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Dyslexia and Language Acquisition

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Dyslexia and Language Acquisition

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to provide language teachers with a broader understanding of dyslexia. I will draw from my own experience as well as provide various viewpoints on dyslexia given by neurologists, therapists, special education teachers, and adults with problems that stem from dyslexia. This paper will not provide instant remedies for various learning disorders. Instead, I will discuss the problems a dyslexic faces in language acquisition. I will also offer some approaches and suggestions on ways to recognize specific problem areas. And finally, I will give teachers some suggestions on working effectively with dyslexic students.

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Introduction

It seems safe to assume that in this decade, most teachers have heard something about dyslexia. But what exactly does this term mean? And what effect does dyslexia have on a student's learning? Fortunately a lot of information has been published on working effectively with young children who have dyslexia. However, what most of these authorities have neglected to do is to offer solutions to working with adolescent and adult dyslexics. The idea for writing this paper came when, as an adult, I discovered that traces of my learning disorders from childhood were surfacing again when I attempted to acquire a new language. Initially I did not want to confront these problems. It was not until I discovered other adult language learners with problems similar to mine that I decided to find out more about dyslexia. The research that I have done has proven to be very enlightening. First, it has enabled me to examine and begin to understand my own history with dyslexia. And secondly, it has given me some knowledge of how I can be of aid to other dyslexic language learners as an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher.

The purpose of this paper is to provide language

teachers with a broader understanding of dyslexia. I will draw from my own experience as well as provide various viewpoints on dyslexia given by neurologists, therapists, special education teachers, and adults with problems that stem from dyslexia. This paper will not provide instant remedies for various learning disorders. Instead, I will discuss the problems a dyslexic faces in language acquisition. I will also offer teachers some approaches and suggestions on ways to identify specific problem areas. And finally, I will provide teachers with several methods to use in helping a dyslexic learn the target language.

Part I

VARIOUS VIEWPOINTS/PERSPECTIVES ON DYSLEXIA

What is Dyslexia?

One of the most important facts a language teacher should know about dyslexia is that it is not a single symptom, such as an inability to read. It is a "syndrome; a cluster of symptoms, which may include physical awkwardness, poor penmanship, hyperactivity, stuttering, directional disorientation, a weakness in visual memory, as well as the more familiar difficulties with spelling, writing, arithmatic and, of course, reading." (1) It is unlikely that a person would have all these symptoms. Another fact is that no two dyslexics are alike; therefore, the "degree of severity differs greatly among those affected by this syndrome." (2)

Despite the fact that "one person in ten is dyslexic," little was known about this syndrome until Dr. Samual Orten, in the 1920's, conducted experiments on children who had been labeled "retarded readers." (3) In an article that revolutionized neurologists' concept

(1) Eileen Simpson, Reversals (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979), pp. 48-49.

(2) Simpson, p. 91.

(3) Simpson, p. 233.

of this common yet barely understood syndrome, Orten revealed that what a portion of America's population had was not "word blindness"[4] (the popular belief at the time), but rather "stephosymbolia." This term literally means "twisted symbols." What Orten discovered in the tests that he conducted on these children was that "not only did they twist letters that they saw, they also twisted what they heard, what they wrote, and what they said."[5] Orton refuted the common belief that dyslexics were dullwitted, lazy, and brain damaged. I.Q. tests revealed that these children had normal, if not high intelligence.

In an effort to divulge the cause of stephosymbolia, Orton focused his energy on the brain. What Orton discovered was that "there appeared to exist noteworthy correlations (in these retarded readers), such as left-handedness or ambidexterity; and a tendency toward reversals when attempting to read and to write -- even culminating in frank mirror-reading and mirror-writing. Orton believed that behind all these phenomena there lay a physiological state of ambiguous occipital dominance, a basis largely physiological in nature;

[4] "Word Blindness." In 1985, Dr. James Kerr and Dr. Pringle Morgan developed and used the term to label non-readers.

[5] Sue Golden, Visual Developmental Dyslexia in Children (Thesis) (Vermont: The School for International Training. MAT program, 1980), page 3.

a faulty patterning of brain function." (6)

While Orton's theories on dyslexia continue to be the most accurate, neurologists are attempting to go further into what causes dyslexia. The most up-to-date theory on the cause of dyslexia is that "there is a developmental lag in the part of the brain and nervous system that serves the learning of reading." (7) Eileen Simpson in her book, Reversals, provided the following information:

> Recently at the UCLA Brain Research Institute, an experiment using computers to analyze the EEG (electroencephalograms) of dyslexics showed that in their brains, the activity between the two hemispheres is less synchronized than in the brains of the control group, which has added a certain weight to Orton's theory. With the invention of new equipment like the Caltech optical device, which permits scientists to observe cortical activity, and with extensive research now being conducted on patients who have undergone split-brain operations, it is possible that the mystery of what causes dyslexia will be solved in the near future.

Are There Solutions?

This news is encouraging. Perhaps in time scientists will find a way to treat the large population of dyslexics in this country who, for the most part, are not well enough informed about this syndrome to even know that they can be helped.

(6) Macdonald Critchly, M.D., Developmental Dyslexia. (London: William Medical Books, Ltd, 1966), p. 9.

(7) Simpson, p. 204.

Private learning centers affiliated with the Orten Society (which was established in 1949 by Orten's widow and former pupil, June Orten), have had an 80% success rate in their remediation programs for dyslexics of all ages. While programs tend to vary from state to state, most centers use the Gillingham-Stillman method in the treatment of dyslexia. Eileen Simpson provides the following description:

> The Gillingham-Stillman system, and the many variations on it developed since, recognizes that what dyslexics need is not to have more of the same kind of training be it "whole-word" and phonetics -- that children have in the classroom. Dyslexics need different training. For them, each stage in the process of learning to read must be broken down into many small steps: each step must be taught slowly and thoroughly, the learning reinforced by engaging as many sense organs as possible -- ear, eye, touch, and with it the musculature of the fingers and arms -- in what is called tri-modal reinforcement." (8)

This system for teaching dyslexia is often referred to as the multisensory approach. By engaging so many sense organs in the process of teaching a dyslexic, the pupil is said to learn at a faster pace and to retain more information than would normally be expected.

While these private learning centers have provided competent as well as effective ways of working with dyslexics, they have not been much help to the larger body of people affected by this syndrome. The reason is

(8) Simpson, p. 90.

simply one of cost. Without federal support, it is impossible to provide service for all. Is there a reasonable alternative?

The United States school system is trying to provide solutions for students with learning disabilities. But what seems to be occurring in this system "is a general reluctance on the part of educators to recognize dyslexia as a specific disability." (9) Dr. Crosby, in his book, The Waysiders, states that the reason why educators "have not been able to accept dyslexia as a cause for reading disorders is that there is a simple lack of information on the subject." (10) And in another paragraph, he goes on to say:

> Unless parents or teachers make a specific effort to look for books or articles on dyslexia in a medical library, they remain largely uninformed even that the disorder exists. This lack of information about dyslexia extends not only to the lay and educational literature, but to general medical literature as well. Most medical textbooks, if they mention dyslexia at all, do so in a sentence or a paragraph.
>
> In addition to the lack of information -- and the natural tendency to be suspicious of something one has never heard of -- a number of prominent educators who have heard of dyslexia have disparaged it. (11)

(9) R.M.N. Crosby, M.D., The Waysiders: Reading and the Dyslexic Child. (New York: The John Day Company, 1976), p. 6.

(10) Crosby, p. 200.

(11) Crosby, p. 200.

Crosby continues by saying that the solution educators take is to place dyslexics in special "classes for retarded children who have little in common with them other than their inability to read." (12)

Educators are doing dyslexics more harm than good by placing them in special classes. I was in just such a special class in the third and fourth grades in California. And my experience confirmed Crosby's findings. My teacher was forced to gear the material to the lowest denominator which made the program inappropriate and too easy for the dyslexics in the class. I would finish my work in a short amount of time and spend the rest of the hour day-dreaming. Without the example and challenge of role models or students who were making progress in their studies, I had no one to measure my progress against. If I used the students I was surrounded by as a yardstick, my progress in the class was inflated out of proportion. Looking back on that time, I see I was in limbo. The dyslexic who is placed in this situation comes out of the experience confused and unsure of his ability to learn.

Inappropriate diagnosis and treatment -- in other words, sticking an intelligent dyslexic in a classroom with mentally handicapped children -- may cause him to

(12) Crosby, p. 13.

eventually resort to violence. As Dr. Macdonald Critchly points out:

> There is a correlation between dyslexia, adult delinquency, and adult criminality. Politicians and government executives might be interested in research and training that would cut our dropouts and save the state millions of dollars by taking care of the predictable criminal population. (13)

Dr. Critchly's point is valid. Dyslexics are not born criminals; it is society's inability to recognize their needs that drives many to such acts.

Presently, it is difficult to imagine that the majority of dyslexics will receive the recognition and help that they need to function in a literate society. Part of this has to do with the fact that most people, as both Dr. Crosby and Dr. Critchly point out, know very little about dyslexia. Fortunately, some dyslexics are receiving remedial aid through private centers affiliated with the Orten Society.

The second part of this paper will be an autobiographical account of my own experience with dyslexia. My intention, in this section, is to acquaint teachers with this syndrome in a way that will help them to understand how a dyslexic views himself as a student.

(13) Louise Clark, Can't Read, Can't Write, Can't Talk Too Good Either. (New York: Walker and Company, 1973), p. 35.

Part II

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH DYSLEXIA

Recognizing Specific Learning Disabilities

Symptoms of dyslexia begin to appear when a child starts his language acquisition. I was in the second grade of elementary school when both the teacher and I realized that something was preventing me from joining my classmates in a smooth and orderly transition into reading. For instance, when called upon to read out loud, I stumbled miserably over the page with little idea of what I was saying. The words were blurry and meaningless images that I could not decipher, no matter how hard I tried.

The second problem I had was a poor attention span. I could not accurately focus my attention upon a given task or activity for more than just a few minutes. I was not a nervous or hyperative child, though many dyslexics are said to be. The problem lay in the fact that I simply could not process a lot of information in one sitting. Unfortunately, this problem persists to this day.

Failing at the age of five is no less traumatic than it is as an adult. The exercise of reading aloud was sheer agony for me. What I feared most was not the teacher's disapproval but my classmates' scorn and ridicule. I knew that with each clumsy attempt I made

at reading, I would look a little more stupid in their eyes. Hearing their giggles and whispering was enough non-verbal criticism to last me an entire lifetime.

Seeking Help

What saved me from losing all confidence in myself and what gave me the strength to survive in that stressful environment was the second grade teacher, Mrs. Hanson's, attitude. She refused to accept that I was dumb. Unlike many teachers who are masters at recognizing problems in their students but do nothing to help them, Mrs. Hanson was eager to get to the root of mine.

The first step she took was to send me off to the school nurse to have my eyes checked. The test revealed that my vision was normal. Since Mrs. Hanson still had no clue as to what was the cause of my learning disabilities, she decided it was time to notify my parents. At her suggestion, they contacted various specialists on learning disabilities to see if they could unravel the problem.

In the months that followed, I was given more tests than most people are given in a lifetime. While the psychologists I met with asked me intimate questions about my family, myself, and my school, the neurologist (who happened to be my father), took another approach. Seeing that reading is a function that occurs in the brain, he focused his attention there. To examine my

brain waves for signs of irregularity, my father conducted an EEG (electroencephalogram) test on me. The conclusion of this test revealed that my brain waves were slightly irregular. The EEG test was helpful in that it verified that something was occurring in my brain that might be hindering my ability to read, but it failed to provide my father with any specific detail as to what the cause was. Without this information, he could be of little help to me. Unfortunately at this point, neither one of us knew that I had dyslexia. In hopes of finding a solution to my inability to read, my father sent me to a reading clinic in San Rafael, California.

Overcoming the Difficulties and, at Last, Learning to Read

The therapists at the Dewitt Clinic informed my parents that I had dyslexia. What impressed me at the age of seven was not so much their knowing I had dyslexia (a term I avoided until adulthood), but their sunny optimism. They insisted that in the course of a few months, I would be able to read. As proof of this, they showed me a wall lined with photographs of smiling children sitting next to big stacks of books. The look on all of their faces was one of absolute triumph. The prospect of accomplishing this feat and having my picture up there too for other children to see triggered my

interest in working with the therapists at Dewitt. What gave me the greatest incentive to trust these friendly people was the hope that if I learned to read, perhaps my classmates, teachers, and family would no longer view me as a failure.

The atmosphere at Dewitt was so unlike the threatening and competitive academic world at school that learning was fun rather than a drudgery. I met with a therapist on an individual basis twice a week for several hours. The one-on-one contact improved my attitude about learning for two reasons. First of all, I no longer had to be concerned about what my classmates thought about me, which allowed me to concentrate on the lesson rather than on how many times I made a mistake. And secondly, my therapist was supplying me with an ample amount of affection, encouragement, and approval which I had never received to this degree before. I literally blossomed in this peaceful and supportive environment.

Given the fact that many dyslexics have a poor attention span, my lessons never exceeded twenty minutes. Instead of feeling defeated and exhausted by the end of the lesson, I felt confident and happy. Dewitt worked hard to make these short lessons interesting. I think the therapists designed their lesson plans with the assumption that learning to read can be fun for a dyslexic child. When my therapist discovered that I loved horses, they became the theme in

a lot of the exercises she had me complete. This approach really sparked my motivation to read. With her help, I read Horse Fever in its entirety. The feeling I had after accomplishing this feat was one of surprise and joy. I remember turning to my therapist and giving her a big hug.

There was one more feat that I had to accomplish before leaving Dewitt. I was told that I would have to read at least ten books on my own. Having mastered Horse Fever without too much difficulty gave me the confidence to meet this demand. In the time remaining, I seized every horse book I could find. Because of my love of the subject and the desire to know all there was about horses, I became hooked on reading. My therapist and parents were delighted. In just a matter of weeks, my picture was taken and placed on the wall beside all those triumphant young readers.

My parents were asked to come into the clinic for a final conference. My therapist informed them that I had exceeded Dewitt's expectations as a pupil. After testing my reading competency, she discovered that my reading skills had vastly improved. I was now two grade levels ahead of my class. All three of them agreed that I was now ready to return to school on a full-time basis. My therapist's parting words to my parents were to continue supplying me with encouragement and, of course, books to keep this fervor for reading alive.

In looking back on that year at Dewitt Reading Clinic, unlike many children who are never properly diagnosed as being dyslexic, I was extremely fortunate to have received remedial help so early in my schooling. Without Dewitt's help, I may never have learned to read properly. Certainly I would not have had the strength to believe in my own self worth in the demanding and often frustrating academic years that followed had I not made considerable progress that year.

Old Symptoms Begin to Reappear

While I can read without difficulty now, traces of dyslexia are still with me today. I am reminded of this fact every time I set out to learn a new language. All of the old symptoms, such as the inability to decode words, short term memory loss, poor attention span, and fear of failing creep up on me again. Rather than feeling happy and positive about this new learning encounter, I start to feel vulnerable and self-conscious. This causes me to have serious problems acquiring a new language.

One of the most frustrating encounters I had in learning a new language occurred while I was serving my teaching internship in Haiti. Several of my colleagues and I had signed up for a beginning Creole class. The first few days of class were fun. Everyone was

basically at the same level. But by the end of the week, it became apparent that while most of the students were making rapid progress, several were not. I was among the scattered few that were struggling. When called upon to answer questions, it became increasingly difficult to supply the teacher with the correct response. Unlike my colleagues, I could not grasp all the new information within the same hour that I had heard it. There was so much occurring in my mind that it often became overloaded.

This experience in Haiti, in some ways, was more emotionally taxing than the difficulties I encountered in learning to read in the second grade. Until entering that Creole class, I had convinced my parents, friends, colleagues, and myself that I no longer had dyslexia. I had overcome my learning problems in English by a lot of diligence and patience. And I had stopped failing and had begun to succeed in school and later in college. When I entered the Creole class, I had a lot of confidence; I did not expect to fail. I think I was more surprised than my colleagues were to see my regression to a level of absolute frustration. The more mistakes I made, the less I wanted to perform in front of others. It was humiliating to hold up the rest of the class as I struggled to provide the teacher with correct responses to the questions he had asked. Once again, ten years later, I was revealing a side of myself

to others that only brought me shame and a sense of alienation.

Failing the Creole class in Haiti may have hurt my pride, but it forced me to accept that I am dyslexic. For the first time in my life, I stopped running away from myself. I began to remember other language encounters that I had in high school and in undergraduate school. It became evident to me that I had manifested the same kind of symptoms (inability to decode words, short term memory loss, poor attention span, and fear of failing) in my attempts to learn Spanish, Italian, and French. While I did not fail these courses, I never made the kind of grades that many of my colleagues did.

To my knowledge, none of the language teachers that I had were aware that I was, and still am, dyslexic. If most of the adolescent and adult dyslexics are as reluctant as I was to acknowledge this handicap, then they are not going to receive the extra help that they need to acquire a new language. In all fairness to teachers, students should come forward and ask for help. But many students, especially dyslexics, are not aware that they are having difficulties until it is too late. By beginning to understand the problems a dyslexic faces in language acquisition, teachers will be more equipped to help the student succeed rather than fail.

Part III

ADOLESCENT AND ADULT DYSLEXICS

Problems that they Face in Second Language Acquisition

That we are still in the Dark Ages in our knowledge of how to treat the dyslexic can be seen in the lack of literature available on the subject. In all the literature I read, I only found one reference to the subject. In Eileen Simpson's book, Reversals, she states:

> It is often said that dyslexics cannot learn a second language. Here, as elsewhere, I think their potential is underestimated. In two years of hard work, I learned to speak and read French. (14)

Unfortunately, Ms.Simpson does not go into the methods she used to learn French, other than to state that she met with a tutor on a regular basis while living in France.

As pointed out, for someone who has major problems in his own language, learning a second language will not come easily. This observation was confirmed in a ten-week French intensive class that I had took at The School For International Training. I watched a fellow student go through the same difficulties that I have always gone through in learning a new language. Initially, this adult male was confident and was making

(14) Simpson, p. 221.

rapid progress, but this soon changed. As the material became more challenging, he could no longer keep up with the rest of the class. He made numerous mistakes in his attempts to answer questions that had been addressed to him in French. He had difficulty reading aloud dialogues that he had written in French because he did not understand what he had put down on the paper. It was also apparent that he had a poor attention span because he was so easily distracted by the other students' behavior.

His classmates, of course, thought that he was dumb. And it was only at the end of school, during the class skit, in a forced situation where he floundered in his first few attempts to read out loud, that he confessed that he was dyslexic. How much more productive his attempt to study French might have been had the teacher recognized his problem in time to save him from ten weeks of constant embarrassment.

In examining the problems dyslexics have in language acquisition, one should be alerted to the fact of how afraid these students are of failing. Dr. Howard D. Rome, in his article entitled "Psychiatric Aspects of Dyslexia," says:

> "Passing" has a high price in anxiety, for these people live in a world that teeters on the verge of collapse at any moment. They are constantly liable to being exposed and, therefore, to being discredited. (15)

(15) Dr. Howard D. Rome, "Aspects of Dyslexia," Bulletin of the Orten Society, XXI, 1971.

In a language class the dyslexic student is always exposed. The very nature of the class makes it impossible for him to hide.

Sylvia Farnham Diggory, in her book, Learning Disabilities, discusses this fear that blocks the dyslexic's ability to succeed. She cites a case study about a thirteen year old boy named Peter who:

> ...tends to be unresponsive to success and reacts strongly to failure, threat of failure, or criticism. He will often refuse to engage in an activity because he is sure he will fail. (16)

This observation can directly be applied to the dyslexic who tries to learn a second language.

Another area where a dyslexic will have difficulty is attempting to write in a new language. For people who reverse letters, vowels, and sometimes whole words in their own language, this task is mind-boggling. If a teacher assigns a ten-minute written exercise to be completed in class, I know that what I would end up handing in is a page filled with spelling mistakes, cross-outs, and poor punctuation. Eileen Simpson states the following:

> Dyslexics resist writing because they are reluctant to project an image of themselves which they feel does not do their intelligence justice. Also, they are aware that nothing is easier to ridicule than incorredct spelling. (17)

(16) Sylvia Farnham Diggory, Learning Disabilities. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 57.

(17) Simpson, p. 93.

If a dyslexic were granted an evening to complete a written assignment, then quality work could be produced.

In a language class where partial, if not all credit is given to the student who passes an examination within a specific time period, the dyslexic suffers an extreme handicap. For example, Louise Clark, in her book, Can't Read, Can't Write, Can't Talk Too Good Either, states that the dyslexic "may have to read a paragraph or a passage over several times before it makes sense. This can slow down his test-taking performance to such an extent that the verdict of the unknowing would be serving retardation or sub-normal intelligence." (18) I cannot stress enough how hard it is for the dyslexic to process so much information in one time period. Because of this, most of the tests I have taken have done more harm than good. However, fortunately, some schools have taken this problem into account. For instance, Harvard allows typewriters into special examination rooms. Ms. Clark mentions that "even College Board Examinations can now be taken in a separate room, with service provided for a reader and/or someone to write down the student's oral answers or dictate compositions or the use of a typewriter." (19)

Cornell University has also made a few allowances for dyslexics.

(18) Clark, p. 87.

(19) Clark, p. 235.

> In the Spring of 1972, an admissions officer at Cornell wrote to a high school about one candidate: I appreciate the fact that you called our attention to his history with dyslexia, which would otherwise have had a negative effect on standardized test data. (20)

It is encouraging that well respected universities like Harvard and Cornell are becoming more aware of dyslexia. Their willingness to accommodate the dyslexic student should give other learning institutions the incentive to do as well.

One can only hope that these changes in admission and testing requirements will spread to other universities. But once the dyslexic is admitted, the school should not abandon him. He is going to need additional help all the way through, especially in acquiring a new language.

While learning a new language seems challenging for most people, for the dyslexic it seems like an impossible task. It is in this learning context that a dyslexic will be exposed. As I mentioned earlier in recounting my own experience, it is humiliating to present an image of oneself as an intelligent and fully capable person just to see that image crumble in a language learning context where one begins to be viewed as "the slow learner" of the class who keeps everyone waiting.

(20) Clark, p. 235.

Language teachers are in a position to help the dyslexic. Just by being informed of this learning handicap is a revelation. In the next section, I will take the language teacher further by offering suggestions on how to identify the dyslexic student.

For example, I will provide several methods to test and use on students that will reveal common problems of this syndrome. Further, I will show how teachers might work more effectively with the student once they are aware of the problems the dyslexic is having in learning a new language.

Part IV

APPROACHES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS

Ways to Recognize Common Problems

The initial step a teacher must take is to be aware of the students who seem to be struggling with the target language. After about the first week of class, the teacher should be able to identify the students who need individual attention. To determine whether a student is dyslexic will require some effort. A good place to begin is to check to see if the student is manifesting the symptoms that are common to the dyslexic: poor attention span, short term memory loss, inability to decode words, and fear of failing or making mistakes.

Had the teacher time, he could design tests geared to exposing these symptoms. But an informal and painless way to test a student's attention span is to ask him a few pop questions related to new material that has just been taught to the class. This is also a way to test for short term memory loss. A dyslexic student will either take a lot longer than the other students to answer or simply will not be able to answer the question at all.

In terms of testing a student for his ability to decode words, it has been observed that some dyslexics cannot distinguish between words that sound alike but are different from one another. A teacher could create

an exercise which requires the student to discriminate between words that he hears. To test for poor visual modality, the same exercise could be given. Rather than just hearing the words, the student must also distinguish them by sight. For example, a list of words that begin and end with the same syllable but the vowel is different. For instance, the teacher and the student have a list of the following words:

1) a. b i t	b. b u t	4) a. r u b	b. r i b
2) a. l i c k	b. l u c k	5) a. s i t	b. s e t
3) a. m i t	c. m e t	6) a. s l i p	c. s l a p

The teacher begins with number one and says "bit." The student must then demonstrate comprehension by distinguishing "bit" from "but" by circling "b i t."

As mentioned in Part III, the dyslexic will make a lot of mistakes when attempting to write in a new language. By assigning an in-class writing exercise, a teacher will probably be able to recognize a dyslexic without too much difficulty. Common characteristics to look for are:

1. A reversal in letters ("p" for "q," "d" for "b," "m" for "w").
2. Messy print-script that will quite often be illegible.
3. Lack of clarity in sentences.
4. Inability to complete assigned task in the time alloted.

Chances are a dyslexic student will be dissatisfied with his performance in carrying out this task. The teacher should be on the alert for this kind of behavior.

Because language acquisition is such major work for someone with this syndrome, a lot of their frustration will be expressed in their behavior rather than oral expression. For instance, a dyslexic student may become flustered, embarrassed, or angry if called on. Often the student appears restless, distracted, bored, or even hostile. Teachers should pay attention to how this student behaves with the rest of his classmates. The dyslexic will retreat into himself as the class becomes increasingly difficult. The dyslexic student may also express signs of reluctance to participate in exercises that require pair-work for fear that the partner will find him unintelligent. Other signals for teachers to be aware of are body posture and facial expressions. The majority of dyslexics I have observed, myself included, often express fatigue, unhappiness, humiliation, fear, insecurity, and many other emotions by sitting rigidly or slouching in a chair, avoiding eye contact with others, including the teacher, frowning a lot, rubbing their eyes frequently, and stretching.

Another approach to discovering whether a student is dyslexic is to ask him. A therapist on learning

disabilities from The Winston Prouty Center, stated that if more teachers took the time to communicate with their students who are having difficulties, then the teachers would discover the reasons behind their students' problems. She suggested that a teacher start out by asking the student what his strengths and weaknesses are in academic subjects. If a language teacher cannot communicate with the student in his native language, then he should find a faculty member who would be willing to interpret for the student. A teacher should not feel hesitant to use this approach for fear of insulting the student. On the contrary, I think most students would be flattered to have a teacher who took the time to inquire about their individual learning styles.

What is most important is not the fact that a language teacher can label a student as dyslexic. What matters is being aware of the difficulties this person faces in language acquisition and attempting to make this experience a little less overwhelming for them. A teacher who keeps in mind that dyslexics can acquire a second language if they are allowed the freedom to learn at their own pace should find that working with these students is a rewarding experience rather than a futile endeavor.

Working Effectively with Dyslexic Students

After the diagnosis has been made, the teacher should try to establish a relationship of trust with the dyslexic. Some ways to go about this are for the teacher to convey interest and respect in the student when communicating with him in and out of class, and by taking the time to engage him in a conversation. By conveying interest in the student, the teacher will be fulfilling the big need of most dyslexics which is to be accepted and appreciated.

Realistically, it may be quite difficult to provide a dyslexic student with the individual attention he needs when the teacher is responsible for ten, twenty, or more students in a language class. But the teacher should not be discouraged. There are other useful ways to insure that learning will take place. One suggestion is to hold individual conferences with the student. At these meetings, the teacher could find out what is helping or hindering the student's ability to learn in class. This time could also help to establish a closer relationship between the teacher and the student. What would be conveyed by using this approach is that the student is not alone in his language acquisition.

These meetings could also be useful in helping the teacher to later make improvements in lesson plans, or design some notes to give the student before or after

the class which might make things more clear. And this extra time spent with the student would help the teacher to choose suitable outside resources such as a good workbook or tapes where he can hear the language spoken.

Another idea would be to encourage the student to keep a journal. When questions arise in class, the student could write them down. Later the teacher and student could talk about the points that remain unclear. The journal would also serve as a useful means by which the student can express himself in the target language. Whether or not the teacher could read the journal would be left up to the student.

Since most dyslexics do so well with individual attention, a teacher -- with the consent of the student -- ought to try to find a suitable tutor for this person. If this can be accomplished, the teacher should keep in close contact with the tutor and the student to insure that learning is taking place. By doing this, the teacher will convey interest in the student's language acquisition.

In examining the approaches that either a teacher or a tutor could use to teach a dyslexic a second language on an individual basis, Margaret Newton, in her book, Dyslexia: A Guide for Teachers and Parents, points out that "the effective teaching method can very often be the one most compatible with the teacher's own style, provided that visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic

modes are all employed in the learning situation." [21] These three modes -- seeing, hearing, and writing (touching), help the dyslexic to acquire language. Ms. Newton goes on to say:

> Over-teaching and over-learning is essential. Because the perception of direction and order is confused, much more experience of auditory and visual material is needed at every level to enable the student (and the teacher), to reinforce "correct" responses as often as possible. [22]

As mentioned earlier, tape recorders, flash cards, and listening comprehension tapes are excellent visual and auditory materials.

A final recommendation to language teachers in working with dyslexics is to keep track of the methods and techniques that have proven successful in helping dyslexics acquire a second language. To my knowledge, there is no information that addresses this topic. By contributing their findings to others in this profession, language teachers would be doing a tremendous service for their colleagues as well as for all those who are affected by dyslexia.

[21] Margaret Newton, Dyslexia: A Guide for Teachers and Parents. (London: Hoder and Stroughton, 1975), p. 12.

[22] Newton, p. 12.

CONCLUSION

What I have tried to illustrate in this paper is that dyslexics are not like most learners. They have a definite handicap which must be addressed. Because the acquisition does not come easily to them, they should be given special consideration by their language teachers. With more recognition and understanding from the educators, there is no reason for them not to succeed.

Writing this paper was painful at first because it opened up old wounds, private agonies that I didn't want to face. But if in the process of exposing my own difficulties in acquiring a language, I have been able to shed some light on the problems that other dyslexics face in the classroom everyday, I will be grateful. And as I have demonstrated, there are positive approaches to the problem once the dyslexic has been identified. The most valuable lesson that I have learned, though, is that I don't have to hide the fact that I am dyslexic.

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