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INTRODUCTION

This book is about dyslexia, a word made from *dys*, meaning trouble with, and *lex*, meaning words. Dyslexia, then, causes trouble with words. This sometimes shows in reading, sometimes in handwriting and spelling, sometimes in listening, sometimes in organizing large amounts of spoken or written information. Because of this, dyslexic students usually have school problems, and may mistakenly be thought unintelligent, lazy, or uncooperative.

Unrecognized dyslexia hurts the self-concept so necessary for leading a productive, joyful life. Therefore, educators, parents, and other adults interested in young people need to understand common patterns of strengths and weaknesses in dyslexic people from early childhood to adulthood. In this guide, we will consider the dyslexic at successive ages and stages starting with pre-school, noticing the effects of dyslexia on school performance and self-esteem.

Dyslexia occurs in roughly 20% of the population, at a 4-1 male-female ratio, among those of average or superior intelligence. It frequently runs in families, so adult readers may recognize themselves, their parents, or their siblings in these pages as well as the children they hope to help by reading this guide.

Dyslexics are often highly gifted in such three-dimensional fields as mathematics, science, music, art, engineering, athletics, or people-to-people skills. However, in two-dimensional symbolic work, dyslexics struggle with reading, handwriting, spelling, and pencil/paper arithmetic.

Dyslexics are often late in learning to talk and, as children and adults, prefer action to words.

Dyslexics frequently reverse or invert letters or numerals, or read and write letters or syllables in confused order. They may have trouble distinguishing *b* from *d* or *p* from *q*, *m* from *w* or *h* from *y*, or *6* from *9*. They may read *was* for *saw* or *on* for *no*, or say *callapitter* for *caterpillar*. In later years they may read *unclear* for *nuclear* or *parental* for *prenatal*.

Dyslexics often have trouble telling left from right.

Dyslexics often work skilfully with their hands but fumble with complex verbal intake, output, and organization.

Left-handedness and dyslexia (along with some types of auto-immune disease and migraine) frequently co-exist. They do not cause one another; they are common manifestations of a particular type of brain structure.

Dyslexics are often highly imaginative, creative problem-solvers who have miserable experiences in school, but, given appropriate training, do well in life. Free from pencil/paper academics, they thrive. As Woody Allen might say "There is life after school."

Dyslexia is neither mental retardation nor stupidity. It is a different but not lessened way of understanding the world. Some of the famous people said to have been dyslexic are Albert Einstein, Harvey Cushing, Thomas Edison, Woodrow Wilson, Auguste Rodin, and Leonardo da Vinci. In the present time we have such bankers as John Reed, such athletes as Bruce Jenner and Greg Louganis, such actors and actresses as Susan Hampshire, Whoopi Goldberg, Cher, Tom Cruise, such authors as Eileen Simpson, and countless others who are not famous yet (and may never be) who know how to make the world work but have trouble with words.

Dyslexics can learn to compensate but their learning style is permanent. Although this is inconvenient in school years, let us rejoice that no-one "cured" Leonardo da Vinci.

Multi-sensory training, which joins seeing, hearing, saying, and writing in one unified approach to reading and writing our language, helps dyslexics learn the skills needed for survival in our verbal, print-oriented society. Multi-sensory materials may be called VAKT, which stands for *visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile* learning. Such training is appropriate for all learners in all regular classrooms even though it was initially developed for dyslexics.

Dyslexics deserve the understanding help of a society which needs their contributions. As dyslexia itself has different effects, we need to remember that each dyslexic is an individual. That the osprey and the hummingbird both have wings does not make them identical.

Just as intelligence, genius, and talent show in different ways, so dyslexia produces a varied number and degree of abilities and disabilities. It is fitting to link power with problems from the outset, since they are flip sides of the same coin.

Margaret Byrd Rawson, psychologist, teacher, and teacher of teachers, and a pioneer in the field, says of dyslexia: "The differences are personal, the diagnosis is clinical, the treatment is educational, the understanding is scientific."

Dyslexia is also a matter of degree, a word with at least five different meanings. Degree can also mean intensity; people can be severely, moderately, or mildly dyslexic.

Degree can also mean an academic certification; it is difficult for many intelligent dyslexics to earn a diploma or degree.

Then there is third degree; an inquisition or a burn. Many are the times the dyslexic has been grilled, "What's today's spelling rule?", "What is this word?", "Why can't you learn like the others?", "What's the matter with you...are you dumb, lazy or crazy?" These third degrees burn as deeply as fire, and scar the psyche as surely as the torch does the flesh.

Degree refers to temperature; dyslexics in school have alternately taken the heat or been frozen by misunderstanding.

Finally, degree is a map-maker's tool for marking a place in the world. Literally and figuratively, dyslexics need to know where they stand.

As babies, toddlers, and pre-schoolers display their likes, dislikes, hopes, and fears, each one is a come-to-life Show and Tell. To overlook what children show us about their own learning styles is to ignore the lesson of Hans Christian Andersen (a dyslexic himself) in The Ugly Duckling. In fact, Academic Ugly Ducklings is a good term for many dyslexics.

It is possible to recognize potential learning differences such as dyslexia in young children, and early help may short-circuit trouble. The following children sent important signals.

Bicycle Bill, so-called for his extraordinary large motor skills and balance, mastered a two-wheeler at age 3. He could climb, throw, skate, swim, and row before he was five, but he still held his crayon like an ice pick and hated sitting still; he preferred action to words. Formal schoolwork was to prove painful.

Kindergarten Lucy consistently reversed syllables. She called her favorite foods "bizgetti" and "hang-a-bers," she looked at her mother's "mazagines" and the creature emerging from a cocoon was a "flutter-bye." One day when she looked messy she called herself a "magaruffin." This affectionate, lively chatterbox proved to be a bizarre speller with a severe reading problem.

Joe loved to draw and paint, and could sing on key and pick out simple melodies on the piano when he was in preschool. In a seeming paradox, he could draw from memory or copy, but in year one he couldn't recognize such words as *the, one, Dick, Jane, Spot, or Puff*.

Michael never seemed to listen. No one knows yet whether persistent middle ear infections in early childhood damaged his hearing, or whether he has trouble interpreting spoken language. Both possibilities should have been explored before

he got into academic and disciplinary difficulty in years one and two.

Gregory who is in year three loses everything, even himself and his ideas, which come more quickly than his tongue can speak. He has such a poor sense of direction that he sometimes loses his way home. Yet his grasp of numbers and true mathematics is amazing. He is in the lowest language arts group and, because he loses his folder and workbooks, he is failing arithmetic.

These children needed early recognition, and it is not surprising that each one now hates school. But it is never too late to help.

Medical research now shows that the combination of emotional peace and psychological energy opens extra pathways to thinking and learning. Children expand their abilities (and use their strengths to support their weaknesses) when they are in joyful, secure environments. Oddly, the more secure the child feels, the greater his willingness to risk. And without risk, there is no real learning.

When children are in a frightening position or place, they have trouble with memory and with learning new things. A classroom where other children can do what the dyslexic cannot is a place of fear and shame. Therefore, in fairness to the 20% of our population who are dyslexics, we must be aware of the signals they send, and recognize their difficulty as soon as possible. Is this an unfair labelling? On the contrary, it is the doorway to fair practice, because it opens the way to genuine help.

How should we help at school and at home? The first thing we need to do is raise our own levels of consciousness to include an understanding of dyslexic patterns. In schools we