

## Why do some really bright youngsters struggle with literacy?

by Olive Hickmott of Empowering Learning

### The Challenge

Have some of your pupils been diagnosed with learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, ADD, ADHD, Aspergers or Autism? You may realise these pupils are highly intelligent, even gifted, but they find literacy in school a real challenge. Are you often perplexed as to why this is so? How can you assist these pupils fulfil their potential?

To help your understanding try this little exercise: Can you spell and read well? If you can, can you 'see' words in your imagination? Try imagining the word 'dog'. If this is easy try the word 'giraffe'. If this is still easy try the word 'conscientious' and try remembering your car number plate. If you are good at spelling and reading, this simple exercise will be easy and you will now be aware that you do 'see' words in your visual memory. Just imagine, for a moment, spelling and reading without the skill to visualise words. This is what many youngsters are missing. If you are Dyslexic, the letters are probably running around having a party! The news I have for you is that of the 1000s I have taught, including teachers, only about 50% find this easy. The others probably won't know what you are talking about and find literacy difficult. You may find it interesting to ask your staff.

### Do you recognise this type of youngster?

Many youngsters today have very highly-developed visual skills, that may in some cases be far more developed than their parents' or teachers'. They have been brought up with fast moving colour TVs, computer games etc. They can easily recall pictures, movies and games in great detail. This skill used to be called 'a photographic memory' and many youngsters have developed the skill even

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further; allowing them to move pictures around in their imagination at a rate of about 32 frames per second. This is ideal for 3D activities such as jigsaw puzzles, Lego, shape sorters etc and for jobs such as double glazing, graphic design and architecture. The trouble is, this skill is completely inappropriate for words and numbers!

### The world as seen by youngsters - told by these who struggle to spell and read

*"Nobody told me that all good spellers and readers can 'see' words in their imagination. Maybe it is such a habit for them, they don't even think to tell children."*

*"When I was born, I lived in a world of 3D objects, where I was excellent at turning things around, like bricks and shapes, to make them fit and be successful. I built things all from my imagination, without having instructions. I was never told that that letters, words and numbers are 2D and you simply get confused if you keep moving them. Even my toy bricks had letters and numbers on them, which just encouraged me to turn them around."*

*"I have exciting videos running in my brain all day, I don't seem to have any control over them, sometimes I have lots of screens with different channels, so I can be watching last night's TV, my mum telling my brothers off, my favourite film all at one time. I can't stop them or turn them off and sometimes they move so fast they are just a blur, like the TV when you first switch it on. They are often only a few inches from my face, which can be very distracting and it's too busy to pay attention to the Maths lesson. How do other people focus when all this is happening?"*

*"I find myself talking, gazing into space or walking away to try and stop my confusion. When I talk this seems to override the confusion, gazing into space lets me concentrate on one of the videos and walking away is, I suppose, me trying to run away from everything, even myself."*

*"I always feel restless and exhausted unless I am on the computer, which is mainly pictures, I can look straight ahead instead of being collapsed in a miserable heap on the desk."*

*"Some words seem to be easier to remember, I think they are the ones with objects attached. So when I spell 'football' I think of the Arsenal Football sign, but silly little words like 'is', 'on', 'was' just don't mean anything to me. Do they mean anything to you when they aren't in a sentence?"*

## A question for Headteachers

*"I have been taught these phonics, but nobody asks me what I can hear. The way my Hindu teacher says them, isn't the same as my Irish mum or my English dad. Anyway there are those silly words like 'to', 'too' and 'two' that sound just the same to me, but seem to have different meanings and are spelt differently. This is so confusing."*

*"When the words start moving on the page, I start to feel dizzy and then feel like passing out. I have tried to put this out of my head, but every day when I come to school I hope that this will be the day that school starts to make sense. But I just get confused again and I am so tired when I get home, I feel I am frustrated, angry and sometimes can be really horrible to mum and dad. Nothing in school makes sense to me."*

Does this sound like some of your pupils? Try imagining what this would be like for you. It is not a lack of intelligence or laziness, it's major confusion and it is so easy to change when you know "how to."

### The world as seen by teachers

A very common thread for these youngsters, when in primary school is to turn letters and words around. This will resonate with many teachers - 'was' becomes 'saw', 'b' becomes 'd', 'no' becomes 'on', numbers are written the wrong way around and so on. This is a classic sign of a very well-developed imagination or inner eye that can easily turn around objects. By the time pupils get to senior school, whole sentences can start to move off the page, turn around or simply shake so youngsters just don't want to even look at the written page. All of this is going on in their subconscious, out of conscious awareness, so they don't realise this is what is happening.

They may be getting very frustrated as poor literacy makes them feel stupid - this often ends in poor behaviour.

### The Solution

Nowadays, it is a very easy process to teach youngsters to keep their letters still. Every primary school teacher can learn how to teach the whole class in minutes. If you recognise pupils from this article, take a look at [www.empoweringlearning.co.uk](http://www.empoweringlearning.co.uk) for a simple way to make spelling and reading easy for visual youngsters. Youngsters can learn to see words in

less than an hour - the younger they get the habit, the more successful they are.

So with all these benefits of visual memory, youngsters have a really great opportunity of success, if taught how to control their visual pictures to make the best use of their untapped gifts.

### My credentials

When I first found out about visual spelling I would have been classified as dyslexic myself, my visual memory moved very fast and although I could visualise numbers, I had never considered the concept of visualising words, until a few years ago. Since then I have learnt much about my own internal experience that has enabled me to dramatically improve my spelling and reading. I have trained over 1000 people in UK, the Netherlands and a few elsewhere in Europe and the USA to be able to "Pass Literacy on". Together we have reached 1000s of people who struggle with spelling, reading, maths, dyslexia and dyscalculia. I am now planning research with a University to encourage visualising in regular teacher, support and specialist staff training.

Empowering Learning, based on my work published in **Seeing Spells Achieving** has taught thousands of people the skill to improve their experience. It is a behaviour that you can simply learn. As founder of [www.empoweringlearning.co.uk](http://www.empoweringlearning.co.uk) I have a passion for helping people who are struggling with any learning difficulties. I am a health, wellness and energy coach, qualified as a Master in NLP, Energy Enhanced NLP (Energetic NLP), Thought Pattern Management and Professional Coaching. The web-site has many stories of individuals who have successfully overcome learning difficulties, inspiring others to repeat their successes. I have developed other simple techniques to help those with ADD/ADHD and Dyspraxia.

I run breakthrough workshops with youngsters and their parents around the UK and in Holland. "In just 90 minutes everyone can change their experience with words."

Do help me to "Pass Literacy On".

Please contact me through [olive@empoweringlearning.co.uk](mailto:olive@empoweringlearning.co.uk) or on 07970-854388

