

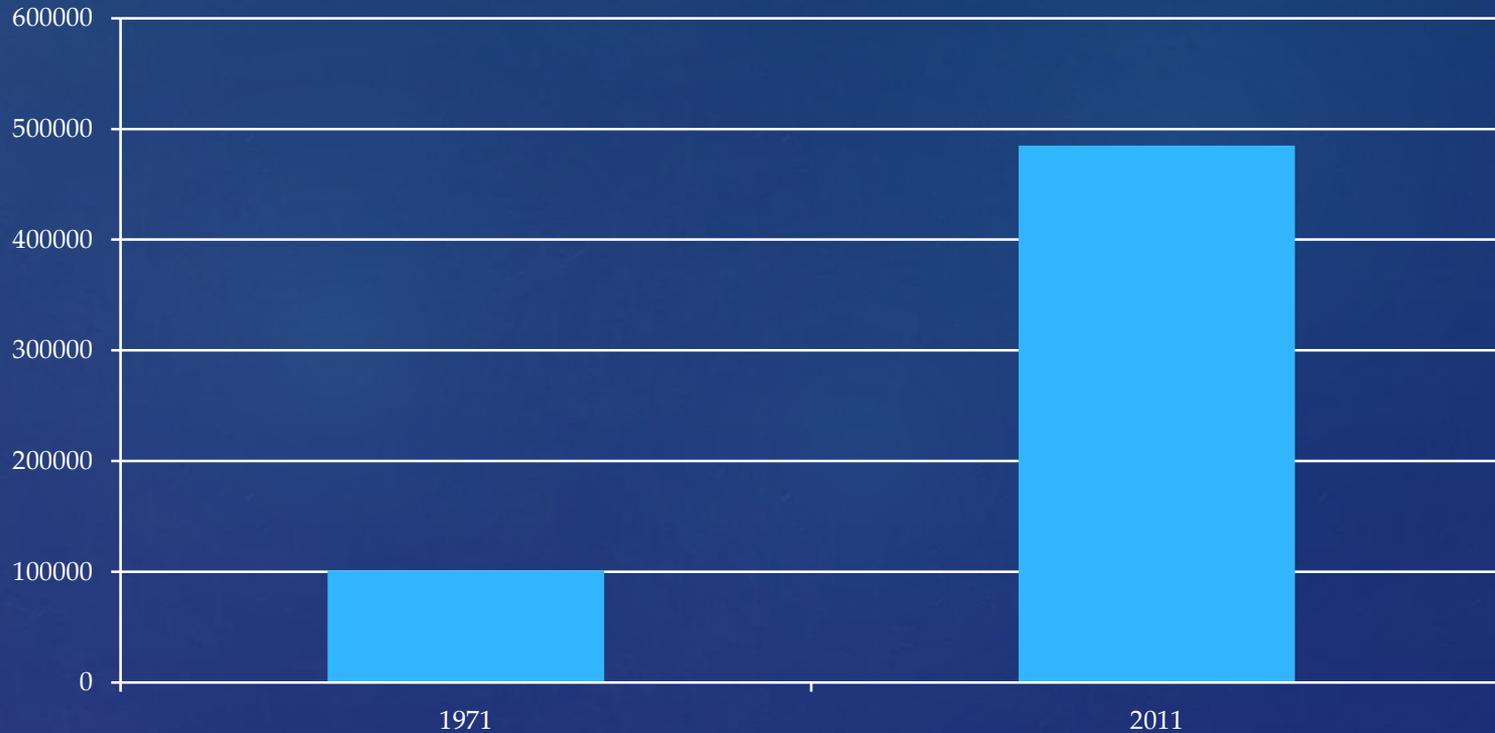
# **Transition to University: Getting it right for students on the Autism Spectrum**

**Dr Kimberley McMahon-Coleman and  
Petria McGoldrick**

**University of Wollongong**



# Student growth in Higher Education



Percentage of 20-24 year olds in Higher Ed (ABS 2012)

# Students with a disability in Higher Education

- Increasing commencing & enrolled numbers of students with a disability (2007 – 2013) – Exploring the Retention & Success of Students with Disability, NCSEHE, 2016
- 5.2% of all HE students had a disability in 2009 (O’Neill, Strnadova & Cumming)
- Reflective of targeted outcomes for diverse student populations in higher education – Bradley report

# Students on the spectrum in Higher Education

- “Burgeoning population” of students on the spectrum at university ( Wenzel & Rowley)
- UOW – currently have registered 30% of all students with ASD who have registered with the Disability Service since 1997
- Two causes – increased diagnosis & high school completion rates
- Prevalence of ASD in general population – 1 in 50 (Falkmer, 2014)

# Students on the spectrum in Higher Education - outcomes

- ASPECT 2013 We Belong study found –
  - 81% of those surveyed commenced tertiary studies
  - 23% abandoned their course
- Most left due to co-morbid mental health and/or unmet learning needs
- Few studies on university students with ASD
- Limited data & best practices still being developed

# Students on the spectrum in Higher Education – Two key truths

1. Best transition planning occurs well in advance
2. Inclusive education approaches work best
  - Not just for students with ASD
  - Outreach touchpoints need to be more –
    - Targeted
    - Timely
    - Systemic &
    - Collaborative

# Students on the spectrum in Higher Education – Two key truths

## 2. Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- Access & opportunity to both support and challenge students' learning needs (Robertson)
- More accessible learning benefits all
- Currently more common in compulsory education
- Challenge that academics have subject expertise but traditionally limited scholarship in teaching & learning

# Assisting students with ASD at university

- Combination of strategies and programs
- Consider individual needs & strengths
- Best accommodations refer to key ideas of transition planning & UDL
- 3 types – social, logistical & academic
  - Social – peer mentoring, social skills
  - Logistical – reduced study load, required class timetable
  - Academic – building academic skills program

# Students with ASD at UOW

- At UOW, we offer a range of accommodations under the three (3) types of accommodations including
  - Early orientation/school liaison
  - Independent Learning Skills Program
  - Adjusted timetable & study load
  - Organisational Mentor Program
  - Peer and/or lab class facilitator
  - ASD training/support to academics
  - Counselling
  - Assistive technology

# Systemic approaches, supplementary teaching

- Identify & explain the 'hidden curriculum', terminology & jargon to ALL students
- Pro-active or pre-emptive models for both
- Avoid 'just in time' & 'just too late'
- Encourage communication & enquiry
- Facilitate self-identification in safe environment
- Active engagement with individual learning support plans

# Tips for academics - expectations

- Orientation programmes not enough
- Make expectations explicit
- Relevant for all students ie. FIF, different cultural backgrounds
- Differences between lecture & tutorial, essays & reports
- Social expectations differ between rooms & roles
- Quiet or 'speak-up'?

# Challenges for academics

- Many do not have formal teacher training
- They are amongst best & brightest students
- Often understand materials quickly & completely
- Teaching 'obvious' material with few pedagogical strategies to learners with atypical learning strategies
- No fault on either part
- Common institutional practices in the HE sector
- Address by systemic change

# Tips for academics - learning differently/teaching inclusively

- Always remember - all students learn differently
- Academics have learned/do learn differently
- Multi-modal information provision
- Visual slides can assist cognition
- Recording lectures
- Allow for repeated learning of concepts

# Tips for academics - learning differently/teaching inclusively

- Intellectual property & fairness – non arguments!
- Read the book
- Refer to Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences
- Identify your own learning preferences!

# Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences

Eight distinct intelligences

- Visual-spatial
- Bodily-kinaesthetic
- Musical
- Interpersonal
- Intrapersonal
- Linguistic
- Logical-mathematical
- Naturalist intelligence

# Tips for academics - learning differently/teaching inclusively

- All instructions clear, concise & multi-modal
- Information in writing for later reference
- Write lists of new or subject-specific words
- Extra time and repetition benefits all students
- “What’s my name” example

# Tips for academics - teaching inclusively

- “Explain more than you think you have to”
- Make clear what constitutes non-compliance, non-attendance, non-submission, etc
- Make consequences clear
- How do students submit their work?
- Scaffolding learning is not just about content
- Students need to know the ‘how to.....’
- Example – different referencing systems in same faculty

# Tips for academics - teaching inclusively

- Good academic writing samples available
- Context is everything
- Reduce the number of abstract examples
- Be aware of how often synonyms & metaphors are used
- Example – baking the cake
- Metaphors can be helpful for some individuals – steam train example

# Tips for academics – feedback & language

- Provide quality feedback
- Avoid using non-examples
- Break-down umbrella terms
- Ask them “What are you testing?”
- Be aware of your language
- Use open-ended questions when checking student’s progress

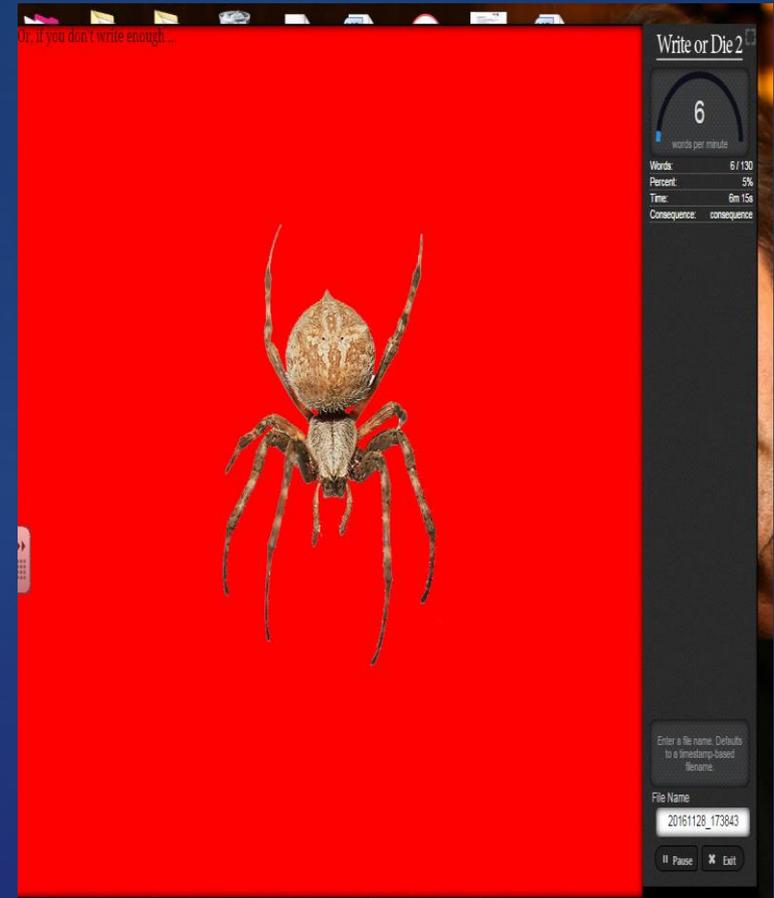
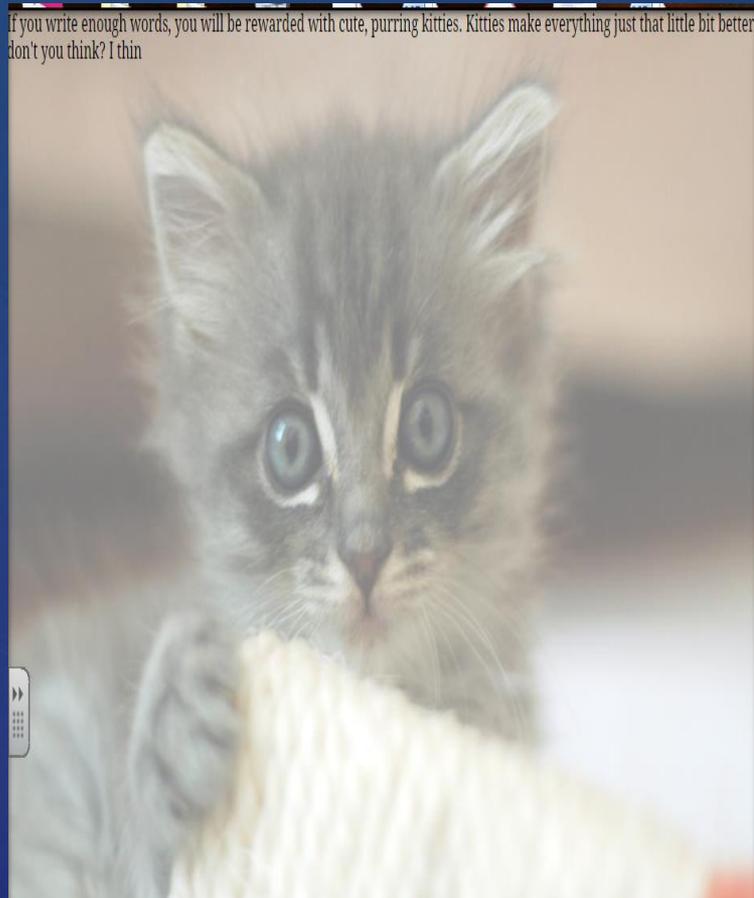
# Tips for academics – executive function

- “Perfectionism/procrastination loop”
- Skills for all students
- Managing competing deadlines
- Teach some task analysis skills
- Breaking the assignment into components
- Interspersed smaller, achievable goals
- Sub-tasks into to do lists – Wunderlist app

# Tips for academics – executive function (cont)

- More skill building for all
- Teach strategies to begin tasks ie. Pomodoro or kitchen timer technique
- To maintain focus – MotivAider, BlockSite, SelfControl, RescueTime
- To start writing – Write or Die

# Multi-modal rewards or consequences for customised words per minute goal



# Final thoughts

- Good inclusive education much in common with good teaching practice
- Changes needed in FYE across the board
- Students with ASD need more knowledge & power
- Still continue to use individualised approaches

1. "If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism," Dr. Stephen Shore.



<http://the-art-of-autism.com/favorite-quotes-about-autism-and-aspergers/>

# More Final thoughts

- Further tips for educators, support staff, students & parents in the book
- A message from Kimberley & Kim –  
“These are students who ... are typically very interested in the subject matter, very motivated to do well, very keen to follow rules, and willing to apply the strategies we share ... They are also largely appreciative of our help.

Don't we wish all students were like that?"

Australian Bureau of Statistics. "Year 12 Attainment (4102.0)." 2012. *Australian Social Trends, March Quarter 2011*. 15 November 2016. <[www.abs.gov.au/socialtrends](http://www.abs.gov.au/socialtrends)>.

Autism Spectrum Australia (ASPECT). "We Belong Study." 2013. <[www.autismspectrum.org.au/sites/default/files/Autism\\_Spectrum\\_WE\\_BELOING\\_Research\\_Report\\_FINAL\\_LR\\_R.pdf](http://www.autismspectrum.org.au/sites/default/files/Autism_Spectrum_WE_BELOING_Research_Report_FINAL_LR_R.pdf)>.

Dixon, Roselyn M. and Kathleen Tanner. "The Experience of Transitioning Two Adolescents with Asperger Syndrome in Academically Focused High Schools." *Australasian Journal of Special Education* 37.1 (2013): 28-48.

Eckes, Suzanne and Theresa A. Ochoa. "Students with Disabilities: Transitioning from High School to Higher Education." *American Secondary Education* 33.3 (2005): 6-20. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41064551>>.

Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic Books, 1993.

—. *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

Garrison-Wade, Dorothy and Jean P. Lehmann. "A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Students with Disabilities' Transition to Community College." *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 33.5 (2009): 415-443.

McMahon-Coleman, Kimberley and Kim Draisma. *Teaching University Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Guide to Developing Academic Capacity and Proficiency*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016.

O'Neill, Sue C., Iva Strnadova and Therese M. Cumming. "Evidence-Based Transition Planning Practices for Secondary Students with Disabilities: What has Australia Signed Up For?" *Australasian Journal of Special Education* 40 (2016): 39-58.

Robertson, Scott Michael. "Neurodiversity, Quality of Life and Autistic Adults: Shifting Research and Professional Focuses onto Real-Life Challenges." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 30.1 (2010). <<http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/1069/1234>>.

Spencer, Sally A. "Universal design for learning: Assistance for teachers in today's inclusive classroom." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning* 1.1 (2011): 10-22. 5 January 2016.  
<<http://files.eric.ed.gov.ezproxy.uow.edu.au/fulltext/EJ1055639.pdf>>.

Strnadova, Iva and Therese M. Cumming. *Lifespan Transitions and Disability: A Holistic Perspective*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

vanBergeijk, Ernst, Ami Klin and Fred. Volkmar. "Supporting More Able Students on the Autism Spectrum: College and Beyond." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 38 (2008): 1359-1370.

Wehman, P. "Individualized Transition Planning: Putting Self-Determination into Action." Wehman, P. (Ed.). *Life Beyond the Classroom: Transition Strategies for Young People with Disabilities*. Baltimore: Brookes, 2006. 71-96.

Wenzel, Christine and Laura Rowley. "Teaching Social Skills and Academic Strategies to College Students with Asperger's Syndrome." *Teaching Exceptional Children* 42.5 (2010): 44-50.

# Thank you

