Is there a kind of a statement for dyslexia or a quote about this lecture that could be helpful?"

Yvonne Lomas: "Yes, I've had a look at the British Dyslexia Association website quite a lot and they've got some useful resources on there about dyslexia and I found a few really good quotes actually. I'll just read out to everybody.

According to the British Dyslexia Association 2001, dyslexia is defined as a combination of abilities and difficulties which affect the learning process in one or more areas. This includes reading, writing, language and numerous other areas. Some people may not be aware of it, but it affects all people.
10% of the United Kingdoms' population are dyslexic with 4% being severely affected. That’s quite a recent statistic from the British dyslexia Association that was published in 2018."

Rory Lees-Oakes: “Yeah, I mean I think that’s really interesting and we are both literally reading off the same page because we got the same sheet here.

I think so many people with dyslexia experience many different learning difficulties. Some with dyslexia may find it difficult to read books, texts, or websites as the words may feel jumbled, or all the information is right at the top of the page and they have forgotten by the time they got to the bottom of the page. That sounds like your experience Yvonne. And then some people may find it difficult to concentrate when it comes to putting the pen to paper.” I just want to outline if there’s a list of the kind of things or challenges that may give someone an indication that they might be dyslexic?"

Yvonne Lomas: “Yes, there can be different indicators to a person being dyslexic. Concentration span is very short and they may experience slow reading. Some learners that I’ve worked with in the past may miss out on words when they read a sentence and some learners struggled with copying words down. We used quite a lot of whiteboards especially with the job that I’m doing at the moment. It’s really helpful because then I can just write something down and the learners can copy it.

And sometimes you do find that some learners can’t copy down texts that’s been written for them before note-taking or not being able to copy down things properly and forget the information.
So, you might read the same information again and again. This is something that I definitely have a challenge with. You will start to read at the top of the page and by the time you get to the bottom of the page you have forgotten what the story was about. The piece of information is processed again and again and then you mix up letters for example. This is quite a common occurrence for some people who may be dyslexic.

And although the podcast is about dyslexia, there might be people who are not dyslexic who are listeners."

Rory Lee-Oakes: "I think that's really important Yvonne because you've produced a super-duper handout and what you've done is you've broken down the difficulties that people with dyslexia might have and you have provided the tips that you would recommend. And like you said, it might be that some people just find this information helpful in general.

So, even if you're not dyslexic don't turn off the podcast. Have a listen to this because this is sub stuff that is really good for learning in general.

When we look at reading. What are the challenges with reading that someone with dyslexia might face?"

Yvonne Lomas: “ Mostly it’s getting the D’s and B’s mixed up and also getting certain words muddled up. And going back to the issue with the reading and not remembering or absorbing what was being said.” That's just a few of the common elements that somebody with dyslexia may face"
Rory Lee-Oakes: “Yeah, you've also put on your list that the information doesn't go in and you may have to read information over again.” That's a big challenge but what tips have you got on reading?“

Yvonne Lomas: “You can use a review sheet. I've got a copy of this that I will email to you. The review sheet is basically like a A4 sheet that you use to put keywords from the paragraph you read. Just a short summary of what the paragraph was about. There may be quotes which you can also write down.

When you come to the end of the page you look at your review sheet and you look at all the information that you've written down. I used this method when I was doing quite a lot of studying for my undergraduate and degree. This will help so that you don’t have to read all the information on the piece in the box again.

Another method that you could use are audiobooks and especially with YouTube being widely available you can get fantastic results. If there's a book in a university library or in a college library, just ask the staff if they've got it in an audio version, because sometimes that piece of information goes in a little bit better than just reading it from the book.

Then there is the text to speech software. I think some versions of Microsoft Word have started doing this now and I think Keynote has this option to use. That's always a good tool. You can download this from the internet. You just put it in your Microsoft Word and you highlight the text you press the bottom and is like a special text to speech or speech exporting and it will read the information for you.
But again, it’s only certain versions of word and not every version that will be able to do this.

Rory Lees-Oakes: “And you can buy bespoke software like dragon also. You’ll use a headset like we’re wearing today. And you can speak and the microphone will correct you. We talked about audiobooks, podcasts and a review sheet which is an information sheet that basically summarizes the information.

What about writing? You mentioned not knowing how to start a piece of writing and never knowing what to say in a piece of writing.”

Yvonne Lomas: “That’s another challenge that I was faced with in the past. When you get given an assignment title or a portfolio or a piece of work that you’ve got to put together. I spent a good couple of hours just looking at the assignment brief and wondering how I’m actually going to start it. And I’m sure a lot of people have been in that situation in the past. I use a mind map which is a piece of software that’s actually online and it’s free. I’ll put the link to that on the bottom of this audio piece.

You just you log on and create your mind map where you can put keywords and link pieces of information to it. You can save it online, and that’s the good thing about it. You can spend 10 to 15 minutes doing a certain piece of your assignment and you can have a cup of tea and then go back to it again and then your mind is a little bit fresh.

I found PowerPoint also really useful because you can use a lot of bullet points for certain key words and at the bottom you’ve got a facility where you can actually write additional notes. So, when you present
your presentation you can look at your notes at the bottom of the screen, rather than having your cue cards in front of you. This makes it a little bit easier for you to carry and relay that information. You can also use this function in PowerPoint when you do an assignment.”

Rory Lees-Oakes: “We received some really good tips there and we’re going to put the links to all these resources that Yvonne has mentioned and has spoken about in the show notes and we’re also going to put them in the handout so you can click on that link and go and have a look at them. You’ve also written down format work and grammar.

Yvonne, you also mentioned looking over work but never being able to spot mistakes. That sounds very familiar as people who write to me on a regular basis will often tell me. Missing vital pieces of information is not a problem that I particularly have. What would you say is the key there for format of work and grammar?”

Yvonne Lomas: “When I was writing my masters it was 20,000 words so you can imagine that is was quite a challenge for me to read over it so what I did is I asked somebody else to read my paragraphs that I have written. And if there are any words that I had spelt wrong or if it was a different type of word that I needed to put into that assignment I've got that support.

It could be anybody like your husband for example. He can be reading parts of the assignment and suggest corrections. Rather than saying “is” you can say “was”. It’s always good to have somebody to help review your work. It doesn’t have to be a tutor it could be somebody in the family. If you’ve got a daughter or a son, they could have a look through it as well.”
Rory Lees-Oakes: “You won’t be asking you dad to do that, would you?”

Yvonne Lomas: “The second tip would be to build a checklist with all the
information you need and then tick it off when needed so when you get
your assignment maybe having a word with your tutor and see if there
are any key theories or some key elements of counselling that needs to
be included in your assignment. Then you can write it down as you’re
going through your assignment. I’m not sure about counselors so I do
apologize but, it may be a certain theorist that you’ve got to quote or
mention something about. So, it’s a big tick if you’ve got that in your
assignments. It’s basically just to have an assignment plan.”

Rory Lees-Oakes: “That is a really good tip. And also, we do have
checklists in the CSR, counseling study resource, that you can have a
look at. We call it cheat lists, but they’re not really cheating. It’s
rather a list of things that within the theory you should have in your
assignment. You go on to talk about handwriting, note-taking and
copying work. And you go on to say that some people may have difficulty
holding your pen incorrectly and not being able to read your own
handwriting. You know this sounds so familiar.”

Yvonne Lomas: “That is exactly like me as well. I don’t think I was able
to hold a pen properly until I was in secondary school. I used to hold my
pen like a chisel and again both of us associate with that experience of
not being able to be read our own writing. And I know with the learners
that I’ve worked with in the past and when they’ve got a piece of work
for me and they’ve really put a lot of effort into it. When I have to
mark it, it's been a little bit difficult to read.
So, the things that I suggest, because I find especially when I'm holding a pen or a pencil that my middle finger gets quite sore. You can get these pain grips which wasn't there in the eighties when I was at primary school. You can pick them up for a couple of pounds from for E-bay. They are worth having a look at.

I'm a bit of a stationary geek to be quite honest with you so when I walk around in Tesco and Paper Chase and all the various stationary outlets, they have all these snazzy pens. You get these gel pens with grip around. They're really good pens to use and I know it sounds really strange in saying it, but maybe there's just a certain make of pen that suits you. And I see with some of the children that I'm working with at the moment and I know when they used certain type of pens it did them really well.

So, again looking at the type of pen that you use also when you doing your notes or your lectures or going into seminars, see if you can borrow a computer. It may be worth going to student services and just say I'm really struggling with the writing element of things and see if the college or university can lend you anything. Even if it's just for the lecture or the seminar and then you can email your notes and have print outs available when you get home.

I got the support while I was doing my undergraduate degree and I was given a dicta phone that I could to put in the front of the class and then I could record everything what the lecturer was saying. But again, that was at the discretion of the lecturers so don't just start recording. Do ask first if it would be okay to record.”
Rory Lees-Oakes: "So find a pen that suits you. It might be that a certain pen suits your handwriting style, record your notes or borrow a laptop from learner services if possible. And record your lectures with the permission of your tutor. Now we go on to spelling and vocabulary, misspelling words and looking at both the correct and incorrect word and thinking that they are spelt the same. It’s not a problem that I have. Yes, it is. I’m learning so much here Yvonne. What would your tips for me be Yvonne?"

Yvonne Lomas: "I suppose with any course a good glossary is key. You get this at the back of the book and these are key words that you can use throughout the course.

What I would do is maybe speak to your tutor and if you have a few spelling differences just see if they can recommend like a word list. I’ve used it throughout the nine and a half years of being in education and have seen with the learners that I’ve worked with and they really do benefit from it. At least if you’ve got like a vocabulary list, you’re able to pick out all the words that you need to use on a frequent basis.

If you’re using Microsoft Word the autocorrect feature in your word processing software is really good and I rely heavily on Microsoft Word. I do quite a lot of my work now via computer and I suppose the majority of people do so autocorrect is a fantastic feature."

Rory Lees-Oakes: “So, I think that’s a really interesting one building up a vocabulary list. So you know, if you’re a counselor student in suggested values, conditions of worth, organism itself, I’ve seen some very creative writing of organism itself.
All I will say is always use the spellcheck if your using organism itself or you can end up having a word that you don't really intend to have. Now you go on to talk about organizing work. You said that sometimes for people who are dyslexic notes and information may be chaotic and storing notes and maybe not being able to find them.

I speak for my own frame of reference there. Unless my desk is a complete tip and unless it's there, I can't see it. If I put it away so much I just cannot remember where I put it. Is that unusual for a dyslexic person or sort of just part of the course?"

Yvonne Lomas: "I think it's down to individuals but personally I am the same as you. I live in an odd piece of chaos from time to time. I know that my old office, at the previous place that I've worked just before the summer holidays, my desk was always a mess and I'm sure the colleagues who shared an office with me can relate to that. I think it is quite common and maybe one of the signs of dyslexia but you can make things really easy for yourself.

I found in the past it's about organizing yourself a little bit more compared to somebody that does not have dyslexia. So, for example making sure you've got ring binders, making sure if you using your laptop during lectures and on college courses that you've got a desktop file for everything so that you can just put your word documents in certain subject areas.

And storing notes if a lecturer gives you handouts. When I was doing my teacher training course there was loads of handouts. I used to do a three hour lecture every Wednesday and by the end of it your bag was heavier by the week with all the handouts which was fantastic and what I made sure was that I had ring bind designed which was clearly
marked. I made sure I had a certain cupboard within the house where I kept all these resources because when I was growing up, I think you can remember that, they were all over the bedroom and we would slip on them always.

So, it’s kind of just being organized more than anything else. And I think it’s one of the things especially if you’re just coming into education or you’ve had a long break and it’s the first time in education. As far as expanding ways in which you can work and having your own kind of routine, it’s worth having the look at and you can get some fantastic folders now and notepads and dividers. There is loads of choices to choose from and they’ve got quite reasonable prices. I’ve not got shares in Paper Chase though.”

Rory Lees-Oakes: “Well I have to say this for in case iTunes is listening, all the other supermarkets and purveyors of stationary are available.

So, the final one and I know this frightens a lot of people and certainly as a lecturer I know it’s something that scared a lot of my students and that’s oral and speaking skills and it is part of many courses. An oral presentation is usually asked for and you’ve talked about worrying about making a contribution in class e.g. oral presentations. And I’ve seen that with my students. You’ve given three very powerful tips here Yvonne.”

Yvonne Lomas: “The first one is making sure you rehearse your presentation. If you’ve done a slide presentation on PowerPoint make sure that you know what’s on each slide. If you have somebody at home, it doesn’t have to be a teacher or a lecturer, that you can rehearse to. It could be your husband, your son or your daughter, your mom or dad.
Just make sure that you’re confident with what you’re saying and that you know what’s on each slide.

And the second point is, I think we’ve covered that really, is using PowerPoint and I do think the majority of people do use PowerPoint for their presentation now and again it’s a fantastic resource. It’s got the note section at the bottom so you can put your notes down and they’ve got some really snazzy backgrounds that you can use.

And then the third point would be to use cue cards when presenting to help you remember key points. So, if these certain elements of your presentation where you just keep forgetting and blank out, just write it down on a cue card and when you present your information you can just look at them and it’s a bit of a memory jogger.

These are the three main ones that I would suggest when you’re delivering a presentation or doing some public speaking.”

Rory Lees-Oakes: “Effectively people are thinking what are cue cards. They are factory like post card, a six by four-inch piece of card. Almost like the ones you have your photographs printed on. You write on and you then you just turn them over and you just read off them. I know a lot of people do that in fact I was looking at the President of the United States giving the speech of the day and he had these electronic cue cards that were on either side of him which he could see. I think that’s really useful.

Yvonne I’d like to thank you because I know that your dyslexia never stood in the way of your dreams and you effectively hold three degrees and you’re employed in education. So, I think that is a really great story
and I think we should go and have a celebrated cup of tea. Should we have a cup of tea?”

Yvonne Lomas: “Yeah, I will have an Earl Grey.”

Rory Lees-Oakes: “Would you like to say something to the audience before we go.”

Yvonne Lomas: “Oh, thank you so much for listening and I hope the information that I have passed on is of some help to you and good luck with you courses and hopefully you will invite me back in the future dad.”

Rory Lees-Oakes: “I’m sure we will so get the kettle on. I will see you later.”