

Specific Learning Difficulties - Dyslexia

November 2009



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For many years teachers have observed a mysterious anomaly in the classroom. Some children of evident intelligence never learnt to read, write or compute at levels commensurate with their ability.

Conscientious teachers and parents have realised that many of these “failures” are not due to laziness, especially since many of the affected children are amongst the most industrious in the class. Nor do their difficulties appear to result from stupidity since these particular illiterate children usually exhibit brightness in oral language fluency.

Many parents have been bewildered by the fact that their child has failed to master basic literacy and numeracy skills despite being generally articulate and apparently intelligent in the home environment.

Some of these children have come to be known as dyslexic or suffering from a specific learning difficulty.

Early recognition of the dyslexic child is of vital importance if effective specialist help is to be given soon enough and parents and teachers should be aware of the set of symptoms which can constitute dyslexia. Some of these are as follows :

- Discrepancy between apparent intelligence and performance at reading and/or spelling.
- Bizarre spelling.
- Confusion between “b” and “d” (other letters may be reversed or inverted).
- Difficulty over distinguishing left and right
- Poor short term memory.
- Difficulty over repeating long words.
- Difficulty over repeating numbers – especially in reverse order.
- Difficulty memorising multiplication tables.
- Difficulty remembering months of the year.
- History of clumsiness, late walking, taling etc.
- Difficulties at birth or pregnancy
- Family history of similar learning difficulties

If a child over eight years possesses three or more of the above set of symptoms it is possible that he or she is dylexic.

Some publishers have produced early screening tests to identify children from as young as 4 years old who may be at risk from dyslexia and then a full battery of diagnostic tests can be administered by a teacher who has specialised in specific learning difficulties or an Educational Psychologist. Once a positive identification has been made and a child’s strengths and weakness have been discovered, an Individual Education Plan is prepared to provide appropriate remediation.

Whilst Dyslexia is now a recognised disability under both the Code of Practice (2002) and the Disability Discrimination Act in the UK, there is still a lack of awareness in many European countries and their special education laws make no reference to dyslexia.

Dyslexic children suffer from weaknesses in phonological skills (ie : relating sounds to letters) as well as having working (short term) memory deficits. No one knows what causes dyslexia but it is known to be hereditary and usually, but not always, passes down the male line.

Dyslexia cannot be cured because dyslexic people have a different brain structure from non-dyslexics. The right hemisphere (the creative side) of the brain is more highly developed than the left (the language side). Neurologists under Professor Albert Galaburda in the United States have now proved this, having dissected donated brains from dyslexic people !

Through skilled specialist teaching using multi-sensory teaching techniques (ie ; using all the senses – visual, auditory and kinaesthetic or touch), many dyslexic children will largely overcome their difficulties by working through

their own particular learning style.

As assistive technology has become more advanced over the past few years, dyslexic students are not now disadvantaged and those who have the opportunity, enjoy considerable success in further and higher education.

Many of the world's greatest artists, craftsmen, architects and engineers and entrepreneurs have been, or are dyslexic. Albert Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, Hans Christian Anderson, Richard Branson, Jackie Stewart, Tom Cruise are but a few who were or are dyslexic !

It is hoped that greater awareness and appropriate teaching skills will not only help dyslexic children and adults acquire vital literacy skills but will also encourage schools and parents to exploit their very many and much needed talents.