

Learning problem unknown to majority of College staff

By Shelley Ball
Of The Print

Clackamas Community College has provided services for dyslexic students with its ABE/GED (Adult Basic Education/Grade Equivalency Diploma) programs since 1973. Despite this fact, and the fact that dyslexia affects approximately 25 million Americans, Developmental Education Instructor Bernice Peachy estimates only a third of the College's staff are aware of the learning disability.

Peachy supported her statement by explaining that at a campus workshop featuring

College dyslexic students, less than 10 faculty members showed up, even though all staff were invited to attend.

The workshop was part of the College's Awareness Week and Peachy said she was surprised at the amount of misinformation given out, as well as the reaction of one staff member after reading an article about the workshop covered by The Oregonian. Peachy said the staff member was heard to say, "Oh, they (dyslexic students) don't want to learn to read."

Recent research on dyslexia has shown that in an autopsied brain of a dyslexic,

evidence of alterations in the normal brain functions in an area important to language have been found. This evidence has been confirmed and it is believed the alterations result from a malformation of the brain cells during fetal development.

Because dyslexia affects the language center of the brain, common characteristics of the disorder are an inability to read well and spell correctly. Dyslexics often reverse letters, such as confusing the letter b for d, p for q, and may confuse words like bog for dog and was for saw. Dyslexics can also have problems in handwriting and math, as well as thinking patterns.

Dyslexics also have a hard time remembering facts, and they cannot follow more than one instruction at a time. Dyslexia is inherited, and four times as many males than females develop the learning disability. There is also a relationship between dyslexia and left-handedness, stutterers and clumsiness.

Although few faculty members showed up at the workshop, Peachy said that "more teachers are becoming aware, and it's (dyslexia) not a catch-all label."

However, Peachy said the most common misunderstanding about dyslexia today is



STUDENT LILLIAN SHELLEY describes her reaction to having dyslexia as "... kind of surprised, but I felt kind of bad—it sounds like you have a disease." Photo by Joel Miller

students with the disorder are thought to be either lazy or mentally retarded and are therefore unteachable, when in actuality they are as intelligent as normal students and have the desire to be able to read and spell just like everyone else.

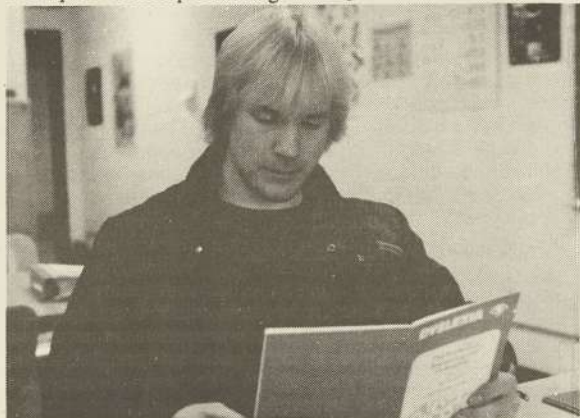
"These people can learn if they're taught properly and you (the teacher) adapt the curriculum you have. These people are of normal to above average intelligence and they can learn if taught by a multisensory program," she said.

This multisensory program is the kind Peachy uses to teach dyslexic students. The program is based on seven key elements. The elements are multisensory, alphabetic-phonetic, synthetic-analytic, structural, sequential, cumulative and cognitive.

Peachy said these seven elements can best be described by Margaret Rawson, past-president of the National Orton Dyslexia Society. Rawson said:

"Dyslexic students need a different approach to learning language from that employed in most classrooms. They need to be taught, slowly and thoroughly, the basic elements of their language—the sounds and the letters which represent them—and how to put these together and take them apart. They have to have lots of practice in having their writing hands, eyes, ears and voices working together for the conscious organization and retention of their learning."

Two College students who are learning effectively with the multisensory program are Lillian Shelley and Tom Bray, both of which are taking (continued on page eight)



STUDENT TOM BRAY looks through dyslexia book. Photo by Joel Miller

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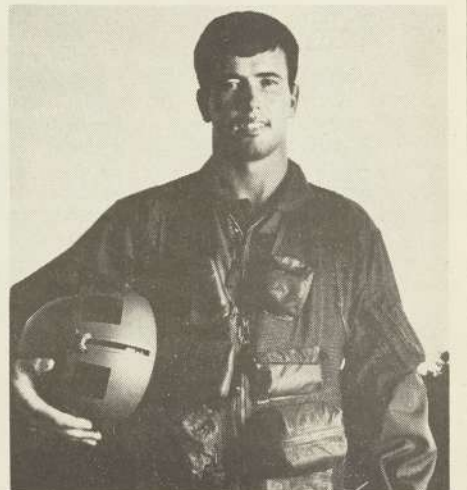
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