

Overlooked Dyslexia hinders students' life

Learning disability affects 25 million Americans

By Shelley Ball
Of The Print

Imagine yourself a student in grade school again, then ask yourself these questions: what would you do if you found you constantly forgot letters and words you had just learned? What if you also realized that you couldn't follow more than one direction at a time, confused directions like left and right, up and down, reversed certain letters whenever you wrote, such as writing the *p* for *b*, the word *was* for *saw*, and the word *girl* as *gril*.

As you grew older and found yourself having to repeat certain grade levels over and over, no doubt you would feel that you were stupid and would spend the rest of your life trying to hide your problem. With discouragement and failure a part of your life, you might even turn to juvenile delinquency, for in stealing or some other form of delinquency you could tell yourself for the first time that you were accomplishing something, no matter how negative that something may be.

As an adult, you would go through life bluffing your way through incidents that asked you to read or write, for your fear of embarrassment would be foremost in your mind.

The above situation is the typical story of a person who has Dyslexia, a specific learning disability that affects approximately 25 million people in the United States today. At Clackamas Community College approximately 10 percent of its students have Dyslexia, Adult Basic Education instructor Bernice Peachy said.

"Dyslexia is not a disease, it's a predicament in which the people involved

have average to above average intelligence," she said.

Larry Gillpatrick is one of the Dyslexics on campus this year.

"I didn't know I had it (Dyslexia) until about three years ago," he said. Up until that time, Gillpatrick said he "thought I was just dumb, so I didn't put myself in a position where I would have to read and embarrass myself; what I couldn't do I guessed at," he said.

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For nearly all of his 45 years, Gillpatrick spent his life living a masquerade by covering up his reading and spelling problems, an act he says "leaves you half of a person."

While a Dyslexic has difficulty reading and spelling, he often excels in others. Artist Leonardo Da Vinci, scientist Albert Einstein, General George Patton and politician Nelson Rockefeller were all Dyslexic.

Throughout his school life, Gillpatrick said that he would get by on the assignments he could handle by simply copying answers to questions word for word from his textbooks. Why in all this time didn't any teacher see what he was doing and offer help?

"It seemed to get me by easier than teaching me to read and write," Gillpatrick said.

Dyslexia was first discovered as a problem by Samuel Torrey Orton, M.D. back in the mid 1920's. Since then it has been discovered that Dyslexia is inherited, usually from father to son. For this reason there are four times as many males with Dyslexia as females. There is also a relationship between Dyslexia and left-handed people, stutterers and clumsiness.

Gillpatrick eventually grew tired of "bluffing my way through school," and dropped out in his junior year to go to work full time. Gillpatrick always made sure he took jobs where he would use his exceptional mechanical skills only, and whatever chance paper work there was he found ways to avoid. "I was perfectly willing to work under somebody else," he said.

The cause of Dyslexia is unknown, but it has been found that the earlier it is treated the better the chances of success. Dr. Orton and his fellow workers were responsible for designing a special teaching system for Dyslexics, which uses a multi-sensory method made up of visual, audio and kinesthetic (writing) skills used together. The program is a highly structured one that has sequential and individualized teaching.

By learning in this manner, Dyslexics can learn to master their reading and spelling problems, but the amount of time it takes is entirely up to the individual, as there are varying degrees of Dyslexia.

At the College, Peachy said she and Harriet Holling use this teaching method, called the Orton/Gillingham Philosophy, in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes that they teach. ABE is designed to help students with an eighth grade or below reading level, and its philosophy combines the teaching methods of Orton with the book Remedial Training for Students with Specific Disability in Reading, Spelling and Penmanship, by Anna Gillingham and Bessie W. Stillman. The classes also stress an emphasis on repeating directions.

It wasn't until he suffered an industrial accident which made it impossible to work full time manually that Gillpatrick realized he would have to learn to read and write. He first came to the College in 1980 to work for a GED, and it was then that Gillpatrick was tested and diagnosed as Dyslexic, which he said "gave me a little bit better feeling when I knew I had a



Staff photo by Rick Obritschkewitsch
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Since that time, Gillpatrick has made astounding progress.

He received his GED in 1981, and returned this fall to continue improving his skills through the ABE classes taught by Peachy and Holling. Gillpatrick currently spends three hours a day Monday through Friday practicing vowel and consonant sounds, English and spelling rules.

"I didn't even know what a vowel was until after I quit school, and I'm just now finding out that I'm spelling words wrong that I used when writing checks," he said.

Through the ABE classes Gillpatrick has raised his reading level from the fifth to the ninth grade, and his spelling skills are gradually improving.

"I plan to stay until I learn spelling, then I would like to get a job as a foreman and use part of my old skills with my new ones," he said.

ABE is funded partly through a state and federal

grant and is considered a tuition waiver, making the class free of cost to students.

Peachy also mentioned that the College is "one of the few community colleges that has an Adult Basic Education program that welcomes Dyslexic students." She explained that the College is the first and eldest community college to recognize Dyslexia as a growing problem, and has helped to inform more people about it through the forming of the ABE classes.

Today there is an Orton Dyslexia Society that has approximately 6,000 members in the form of doctors, teachers, parents of Dyslexics and university professors in the United States alone. In the state of Oregon there are over 200 members.

Anyone with questions concerning Dyslexia can either contact Peachy at her office (Barlow 251) to make an appointment, or they can write to the Orton Dyslexia Society. The Oregon branch address is P.O. Box 3677, Portland, Oregon 97208.



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APPROXIMATELY 10 PERCENT of Clackamas Community College students have Dyslexia commented Adult Basic Education instructor Bernice Peachy.

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