



Newsletter

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One of 300,000,000



Bill Traore, a bright child of eight, lives in Mali and according to his guardian, Sarah, is 'happy, settled, fun and good natured'.

But all has not been plain sailing for Bill. He has changed schools from one where the teachers hit him, and made him spend whole lessons on his knees in class for not understanding the lesson, to a school where they say that 'he does not want to learn' and 'refuses to learn'. Sarah thinks this is untrue.

'What he has is great difficulty distinguishing letters, and even more trouble distinguishing syllables. For example, after several minutes he might recognise "s" and then "o" but be unable to put them together to make "so",' she says.

'I was reading him a story and there was the word "maison". He could not remember that m+ai = "mai" and that s+on = "son". When he pronounced the word (after much prompting), he said "mai-son". Until it was pointed out, he did not make the connection with "maison", which he uses in communication in French everyday. And then, surprised at himself, he said, "Of course – how come I didn't get that?"



Bill and his guardian, Sarah

'We go over combinations of sounds hundreds of times and each time it is as if he has almost never seen or heard it before. At other times he can surprise me and read things spontaneously like "L'Oréal" off my face-cream pot which he saw in the bathroom the other day, or "Yassa" on the blackboard of "specials" in the nearby restaurant – totally without prompting and correct!

'But I am worried the negative effects might be starting to run deeper. Once at the school gate, three girls from his class came up to me and said "You know, Bill can't read! *She* (they pointed to a girl in front of me) has to do his writing for him!"

'I do know that the teacher often asks a neighbouring child to write for him as he is holding up the class and I am worried he will be excluded socially as a lot of games at this age rely on reading at least a bit. In school now he is sometimes made to sit outside by the teacher because he bothers the other kids by chatting incessantly, which perhaps he does simply to distract from the fact that he can't do the reading or writing task in hand. This is in spite of the fact that, when he wants to, he participates well orally and is very bright. In maths he regularly gets 9/10 but always with comments about the written presentation of his sums, which is awful. One of his strengths is art.

'There is no local support or understanding of the problem.'

Sarah is totally bewildered by Bill's apparent brightness but lack of progress in reading. She is looking for a Francophone teacher, trained for dyslexic children, with travel expenses to Bamako paid, and lodging offered with a small stipend. 'French Mali', she writes, 'is a wonderful place – rich in music and culture and it would be a marvellous opportunity for someone. We have a very nice house, swimming pool and a rich social life across all kinds of cultures.'

Profiles

Meet the Dyslexia Consultancy e-team *(continued)*



Sue Flohr is the Helpline Manager of the British Dyslexia Association. Her role enables her to receive and research information on all aspects of dyslexia on behalf of the BDA. This role, along with the range of committees and steering groups with which she works, also enables her to contribute towards shaping change in government policies for the benefit of dyslexic people. Sue is a teacher for special learning difficulties with experience across all age sectors and the workplace, and she is also a qualified Access Assessor for the Disabled Student Allowance (DSA). She has a particular interest in multilingualism and dyslexia, and in her spare time is completing a degree in Linguistics and Modern Foreign Languages.



Judith Stansfield is a consultant for special educational needs and ICT and has a particularly wide experience of assessing the ICT needs of children and young people with dyslexic and related learning differences. Formerly, she was the advisory teacher for SEN (Special education needs) and ICT in Cleveland. She designed and ran validated courses in the use of ICT with SEN for teachers and classroom assistants. She has written several booklets and support materials to help teachers and carers with using ICT and lectures at national and international seminars. Judith has acted as consultant to DITT in previous projects. Her sound views, extensive experience and judgment are highly valued.



Dr Vincent Goetry took a PhD at the Free University of Brussels (ULB), Belgium, on reading and spelling development in bilingual children. He then did a three-year post-doc at Queen's University, Kingston, Canada, on the development of reading in Anglophone children schooled in French immersion programs.

Currently, he is working on a Post Graduate Certificate in dyslexia and literacy, provided by Dyslexia Action (UK) and validated by the University of York, UK. He is also giving private lessons to dyslexic children with multilingual backgrounds.

Vincent's areas of interests include dyslexia, reading acquisition within a multilingual context, phonological awareness and how to translate theories of reading development into practice in lessons.

For a further listing of members of the DITT Dyslexia consultancy e-team, see *Newsletter* No.30, Winter 2007

One in ten: André Génard



André is an adult dyslexic. Formerly working in the arts, he is now working on a monologue entitled 'The Illusionist'. He researches the interface between psychology and physics. His 'act' (a sort of humorous lecture) gives insight into his findings, interests, and 'himself' as an illusionist. He recently visited DITT and agreed to share his story.

'I was seven when I was considered as having learning difficulties because of not keeping up with reading and writing. Nobody really explained to me what was going on. They merely said I had to visit a doctor, making it sound far more dramatic than it was. Forty years later, I revisited this psychiatrist, a professional I merely knew about from cartoons. He managed to restart the consultation and I went about 20 times until I realised that it could go on for ever without my learning anything.

'I can still remember the circumstances of the early visits: a lot of tears and doubt about myself and everyone else, not least my mother. Incidentally, I overheard a conversation between the medic and her. Then in desperation, I vowed to myself that I would start 'acting' as if I was a bit loony and that 'they' would never find out about the real me.

"Since the only information they crudely gave me was that I was writing things in reverse, I decided to use this fact as a guide for my behaviour. I would act in reverse as well, but making sure I did not damage or hurt anyone. So, for example, whenever I really felt great anger, I played the sweet, silly boy. When everyone in the playground was happy for some reason, I would act sad, and vice versa. And indeed, I also thought about the scene in the Tintin story *Cigars of the Pharaoh* in which he is tricked into being a patient in an asylum and the medic says, "It's just as the other doctor said, 'He will keep on insisting that he is absolutely sane'". I felt trapped.

'What I did not realise over the years was that I was building up a reputation of someone who was not to be taken seriously, which turned my adolescence into a dark period. I was caught out by my own scheme, and could not find a way out.

'For that reason I attended art classes and went to the Academy of Fine Arts, learning to draw still life, portraits, nudes, and landscapes. But even there I could not engage



'Alphabet Candy', 2007
Digital image

in the art scene. It was really about psychological survival. Though I did quite a few projects anonymously, my works were in fact tools and devices designed to invite people to communicate with me. (Today, as an illusionist I call those my 'tricks'.) Once they communicated, which was rare, I would then screen them for trustworthiness before opening a door further into the person I really was. Again, by setting up this scheme over the years I lost sight of who I was supposed to be in the first place. This contrasts with people who can clearly say what they are – a dancer, a racing car driver or a record salesman. Only recently has it started to dawn on me who I really am.

'My current work stems from another early humiliation. They had given me a pair of glasses, with an awful 1961 design, which turned me once more into the school laughing stock. This motivated me to do something about it and confront the problem. Around that time, I saw an illustration in a biology textbook of how an image is inverted and reversed at it crosses the lens of the eye. By mentally and intellectually concentrating on the focal point itself, I realised that the difficulties I experienced had to do with a 'Droste' effect and became convinced about where the problem lay. I began my research into physics, the brain, art and now the wonderful universe of illusion.'

One in ten: Ann Jorissen



Digital art by
Ann Jorissen

Ann Jorissen's latest exhibition: a mixture of photography, painting with WACOM pen - resampling images in moving pictures, consists of a 15-minute film depicting what will happen on 21 December 2012. The date is not arbitrary: the Mayans believed that this was the end of the calendar as we know it, and that the planets would align in such a way as to bring in a new era of femininity, care and respect for nature. To find out more, visit the cultural centre in Bikveld, Bonheiden, Belgium, on Sunday 20 April.

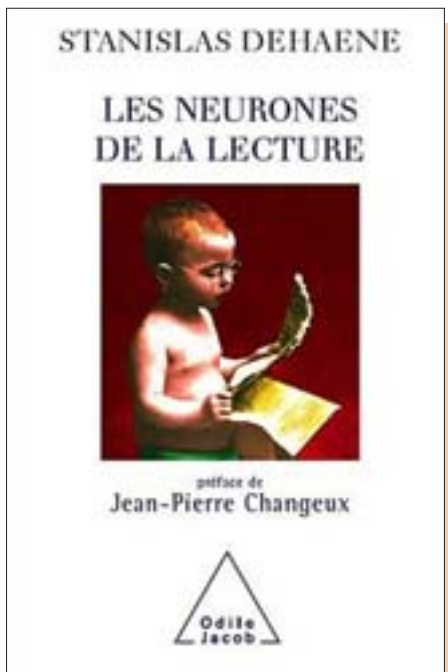
The Flemish artist is enjoying a flourishing time, but her path to creative fulfilment has not been as smooth as it might have been. Art was always in her blood, but her parents didn't want her to go to art school, instead preferring that she train as a pre-school teacher. She had always had difficulties writing languages, and it wasn't until her time at teacher-training college that she received useful advice for overcoming her dyslexia.

A retired teacher taught her a series of ‘little tricks and little rules’, she says. Ann wrote down these aids and consulted them regularly. Before long she knew them by heart, and they proved to be highly effective. ‘I had to work very hard to get where I wanted to go,’ she says. After ten years as a pre-school teacher, Ann trained as a sculptor and took courses on computer graphics and photography.

She has a son, who is also dyslexic, and despite recognising his condition at an early age, she has struggled to get his teachers to acknowledge his difficulties with writing. Following a consultation with a specialist in Hasselt, Belgium, she discovered Klank therapy, which uses sounds to overcome problems associated with dyslexia. Ann says that her son’s writing responded well to the treatment.

But Ann warns against complacency. ‘There is still a lot of work to do in Belgium,’ she says. ‘During the whole of his school years, we had to explain to teachers what dyslexia is. We were always fighting.’

www.artstudioannjorissen.com/en/index.htm – 6k



Typefaces or fonts:

Arial

Comic sans

Times New Roman

Verdana

Type styles:

regular regular

italic italic

bold bold

condensed condensed

What works

Les neurones de la lecture by Stanislas Dehaene

The author is a professor of experimental cognitive neuroscience working in France. He claims that the brain did not evolve specially for reading and so has had to learn how to ‘recycle’ the mechanisms it has long used to recognise objects into a facility for decoding arbitrary sequenced marks before converting them into sounds – a ‘re-conversion which is slow, partial and difficult’.

Professor Dehaene supports this hypothesis with a wealth of recent scientific discoveries afforded by the latest techniques of brain imaging and clever psychological experiments which tease out the innermost workings of the brain. So, in the normal course of reading text, the letters of the word first have to be detected and, because these are quite small, the eye has to move its most sensitive part for the detection of shape, the fovea, across (or down) the page in a precision-guided sequence of movements. Then the brain has to extract the *invariant* features from the text so that words, in no matter what font or style, are recognised as words. Here, Dehaene

brings in his own idea, that of 'proto-letters' (which monkeys can distinguish): 'T's and 'Y's have at origin those features made where, for example, trees occlude the line of the horizon, or corners of objects are formed. Early scribes realised that the recognition and remembering of suitable marks could profit from this ability. So writing was adapted to the brain and in turn the brain now adapts to writing as it learns. 'Nature and culture are strictly interwoven,' he writes.

Professor Dehaene is confident that if teachers had a reasonable understanding of the science of reading and methods of remediation, then most dyslexic children could be brought up to a proficient level of reading although they may not read in exactly the same way as children who are not dyslexic.

The evidence is clear for normal and dyslexic children alike: reading is a skill which has to be taught systematically as the brain is trained, and connections and associations fortified.

He is quite harsh about the 'global' method of teaching reading and believes he can refute most of the reasons given for the benefits of this method.

At the very least, he says, these reasons are discordant with what he and his colleagues working in the field have found scientifically.

The invariant information analysed in this way is then sent to a part of the brain that is the same in every individual who can read (the left occipito-temporal region, just above and behind the left ear). Several illustrations from brain scans show this. One of his own experiments gives the data from an experiment in which 'RADIO' and 'radio' are randomly presented to the subject and this very precise region shows activity, but the response time required diminishes as the word becomes more familiar, whether or not it is in capitals or lower case. In short, recognition becomes automatic.

But this of course is not the only region of the brain that is implicated in reading. A diagram shows the most recent thinking with at least five regions activated in parallel and bi-directionally from this occipito-temporal area when the subject reads. The paths vary depending on whether the word to be spoken is familiar and therefore has to be accessed more quickly for pronunciation or has to be broken down into graphemes first. The broad paths are known but not the precise interconnections.

Now to the point which will interest readers concerned about dyslexia and methods of teaching reading. 'Science develops continuously and all concerned with literacy and policies related to it have a duty to keep abreast of the findings', Dehaene says. To give one example, he invokes the most modern methods such as diffusion magnetic resonance which is used to detect the fascicles or bundles of nerves which interconnect regions and have been up to now very difficult to trace. He cites several independent studies that show these bundles are disorganised in dyslexic children, suggesting the reason for problems of timing and association. However, he also deals with other lines of evidence which are well known such as 'ectopias' (misplaced cells), degree of hemispheric specialisation, and genetic factors. There is a particularly interesting chapter on brain symmetry.

In conclusion, this book is highly recommended as an example of science made comprehensible, for its intrinsic interest about just one marvellous behavioural feature of the brain's workings, and how modern techniques are beginning to reveal the causes of dyslexia.

478 pages. ISBN 978-2-7381-1974-2. Odile Jacob. Also available from www.amazon.fr. An English version will be published by Viking later this year.

Professor Dehaene will speak at DITT's Annual Open Forum in November, which will be online this year. More details will follow.

Films

We recommend the following recent films, each one good for raising awareness and gaining insight into extent of damage to the person when dyslexia goes undetected:

- A recent Canadian documentary by the Knowledge Network provides more information about dyslexia, efficient and successful interventions:

<http://www.knowledgenetwork.ca/dyslexia>

- *Decoding dyslexia – a look beyond the myths*, a film from New Zealand introduced by DITT member Caroline Brockes, and used in teacher training programmes in the UK. It will be available from the web after its broadcast on 28 April:

<http://tvnz.co.nz/view/page/410965/992327>

- The French version of the DITT film *Language Shock – Dyslexia across cultures* is available from our site at this address:

<http://www.ditt-online.org/Pack/Video.htm>



Mathematics

- Cambridge University has a collection of excellent puzzles for the enrichment side (NRICH):

<http://www.nrich.maths.org.uk/public/index.php>

- This site is run by the Mathematics Association:

http://www.m-a.org.uk/education/primary/primary_mathematics_challenge/

- A collection of resources put together by the London Maths Society:

http://www.lms.ac.uk/activities/education_com/resources.html

-
- Sage has published *Developing Thinking in Algebra/Geometry/Statistics*, which contains activities that can be used by the teacher with the whole class.
 - Finally, also recommended by Judith Stansfield, the Open University has a Centre for Mathematics Education (CME):
<http://cme.open.ac.uk/>

Supporting dyslexic learners in a mainstream junior school

Sue Newton, a teaching assistant mainly working with dyslexic children, writes...

Imagine yourself dropped into the middle of a desert, then told to make your way to the nearest town. You have no directions, no support and no idea how to get there. Which emotions would you experience? Panic? Fear? Stress?

The same emotions are felt by dyslexic learners when they are faced with a blank sheet of paper and told to write. At Velmead we strive to provide the direction, support and strategies. It is important to us that children experience the 'feel-good factor'.

My journey started 17 years ago when I first worked with children at Velmead (a state community Junior School currently with 366 children). I found it challenging yet rewarding and I soon became more and more interested in the way dyslexic children learn. After receiving accreditation from the British Dyslexia Association in 2003, I have worked towards helping Velmead achieve 'Dyslexia Friendly School' status. The dyslexia friendly approach has great benefits for all the children because it is multi-sensory, thus connecting to children's different learning styles.

I mentioned the feel-good factor – many dyslexic learners have low self-esteem and feel they will struggle to achieve anything. In order to address some of these feelings, I have displayed photos of, and information on, many famous people who are dyslexic. This reinforces the message that dyslexia does not have to be a barrier to learning. Dyslexic children can achieve great things. All children need to feel valued and that they are capable of exceeding their own high expectations. As educationalists, we need to understand how dyslexics learn. We need to consider embracing a different approach. In words quoted by Dr Harry Chasty, an

international consultant on learning abilities and disabilities: 'If they don't learn the way we teach them, can we teach them the way they learn?'

With proper understanding and appropriate support dyslexic learners can strive to achieve their goals. At Velmead, we share best practice. Since 2003 I have attended conferences and courses about dyslexia, I have fed back information and modelled new strategies for the staff. Also, as part of my work, I produced a booklet aimed at parents which gives information about dyslexia and the comprehensive support we provide at Velmead.

Velmead is a mainstream school where dyslexic learners' needs are understood. Our 'Policy for Teaching for Learning' encompasses everything a school needs to do in order for all children to succeed. Here are just three examples of how to adopt a policy which is dyslexia friendly:

- Create for all individuals a creative, positive and supportive learning environment in which children's self-esteem and emotional intelligence blossom.
- Teach listening and thinking skills. Give them time for thinking and methods to promote memory, retention and recall including the importance of review, reflection, mind mapping and other novel ways of recording outcomes.
- Teach children about multiple intelligences, and raise their awareness of their own preferred learning styles and conditions of optimum learning.

So much can be achieved when educationalists have a clearer understanding of dyslexia. This in turn makes learning more enjoyable and rewarding.

OFSTED, the official body for inspecting schools in the UK, has also recognised how well special education needs children progress at Velmead:

'All strands of special needs provision are fully informed by assessment; as a consequence, teaching is effective and pupils make good progress.'

(OFSTED Report, February 2004)

'The tracking system successfully ensures early identification of those pupils who need additional help. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress.'

(OFSTED Report, January 2008)

Lexion

Judith Stansfield has been working with a beta version of *Lexion* with the children at a dyslexia summer school in Switzerland and found it really useful. It was developed by speech and language therapists and teachers in Sweden and has been used successfully in Swedish for several years. It has now been translated into English and has undergone trials in the Midlands, UK. Initially it is used as an assessment tool, and once the child's strengths and weaknesses have been identified, it then provides activities to help develop learning. The teacher can use these recommendations and can also use any of the other activities to develop skills and confidence.

<http://www.frolundadata.se/index.cgi?cmd=ShowPage&page=english>

A teaching tip from Johan Schepens

Johan recommends using an electronic agenda in helping dyslexic pupils acquire better planning skills:

'One of the characteristics of pupils with dyslexia is poor planning skills. They need far more time to finish tasks and they tend to be easily distracted. But recently I started using an electronic planner because everybody has an e-mail address throughout the school. Using the electronic agenda attached to my address I can monitor dyslexic pupils' planning.

'The idea is quite simple: every Friday evening they plan the next week, fortnight or up to one month ahead – even colour-coded. As they automatically share their agenda with me I can intervene, but only as needed, to propose changes so that adjustments can be made on the spot. Every month we evaluate the results.

'This system gives the students autonomy. They take responsibility for their own actions and timetables. Although it's still early days, the results seem to indicate a positive impact on the planning skills of my dyslexic pupils.'

A round-up of recommended resources

DITT thanks Rachel Warfield for trawling through the 'What works' sections in back issues of the *Newsletter* to compile a collection of resources which will be included in the ToSuccess.org subsite, to be made accessible from the principal DITT website, ditt-online.org.

Announcements

DITT seeking Deputy Executive Director

Please advertise this post and encourage new volunteers to help DITT in all its activities. These include the creation of online training, administration, research and public relations.

DITT Deputy Executive Director

DITT, Dyslexia International Tools and Technologies asbl, an international *NGO in operational relations with UNESCO*, is looking to appoint a deputy executive director.

This key position involves:

- representing DITT at international events and seminars
- promoting the interests of people with dyslexia worldwide
- ensuring funding is in place through donations and sponsorship
- commitment to a flexible time-table for a minimum of 3 years involving administration and management
- reporting to the Executive Director

To be eligible for this position, you should have:

- a doctorate in education from an internationally recognised university
- a minimum of 10 years of experience in research into the causes and effects of dyslexia
- a history of publications on the subject, and
- experience in the development of software programmes and games to aid dyslexic learners.

It is important to note that, currently, all DITT staff are unpaid volunteers.



World Dyslexia Forum 2010 at UNESCO, Paris

The first World Dyslexia Forum on the theme 'Science, good practice and technologies', featuring *Teaching the brain to read* by Dr Duncan Milne, will take place at UNESCO, Paris, on 3–5 February 2010. Following delays due to building works, the dates for the Forum are now finally confirmed.

DITT is targeting teacher-training decision-makers from more than 190 countries worldwide to explore good practice reported by experts in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Chinese.

The outcome will be enriched teacher-training programmes – online courses and effective teaching promoted through shared good practice.

All the speakers engaged (see *Newsletter* No.29, Autumn 2007) have been contacted about the new dates.

Website set for relaunch

Design, content and technical aspects of the new website are well in hand, and we hope to be up and running by the end of April 2008.

Annual Open Forum

This year our Annual Open Forum in November will be an online conference, thanks to the support of the Microsoft School Technology Innovation Center in Brussels.

Professor Stanislas Dehaene from the Collège de France and José Morais from the Free University of Brussels will give short presentations and answer questions. Both are psychologists: Dehaene has carried out research into consciousness, reading and the learning of mathematics; Morais is an expert in the acquisition of reading.

The exact date will be in our next Newsletter and announced on our web site.

DITT Annual General Meeting

This year's AGM will take place at the DITT offices, 1 rue Defacqz, 1000 Brussels, Belgium, on Friday 23 May at 12.30, and will be chaired by DITT legal adviser Joe Sepulchre. We welcome your attendance. Please let Amy know in advance if possible: +32 (0)2 537 7066.

Money matters

Thanks go to all our associates and supporters who have generously contributed to enabling DITT to continue its business – working with leading experts to create and promote tools and technologies that enable people with dyslexia to succeed in a competitive world.

DITT now welcomes sponsors for the World Dyslexia Forum in 2010. Packages that include backing for the new film *Dyslexia – On the right track*, speakers and rapporteurs' expenses will give partners and backers global visibility.

Reflections

Study links school failure to dyslexia

Many schoolchildren could be failing reading and writing tests because they are unaware they are dyslexic, new government-funded research suggests. A study by academics from Hull University, UK, of 1,300 children stated that dyslexia was a major cause of failure. Over half of those who did not achieve expected levels in tests displayed all the signs of being dyslexic. The research has led to calls for more specially-trained teachers in schools as well as better diagnosis.

The study, commissioned by dyslexia charity Xtraordinary People, claims to be the first to firmly identify dyslexia as a major cause of underachievement in primary schools. It looked at 7- and 11-year-olds who failed to reach expected levels of reading and writing in national tests. The majority – 55% – displayed all the signs of being dyslexic.

The UK government is piloting a scheme using specially trained dyslexia teachers, but says it will not roll it out nationally until it is sure the teachers make a difference.

The Animal School

In 1940, George Reavis, superintendent of the Cincinnati public schools, wrote a fable that offers valuable insights into children with disabilities. As the adaptation overleaf illustrates, in many cases it is not the child who is 'disabled', but the faulty teaching system.

What insights can we gain from this story?

ONCE UPON A TIME the animals decided they must do something to help their children face the problems of the world, so they organised a school. They had adopted an activity curriculum consisting of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

THE DUCK was excellent in swimming. In fact, he was even better than his teacher. But he made only passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to stay after school and also drop swimming in order to practice running. This was kept up until his webbed feet were badly worn and he was only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in school so nobody worried about that, except the duck.

THE RABBIT started at the top of the class in running but had a nervous breakdown because of so much catch-up work in swimming.

THE SQUIRREL was excellent in climbing until he developed frustration in the flying class where his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of the treetop down. He also developed cramp from overexertion and then got a C in climbing and D in running.

THE EAGLE was constantly causing problems and was severely disciplined. In the climbing class, he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but he kept insisting on using his own method of getting there. This was unacceptable.

AT THE END of the year, an abnormal animal known as a Snakehead Fish enrolled at the school. He could swim exceedingly well and also run, climb, and fly a little. He ended up having the highest average and gave the farewell graduation oration.

THE MOST social members of the squirrel family stayed out of school and fought against paying state tax for education because the administration would not add digging and burrowing to the curriculum. They apprenticed their children to a badger and later joined the groundhogs to start a successful private school.

*Newsletter edited by Jon Eldridge
and designed by Pauline Key-Kairis*