The initial report is that the dyslexic population in their 5-year study graduated with BETTER reading skills than the normotypical (non-dyslexic) group did at the beginning! This confirms the studies by Dr Cooper, where 84% of the dyslexic population outperformed a group of non-dyslexic university professors! The dyslexic group all more than doubled their incoming R.E. Scores.

RESULTS FROM 2018 ITALIAN STUDY OF 260 STUDENTS

Reading as a Multi-Layer Activity: Training Strategies at Text Level

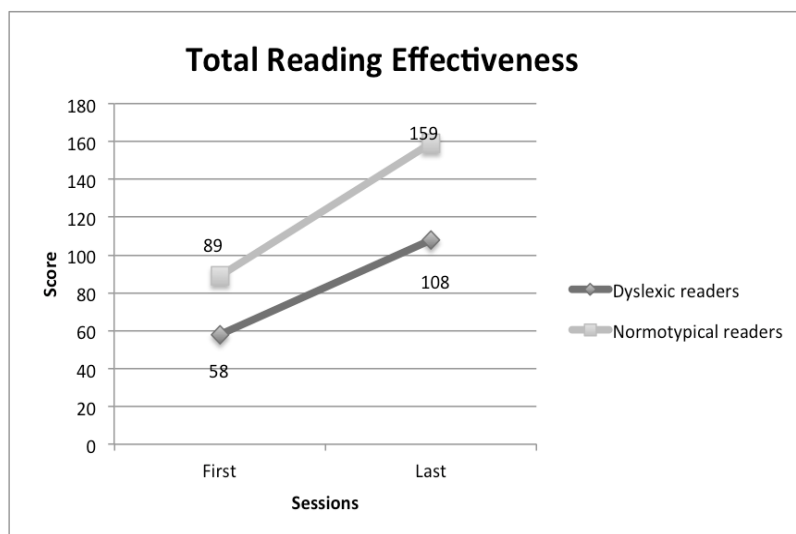Professor Francesca Santulli and Dr. Melissa Scagnelli

Fig. 12.3 shows the average measure of Combined Reading Effectiveness as comprehension per minute, considering initial time at first and at last test, for the two subgroups the former by 86% and the latter by 78.7%ups. Both dyslexic and normotypical readers significantly improve their global performance, the former by 86% and the latter by 78.7%. Also, for this global measure, at the end of the course, dyslexic readers perform better than normotypical readers at the beginning.

3-The SuperReading Course

The SuperReading course was developed in the US by Ron Cole, who, as a life coach, had realised the crucial role of reading and comprehension for the professional success of his clients. In the mid-90s, considering that existing speed-reading programmes did not guarantee adequate comprehension levels, he experimented new techniques and combined them in a course, which he offered to his clients, mostly adult managers (Cole, 2009). The course relies on the fundamental principles of metacognition (Wray, 1994) and on the analysis of the different variables influencing comprehension (Ellis, 1993). At the same time, it emphasises the emotional and motivational components, and includes a special reading practice, named eye-hopping.

Metacognitive abilities are considered to be crucial for academic success (Pressley, 2002; Pressley & Gaskins, 2006; Hacker et al., 2009; Williams & Atkins, 2009; Vanderswalmen et al., 2010), and research has shown that they can influence the performance of reading and comprehension tasks (Hacker et al., 1998; Anderson & Ambruster, 1984; Baker & Beall, 2009; Roeschl-Heils et al., 2003). Good readers have better metacognitive knowledge than

poor readers (Brown, 1980; Baker & Beall, 2009). The adoption of metacognitive strategies allows a more effective approach to texts: the reader activates background knowledge, anticipates difficulties, reflects on how to single out salient information and memorize it, and is able to self-evaluate his/her level of understanding. On the other hand, poor readers also have poor metacognitive abilities (De Beni & Pazzaglia 1997; Butler 1998; Klassen 2002, 2006; De Beni & Pazzaglia 2003; Job & Klassen 2012), which makes it necessary to include metacognition in any comprehensive support programme.

Another important component of academic success is motivation, which is closely linked to other emotional aspects. Good students believe in their good capacities and have a high level of self-efficacy (VanderStoep et al., 1996). As a consequence, they can manage anxiety more easily, and thus perform better (Kleijn et al., 1994). Research shows that high levels of anxiety compromise performance, as anxiety influences the working memory, and interferes with concentration and capacity of finding suitable strategies (McCraty, 2007; Ruffins, 2007). Vice versa, good levels of self-esteem can be of help in stressful situations (De Beni et al., 2003). In their first school years, students with SpLDs become soon aware of their difficulties, and realize that they need more time and effort to obtain results that are often poorer than those of their peers. This in turn can have negative consequences for their self-esteem and for their perceived self-efficacy (Martino et al., 2011). The emotional components of SpLDs have often been under scrutiny, yet results are not always consistent (Novita, 2016). However, some of them suggest that in the academic context levels of anxiety and self-esteem in students with SpLDs are different from those of the normotypical population, while this is not the case in other domains (Riddick et al., 1999; Hellendoorn & Ruijssenaar, 2000; Frederickson & Jacobs, 2001; Novita, 2016).

As mentioned, the Super Reading course works on both metacognition and emotional components. The standard format comprises six sessions of 2.30/3 hours each, over a period of nine weeks. The course is led by a coach (Angel & Amar, 2005), whose task is to illustrate and comment on the different techniques, to motivate and support the participants, creating a positive environment for learning and practice. The approach to the reading task is multifaceted (Cooper, 2009; Cole, 2009), emphasising metacognitive skills, memorization techniques as well as self-empowerment. Yet, the distinguishing feature of Super Reading is eye-hopping, a training technique to be practiced both during sessions and as homework. Reading texts are printed in close columns, each of them containing 2-5 words; readers must "hop" with their eye from the middle of one column to the middle of the other, following the movement of their first finger. The practice starts with 2-word columns, moving to the higher level as soon as the exercise is performed at conveniently high speed.

Cole administered reading tests during the course, which showed significant improvements in the reading abilities of participants. Moreover, he noticed that participants with reading problems obtained higher rates of improvement compared with neurotypical readers. A pilot study carried out in London (South Bank University, Language and Literacy Unit) with 15 dyslexic subjects supported this claim (Cooper, 2009).

Further data gathered with a population of 91 adult dyslexic readers confirmed the previous results (Cooper, 2012). In 2012, IULM University signed an agreement with Cooper and Cole, to be entitled to translate and adapt the course materials to the Italian context (for a more detailed description of the translation procedures, s. Santulli & Scagnelli, 2017). Since then, the course has been taught to 18 groups, 10 of them at IULM University, where since 2016 it has become part of the curriculum, awarding 3 credits. Four courses were held in other universities (Modena e Reggio, Venezia Ca' Foscari, Bocconi University), one in a high school in Brescia (Liceo Luzzago), three in a centre for support to dyslexic children

(Cooperativa Crescere, Reggio Emilia). As in the English version, reading tests are regularly administered during the course. Data have been gathered and processed, and partial results have been already published (Scagnelli et al., 2014; Santulli & Scagnelli, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).

4.4-Data analysis

The analysis of data was carried out by an expert in statistics, Francesco Della Beffa, using the IBM SPSS software. The differences between first and last test performances were analysed for the whole population, as well as separately for the two sub-groups using Wilcoxon signed ranks test, for all the variables considered in the tests. Differences between the dyslexic and non-dyslexic population were analysed using Mann Whitney U test.
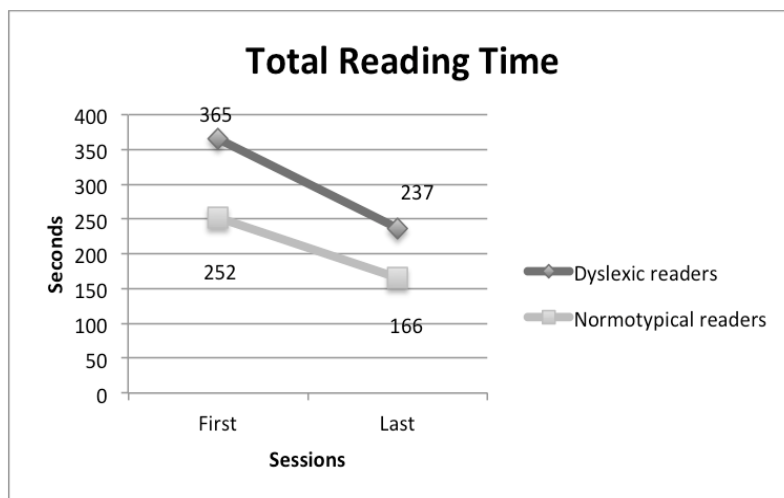
4.5-Results

Fig. 12.1 shows the average measures of Total Reading Time at first and at last test, both for dyslexic and normotypical readers. The decrease is evident for both groups, with a similar pattern: dyslexic readers reduce their reading time by 35%, normotypical readers by 34%. At the end of the course dyslexic readers perform better than normotypical readers at the beginning.

4.6-Discussion

The results obtained so far consistently show that in a few weeks participants to the SuperReading courses improve their reading performance from the point of view of both speed and comprehension. Moreover, the improvement concerns both normotypical and dyslexic readers. The course can therefore be considered an inclusive instrument to be offered to students and young adults, independently of their reading capacities.

SuperReading   Alchemy Educational Training Ltd   Ron Cole   www.dyslexiainfo.info
+44 (0)7738 666511