published in Reader's Digest,
27 June 2017

link to Reader's Digest article [1]

brain [2] genetics [3]



Word blindness, or dyslexia, describes difficulty with reading, writing or spelling. Helen Cowan meets Dr Ginny Stacey, tutor for students with dyslexia at Oxford University.

Dr Ginny Stacey is intelligent and articulate: she holds a PhD in physics from Oxford University, she's writing her fourth book [4], and she's dyslexic.

Ginny doesn't read newspapers because the columns of text present a problem. She stands up to write because words 'send her to sleep'; she'll often read a chapter in a book and miss its meaning; letters and numbers sometimes get out of order.

Ginny taught me some truths about dyslexia.

It's independent of IQ

"Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty, not a learning disability. Intelligence isn't affected," says Ginny.

"Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty, not a learning disability. Intelligence isn't affected."

Albert Einstein, Winston Churchill, Hans Christian Andersen and Leonardo da Vinci may have all been dyslexic- and also very intelligent. According to the Dyslexia Research Trust, the brain changes in dyslexia may result in stronger connections elsewhere in the brain, allowing for "exceptional artistic, engineering and entrepreneurial talents".

Dr Helen Taussig [5] was a dauntless, discerning dyslexic (who was also deaf). She is seen as the founder of children's heart surgery, developing an operation to help 'blue babies' born with heart defects.

More than words

According to Dyslexia Action, many adults with dyslexia have "issues with short-term memory and speed of processing that are more frustrating than issues with reading or spelling." This can make it difficult to keep track of conversations and follow instructions.

Time management can also be troublesome: a new app has been designed to help.

Some dyslexics find it difficult to envisage space: driving a car presents its own challenges. The British Dyslexia Association [6] offers some helpful tips for the dyslexic person taking a driving test, including use of hand gestures to indicate direction and keeping information to a minimum to avoid overloading the weaker working memory.

Never too late to get tested

Ginny didn't know that she was dyslexic until she was in her mid-thirties, long after she'd completed her PhD. In fact, it was when she decided to learn the guitar as an adult that she first began to think about how we learn. Many students only discover that they are dyslexic at University.

Studying a foreign language [7] at University can reveal that you are dyslexic – and help you manage it too. "When you learn a second language, you begin to understand how language works and fits together – it can really help fill in the gaps in your first language" Ginny explains.

Intriguingly, eczema, asthma and hayfever seem to be more common in people with dyslexia – worth mentioning when being tested?

Gender, genetics and…glasses?

It used to be thought that dyslexia was four times more likely in boys. "It's now thought to affect boys and girls equally: it's just that girls develop earlier and cooperate more so that the learning difficulty is better hidden" says Ginny.

Dyslexia may have a genetic cause, since it often runs in families.

It's known that tutoring and technology [8] can help the person with dyslexia, but what about coloured glasses? Professor John Stein [9] from Oxford has shown that using yellow filters on reading glasses can sometimes help the person with dyslexia "take off with their reading". Stein finds that others are helped by blue glasses.

Coloured glasses don't work for everyone, however. A more helpful strategy would be to get practical, cost-effective learning support into every school, so that children receive the help they need as soon as possible.

MEDICAL JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATION

Source URL:https://www.helencowan.co.uk/debunking-some-dyslexia-myths

Links
[1] http://www.readersdigest.co.uk/health/health-centre/debunking-some-dyslexia-myths [2]

https://www.helencowan.co.uk/../tags/brain [3] https://www.helencowan.co.uk/../tags/genetics [4] https://www.amazon.co.uk/Knowledge-Skills-Living-Confidently-Dyslexia/dp/1138202444 [5] https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/taussig-helen-brooke [6] http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexic/learning-to-drive [7] https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dyslexia/learning-a-foreign-language-with-dyslexia [8] http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/assistive-technologies [9] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eIx6ITYfNbU