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Dyslexia. Specific teaching difficulties

Dyslexia exists just to the extent that its development is furthered by environmental factors. Dyslexia is the children's answer to an education that is inappropriate for their abilities.

Dyslexia is not an illness, but instead, a special way of processing information. According to the special educational approach, any deviation from the abilities of the majority is to be regarded as a deficit. For those who failed to meet the usual requirements based on standard examinations, adequate help, support and development should be provided.

Deafness and partial deafness are, for instance, hearing deficits, which are called hearing impairments and are treated accordingly. Organizations for the deaf, however, insist on being called deaf, rather than hearing-impaired people. Using the former term emphasizes the human rights aspect rather than the special care side of the issue. The deaf are not people to be aided, but rather people with different abilities, who – like all other minorities – need circumstances suitable for their special traits to be able to blend in with the society of the majority, which in this case means hearing people, and become an equal member thereof with equal opportunities.

By the same approach, dyslexics form a minority as regards their way of information processing. As long as their number was insignificant, their difficulties could be dealt with individually. Today, however, the number of those who have problems with school-related abilities – reading, writing, counting, studying – is increased to such an extent that provision is not possible through individual development.

The aim of the present book is to present an approach and some essential information that renders it possible to prevent and effectively deal with the syndrome called dyslexia. This direct goal also indirectly serves the goal of making the common practice of teaching more efficient.

Culture has changed, children grow up in different circumstances, and are subject to different stimuli and experiences than they used to be at the time when the present education was devised.

Most probably, the education that was devised more for an elite than the great masses, was never really accessible to wider groups. In former cultural-social situations, however, children could be fitted in with the curricula, and school teaching even aided their cognitive development to some extent.

As a result of all the changes, though, the school and the student increasingly part company. This process started earlier on, and light has already been shed on this incompatibility:

„We don't need no education,
We don't need no thought control,
No dark sarcasm in the classroom
- teachers leave the kids alone.”¹



By the end of the seventies, the problem of education appeared in open protests. Instead of making any substantial changes in education, however, children unable to achieve at school, but not mentally handicapped, received a psychiatric label. This was a kind of compromise between the children and the authorities. It was an exemption for both. Children thus fleeing into disability do not have to live up to the requirements set by education, while education, being relieved from the responsibility of having to teach these children, does not have to live up to the children of today.

This well-structured escape system collapses under the weight of the mass non-conformity that has appeared over the years. One fifth of the population simply cannot be qualified as disabled. It seems to reflect the truth more to consider instead the education of today disabled, and devise suitable development and therapy, once we have omitted prevention.

A generation has grown up for which the analytic way of thinking which is familiar with relations and connections, is hardly functional. Acquiring writing-reading-counting skills does not only serve to establish these functions themselves, but also to develop and exercise the left-hemisphere, analytical-sequential way of thinking.

In today's world, and most probably in those to come, there is hardly any need for reading, given that one can obtain much more information through images. There is no need for handwriting, when beautiful texts can be typeset using computers, and when visual and audio transmission can serve as a substitute for writing. There is even less need for counting skills, since even a person with dyscalculia who cannot do sums and subtractions, can solve a whole line of mathematical operations using the built-in functions of a pocket calculator or even a cell phone, not to mention the opportunities a computer can provide.

Assuming, but accepting without much joy, that today's technical tools make the skills acquired at school unnecessary, which have so far been our most important cultural tools, new methods will need to be devised that take over the role of writing-reading-counting in developing the analytic-logical-sequential way of information

¹ Pink Floyd: „The Wall”, a 1979 album and rock opera, based on which the 1982 movie „The Wall” was also made.

processing in children. Failing this, a number of important elements of human thinking can be lost forever.

Forming images and ideas can be developed by the cognitive processing of written texts. Cognitive control and rhythm can be developed by writing. Counting operations exercise the way of thinking that builds on relations, amounts and connections. These and many more elements of thinking are important for efficient mental functioning.

The role of psychology and pedagogy is not simply to carry over the provision for dyslexics into everyday teaching by applying methods adequate for age and culture. This is only the first step of the task, automatically leading to the real challenge.

Psychologists should survey and get to know all those cognitive areas that have become neglected owing to cultural changes, but are important elements of human thinking. New methods and tools should be devised that can develop important cognitive abilities that are at the risk of failing to be developed due to writing-reading-counting potentially becoming subsidiary.

Pedagogy should work out methods suitable for developing the new kinds of ability, and to put these methods into the practice of teaching.

The present study is the beginning of this work. The „traditional learning disability“ part of the book provides a historical overview of this topic and an outline of this syndrome. I introduce the reader to the syndrome, which has been known for centuries by professionals, and which is receiving more and more attention. The syndrome was given different labels over time, and the concept behind the labels changed, as well. The identification and treatment of the syndrome and/or the illness is, therefore, varied. Although the approach of the present work is in several respects detached from the traditional approach to dyslexia, it is still rooted in approaches that have evolved during the long process of researching, treating and understanding learning difficulties and that have gathered strength with experience.

Those who are acquainted with the topic, or are simply not interested in the past, can safely skip this chapter. Those, however, might find it very intriguing, who would like a short summary of the literature on learning difficulties, and of the practical issues thereof.

In the second part of the book, I present an approach to the development and treatment of dyslexia which emphasizes the role of environmental factors. The disability is regarded as a function of changing external factors. This approach implies that manipulating environmental factors can substantially influence the problem of dyslexia.

In the third part, I review efficient solutions to prevention and to the development of partial skills, while the fourth part is dedicated to school skills. Both parts focus on methods of treating and particularly of preventing dyslexia through everyday activities.

The last part is about techniques that can make life easier for dyslexics. It is adult dyslexics who receive the least provision. Many people are not even aware of what causes their difficulties. Adequate provision should start by exploring the causes of the difficulties. It is easier to solve known problems. Readers are, again, introduced to methods of treating dyslexia through everyday activities. Besides those in learning, treatment possibilities in changing some aspects of work and lifestyle are presented.

This book is intended not only for reading, but also for browsing. Each part and each chapter is coherent in itself and contains usable information. It is not necessary to read through the whole book to obtain an answer or some help on some issue about dyslexia. Should someone be only interested in the main tenet of the book, they do not even need to read at all. They can simply compare the first and the last chapter of the book. The difference, which is easily identifiable even visually, indicates what and how much difference there is between traditional teaching and the teaching appropriate for today's students.