



17th to 23rd March 2014

Dyslexia Awareness Week

The acclaimed documentary "The Big Picture; Rethinking Dyslexia" screens Sunday March 16 at 12pm on TV3.



My child seems so bright. Why isn't he doing well at school?

Some of the common signs of dyslexia can include:

- Problems with patterns, rhymes, sequences
 - Letter or number reversal, or confusion e.g. b/d/p/q, n/u, 13/31
 - Being slower to process information
 - Needing repeated exposures to retain learning
 - Retrieval issues - learns something one moment, gone the next
 - Large gap between oral and written capabilities
 - Poor sense of direction - difficulty telling left from right
 - Effortful reading, reluctance to read out loud
 - Frequent misspelling of words and mixing up words which sound similar (recession/reception), in speech or written work
 - Poor handwriting, difficulty forming letters / numbers, awkward pencil grip
 - Poor punctuation and grammar
 - Misunderstanding or difficulty following instructions
 - Problems completing tasks, or runs out of time, despite working hard
 - Difficult to turn thoughts into words
- NOTE: Some of these signs are very commonly found in young children in the first two years of school (5-6 years). However if these symptoms persist beyond the age of 7, then there is cause for concern.

At least 1 in 10 students in New Zealand schools are dyslexic. So, what is dyslexia?

Sometimes referred to as a **specific learning disability**, or a learning difficulty, it is more realistic to define dyslexia as a **learning difference or a learning preference**.

Dyslexic students **don't lack intelligence**, but their brains work differently - dyslexia is **neurological**. The acquisition of basic skills like reading, writing and spelling uses a different part of the brain, resulting in unexpected difficulties (for both student and teacher!).

In defining dyslexia, note that **difficulties with literacy and numeracy** are a common feature, but there is a broader range of difficulties, e.g. auditory and information processing, planning and organising, motor skills, short-term / working memory and concentration. **Dyslexia is best thought of as a spectrum of characteristics**, with each child exhibiting a differing array of abilities and difficulties.

Dyslexia can be considered as a type of giftedness.

Dyslexics generally prefer working visually - they are **big picture / concept driven**, getting the overall idea or meaning first, and then filling in the specific details. Skills like **problem solving, creativity, and original insights** are often real strengths. Dyslexics often display other strengths such as high learning capacity, exceptional empathy, and noticeable excellence when focused on highly specialised areas, e.g. medicine, law, public policy, architecture, engineering and science. Dyslexics are often **high level conceptualizers** who manifest "out-of-the-box thinking". Often the **entrepreneurs** of our society.

Ultimately, **dyslexia can be characterised as a learning preference** - based on individuals preferring to receive, process and present information in ways that make more sense to the dyslexic-wired brain. These are often **oral, visual or multi-sensory** rather than via the written word.



Spot the "big picture" thinker!



Which letter is it?
They are all sticks with circles attached!

Is my child dyslexic?

It is common for dyslexia to go unidentified, with children labelled as 'slow' or 'struggling'. When children begin to perceive themselves as 'dumb' the knock on effect of poor self-esteem can cause potential emotional and behavioural issues. Some children may be the "class clown" or be very disruptive or very withdrawn in class. Often there is a family history of dyslexia. The primary indicator of dyslexia is when an intelligent child is not learning at the expected rate.

If your child has some dyslexic signs then a good starting point is to discuss your concerns with the classroom teacher and the school's Special Education Needs Coordinator.

For a definitive diagnosis, a SPELD assessment can be done. SPELD assessors are fully qualified psychologists with additional training in educational testing. Parents can contact NP SPELD to discuss and arrange this assessment. Ph. 755 0664

Dyslexics frequently have social, behavioural, and physical characteristics:

Socially immature in comparison to their peers leading to a poor self-image and difficulty making / keeping friends

General awkwardness, may act inappropriately in social situations

Difficulty reading social cues, e.g. oblivious to the amount of personal distance necessary in social interactions or insensitive to other people's body language

Often obsess on one topic or idea

Excessive talking (verbal commentary), and constantly making verbal sounds

Lags in development milestones (e.g. motor skills like throwing and catching, language)

Poor visual-motor coordination; poor eye-tracking, under developed vision system

Hyperactivity; excitable during group play

Overly distractible; difficulty concentrating

Lack of hand preference or mixed dominance

Impulsive behaviour; lack of reflective thought prior to action; failure to see consequences for their actions

Easily frustrated, overly emotional

Excessive movement during sleep

Inappropriate, unselective, and often excessive display of affection

Poor self-management; can't control inappropriate behavioural urges

Poor time and organisational skills

Overly gullible; easily led by peers

Excessive variation in mood and responsiveness

Poor adjustment to environmental changes; prefer rigid routines and structure

Difficulty making decisions



"Imagine going to work and not being able to do your job. Now imagine that you can't leave your job. Imagine having to do that every day. This is what life is like for children with learning disabilities."

-- Dr. David Urion

Director, Neurology and Learning Disabilities Program,
Children's Hospital, Boston

What is it like to be dyslexic?

Frustration

Dyslexic children begin school excited and eager to learn, until they repeatedly experience unexpected failures. They then become very frustrated by their inability to meet their own and others' expectations. When parents and teachers see a bright child who is not learning to read and write, they begin to label that child as lazy, unmotivated, careless or troublesome. "He's such a bright child, if only he would try harder." Ironically, no one knows exactly how hard the dyslexic is trying; a day in a classroom for a dyslexic child is extremely effortful and exhausting.

Anxiety

Anxiety is the most frequent emotional symptom. Dyslexics become fearful because of their constant frustration, confusion and failure in school. Because they may anticipate failure, entering new situations can cause extreme anxiety, leading to avoidance or resistance type behaviour, e.g. hesitancy to participate in school activities or try new things, and strong resistance to homework.

The gift of dyslexia is the ability to think multi-dimensionally. While the ability to see in pictures and to change one's point of focus or reference point is a handicap in reading, it can also be a source of

Imagine if this was what you saw when you took an exam. Do you think the test would be a good indication of your abilities?
<http://jackieweber.net/images/proj/dyslexia.gif>

What can schools do?

Dyslexic children can be catered for in the classroom through teachers creating a comfortable learning environment and being empathetic. An innovative teacher can help students to learn in a way that suits them, using multiple means of engagement to tap into students' interests, challenge them appropriately and motivate them to learn. Significantly, if you get it right for dyslexics, you get it right for everyone — personalised and multi-sensory approaches that benefit dyslexic students, also produce great results for the non-dyslexic students. Sometimes dyslexic children struggle to progress in the classroom (despite good teaching) and may require specialist intervention to address their learning needs.

References / Links

<http://www.4d.org.nz/>

<http://www.dfnz.org.nz/>

<http://www.speld.org.nz/learning-disabilities.htm>

www.minedu.govt.nz/Parents/AllAges/UsefulInformation/Dyslexia.aspx

literacyonline.tki.org.nz/.../Dyslexia/Defining-dyslexia

www.minedu.govt.nz/Parents/AllAges/UsefulInformation.aspx

<http://www.kiwifamilies.co.nz/articles/dyslexia/>



Anger

Many emotional problems occur out of frustration with school or social situations. This frustration can produce anger. The obvious target of the dyslexic's anger would be schools and teachers. However, mothers are particularly likely to feel the dyslexic's anger. Often, the child sits on his anger during school. But, once he is in the safe environment of home, these very powerful feelings erupt and are often directed toward the mother. This becomes very frustrating and confusing to the parent who is desperately trying to help their child.

About 80 to 90% of NZ prison inmates are not functionally literate or numerate. Unsupported learning difficulties as a child are a major cause of social dysfunction as an adult. We need to help children before failure at school turns into frustration, leading to low self-esteem and disruptive behaviour.

Famous Dyslexics

Sir Richard Branson

Orlando Bloom

Tom Cruise

Leonardo da Vinci

Henry Ford

Kerry Packer

Steven Spielberg

Albert Einstein

Alexander Bell

Thomas Edison

John Lennon

Hans Christian Anderson

William Yeats