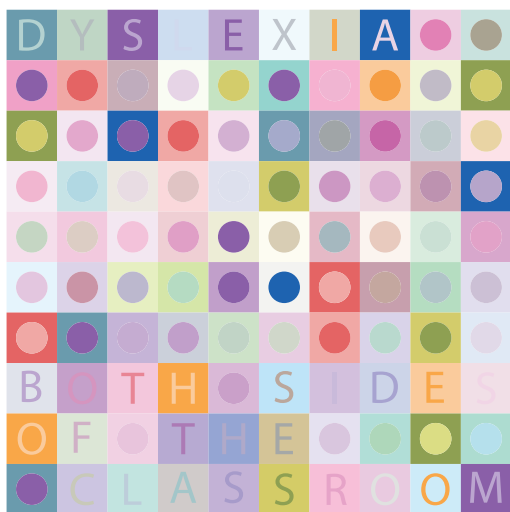


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# THE LITTLE BOOK OF DYSLEXIA

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Both sides of the classroom



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Joe Beech  
Edited by Ian Gilbert



## Praise for *The Little Book of Dyslexia*

Any parent of a child diagnosed with dyslexia would find this book excellent in that it is written by someone who really knows how that impacts. I love the human touch in Joe's style of writing. Would I buy this as a parent of a dyslexic person? Absolutely!

Andrew Massey, Fox In The Box Consulting Ltd

*The Little Book of Dyslexia* is easily accessible, written in an almost informal and 'chatty' way which makes the reader want to read on. The mix of fact and anecdote is timely and appropriate. The 'human' element of the book is its strongest selling point - the author knows what it is like to be dyslexic and how it impacts on everyday life and the use of humour (often at the author's expense!) is very apt, especially when describing situations/faux pas that can easily be made.

The book will appeal to trainee teachers, newly qualified teachers and practitioners across all phases of education. It will also prove to be a practical guide for all parents on how to cope with a child who has dyslexia, and also some reassurance that a 'diagnosis' of dyslexia is not life-inhibiting.

Debbie Coslett, Chief Executive Officer,  
The Hayesbrook School Academy Trust

This may be a 'little book' but it is about a big subject and has great heart and a penetrating mind. It is a very useful book that is as much about the whole issue of learning as it is about dyslexia.

Joe Beech combines his personal story, a succinct account of the theory and research associated with dyslexia and a significant degree of practical recommendations that cannot fail to be of immense use to everyone who has experience of dyslexia - as subject, parent or teacher.

The way Joe tells his own story endears him to his readers and commands human attention to this most human of challenges – both in terms of learning in our social and educational systems and in terms of how we should regard a specific group of learners, numbering over two million people in this country alone. He charts his own experience from early childhood through to his experiences in higher education – a story of obstacles surmounted and how those obstacles could and should be significantly reduced by those who manage learning systems.

The first five chapters introduce the reader to the subject itself, explaining the potential genetic origins of dyslexia and the questions it raises about the way that we think about learning and some of the many obstacles there are to learning within our social and educational systems. The three chapters dealing with the period of early years through to secondary school help us to get inside the mind of a child experiencing dyslexia and the typical response of the system to such a child. The ‘system’ includes teachers and parents in particular, for it is the personal response of the adults whom the child encounters that can profoundly influence whether learning for a child experiencing dyslexia becomes a pathway among many possible pathways, or a steep incline with ever-growing obstacles to be cleared in an increasingly isolating climate.

Joe charts the story with a light touch in which he offers us insights laced with humour and occasional irony as he helps us to understand how this particular challenge to learning can be effectively managed. His inference that we need to know our ACBs (deliberately a little ironic) – Assessment, Classroom practice and Behaviour – so that adults, particularly teachers and parents, can help move the learning of children with dyslexia forward and themselves develop a useful and practical level of understanding, has a powerful impact on the reader. He demystifies the subject, making it immediately accessible to anyone who wants to understand it and respond to it.

In spite of the plain and very accessible writing on the subject and its intensely practical nature, this is a book founded on thorough and rigorous research. From the earliest chapter he finds simple ways of explaining and illustrating what the printed environment might look like through dyslexic eyes, even with a spell-checker on the computer to hand (or eye).

The illustrations are particularly evocative and somehow create a feeling of empathy towards the person, young or more mature, working out how to manage this distinctive set of challenges.

One very serious point about this book is that it explores aspects of learning in general. What is written about dyslexia is applicable to all aspects of what we have come to call 'special needs'; and what we can learn from thinking about meeting special needs applies to the whole potentially vexed question of how all of us learn. To read this book is to further deepen one's understanding of learning. To understand dyslexia and how to manage it is to grasp more about the management of learning for all children and indeed all adults. That is perhaps the most remarkable thing about this 'little' yet very big book.

Or perhaps there is one other thing that is most remarkable. It is that it is an example of *amor vincit omnia*. Joe's story is one of being loved and of loving – the key ingredients of how he has come thus far in his life managing challenges that are that bit steeper than those which we normally face. It is clear that this is due in no small part to the love he has experienced especially from his family. Equally he approaches the subject in a loving way – love for those like him who have engaged with this particular challenge, love of learning, love that he shows through the insights he shares in the book, and the love which has drawn him to a career in education himself – something he hints that many people find remarkable.

This is a 'must-read' not only for anyone who has met dyslexia – in their own approach to learning or in a child or children they know – but for anyone who has an interest in learning and

how it is best facilitated, whoever the learner might be. If you are interested in learning and being a more effective learner on a personal level, read this book.

Roger Pask, education leadership and management consultant, facilitator and coach

Joe Beech is going to be an outstanding teacher. He is currently at the University of Chichester studying to be a PE teacher in secondary school. He is also the author of *The Little Book of Dyslexia*. This book is a very welcome addition to the library of books on dyslexia because it offers a personal account allied to a teacher's perspective. Even in these relatively enlightened days, not many people are both dyslexic and a teacher.

Joe Beech grew up in Kent where the 11 plus was still in operation so while his brother went off to grammar school, he went to a mixed high school. This had some key advantages. The school taught touch typing, which Joe acknowledges as 'one of the most valuable skills' that he possesses. While so many books focus on endless spelling and phonics practice, *The Little Book of Dyslexia* is a breath of fresh air when it comes to the practical uses of technology to support the dyslexic learner. Beech talks about mind mapping, dictaphones, e-readers, smartphones and all the panoply of 'technology in your back pocket'.

Joe Beech's experiences have informed his approach to his new career. It is worth buying this book for the chapter on teaching alone. There is a wealth of practical tips: Do a lesson plan as a flow chart instead of in the conventional way so you can see exactly where you are and where you are going.

'The best resource available to you in any classroom is the pupils themselves,' says Joe. 'If you can implement a system in which the pupils cover most of the organisation, half of the work is done for you!' He suggests building on the ideas used in *The Apprentice* and setting up a system where pupils take on roles as Project Manager, Resource Manager, Team Motivator, the

Accountant who is responsible for rewards and the Coach/Mentor who also acts as assessor. Not only does this motivate young people but it also prepares them for the world of work, too.

Joe Beech has produced a very enjoyable read which offers an insight into the best teaching too: 'The best lectures and lessons I have had are the ones that caught me off-guard and involved a novel experience which remained in my mind.' I am sure his own lessons will be equally memorable.

Sal McKeown, freelance journalist and author of *How to help your Dyslexic and Dyspraxic Child* (Crimson Publishing)

This little book is a delightful read. Written by a trainee PE teacher who was diagnosed at the age of 8 with dyslexia and dyspraxia, it is a testament to his perseverance through a sometimes unforgiving education system bent on teaching literacy and numeracy in dyslexia-unfriendly ways. Aimed primarily at teachers, *The Little Book of Dyslexia* has a wealth of practical information to help both teachers and parents meet the needs of dyslexic children more effectively.

There is a good balance between the author's own experience, tools of the trade and literature research all adding up to well-rounded package addressing the needs of dyslexic pupils and students in education. Explaining how dyslexia is experienced is helpful as it puts the reader in the shoes of dyslexic pupils focusing on issues such as self-esteem, organisational skills and managing challenging behaviour and how these impact on learning.

The book also has suggestions about useful software to support dyslexic students and ideas for teachers to consider in their classroom practice. The section on exams is particularly useful. The author takes a balanced view about exams versus coursework and suggests a number of strategies to help dyslexic students through these challenging times. Topics such as managing time

and money are covered as well as organisational skills. These are essential life skills for all young adults. The last section of the book is specifically aimed at teachers, packed with ideas about how to make classrooms dyslexia-friendly.

*The Little Book of Dyslexia* is a gem of a book that will be useful for working with all pupils and students. It is packed with common sense strategies and insights that will make learning fun and productive.

Carol Frankl, Ofsted Inspector  
and a provider of SEN training and consultancy

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I would like to dedicate this book to my better half, my family and friends without whom I would not have achieved a lot of the things that I have today, this book included. In particular I would like to thank my parents for all their support whilst I was growing up and my mother for inspiring me into the world of education and teaching, although I get a strange look sometimes when I tell people that.

I would also like to extend particular thanks to my new fiancée Sarah, for all of her love, patience and support. I will love you always.

One day I may find a way to put my love into words but until then I will dedicate a book to you which is about how hard it is to put things into words.

Much love.

# Contents



<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	<i>iii</i>
<i>Foreword</i> .....	<i>v</i>
1. Introduction .....	1
2. Dys-lex-ia .....	7
3. The Early Years .....	17
4. Primary School .....	29
5. Secondary School .....	47
6. Technology .....	67
7. Exams and Qualifications .....	85
8. Higher Education .....	99
9. Teaching .....	119
<i>Appendix</i> .....	<i>131</i>
<i>Endnotes</i> .....	<i>137</i>
<i>Bibliography</i> .....	<i>143</i>

## Chapter 1

# Introduction



There are two things I would like to introduce before we continue: the first is myself, because a lot of this book is based on my personal experience, and the second is this book. First things first: I am currently a student studying a Secondary Physical Education teaching degree (QTS) at the

## The Little Book of Dyslexia

University of Chichester. At age 8 I was diagnosed with dyslexia and dyspraxia. Dyslexia is generally associated with having difficulty learning to read and decoding language although it is far from limited to this. Dyspraxia, on the other hand, is a motor learning difficulty that affects coordination and movements. The two conditions are associated and can often develop together but are not the same.

I progressed through the education system with varied levels of success and support. There were many times when I felt angry and frustrated with my situation and there have been other times when, thanks to the support I received, I managed to achieve things I didn't think would be possible at one stage. Ultimately, for better or for worse, and thanks to the education system and every teacher I have ever had (both good and bad), that is why I have written this book – in the hope that my experience might benefit others. My aim is to try to optimise the educational opportunities and understanding that people with dyslexia receive during their schooling.

This book will grow with age. I start by looking at some of the early signs of dyslexia before progressing through the UK education system and finally on into higher education and what it is like to be on the other side of the classroom. Along the way, drawing on my own experience, I assess what the research tells us and what support is available. I also include some of my own personal hints and tips that you might find useful. Although this book is primarily aimed at teachers, hopefully it will support students and parents alike.

## Introduction

The important thing to bear in mind when approaching dyslexia is that individuals don't either have or not have dyslexia; rather it works on a continuum, and not a simple lateral one at that. People have different severities in different areas and must always be treated as individuals and never tarred with the brush of 'having a condition'. Teaching is incredibly difficult, and if you find it easy then you are a cheat, a liar or in the words of Sir John Jones 'a weaver of magic'!<sup>1</sup> It is so important not to make assumptions and jump to conclusions about your students, and yet often we have a limited amount of information to work with and the 'reality' of dealing with what lies in front of us kicks in. To help you take reality and kick it out of the classroom where it belongs, at the end of each chapter I include a 'teacher tips' section which will give you some practical solutions to draw on. My aim is to help you with your 'ACBs', but I don't mean teaching you to read and write. The 'ACBs' I am referring to are these:

### **A - Assessment**

Looking at assessment on a number of levels: assessing for dyslexia, Assessment for Learning in the classroom and how to deal with formal and informal assessments.

### **C - Classroom practice**

Practical and useful strategies to pull out and give a try - and, with a bit of luck, adapt and improve on! This section is at the heart of good quality teaching and learning and will hopefully give you some ideas to help you reflect on your practice, experiment with ideas, take

## The Little Book of Dyslexia

a few risks and above all have fun. These strategies will benefit all young people, not just those with dyslexia.

### **B - Behaviour**

Dyslexia can manifest itself in challenging behaviour, often boredom and the inability to engage with school life, which can then lead to bad behaviour. This section aims to help you spot problems before they get out of hand.

Dyslexia is always there but hopefully these tips will give you a better idea of how to deal with scenarios should they arise. Even while writing this and using a spell-checker, I still needed other people to read and check my work a number of times. Here's an example of some of my most common mistakes:

- *Where* and *were* – both good words when used in the right place but with different meanings.
- *Definitely* – when spell-checked this came out as *defiantly*, giving a totally different meaning.
- *Anachronisms* and *acronyms* are two very different things.
- *Is it* instead of *it is* – two little words, one is a question and the other a statement. Spell-checkers don't identify errors like these.
- *Their/they're*.
- *Your/you're*.

There were a whole host more but I lose track after a while. My favourite mistake however was writing *defecate* rather

## Introduction

than *deficit*! You have to be able to laugh at yourself, sometimes dyslexia is funny!





## Chapter 2

# Dys-lex-ia



Writing about dyslexia presents a bit of a challenge. As someone with dyslexia I have the personal experience, but how can I ensure that this comes across in the written word? Conversely, if I wasn't dyslexic, how could I back up what I was writing with experience? How indeed can you help

## The Little Book of Dyslexia

someone without dyslexia to understand what it is like to have the condition, especially when it is so variable?

I was recently asked what it is like for a dyslexic to read. For me, words often appear as broken up rather than fluid, which can lead to a text losing its meaning. Here is how the British Dyslexia Association represents visual stress<sup>2</sup> (please note the distortion is deliberate – there is nothing wrong with the printing!):

**Read Regular is created without copying or mirroring shapes. Therefore the frequency of repeated shapes in a text is decreased. This results in a minimum chance of visual distortions (swirl-effect). The aim is to create interesting typography that will maintain the readers' interest and will prevent them from getting bored or frustrated. Diversity in text knows many variations. We must understand the fact that typography for a novel is different from a magazine or a publication for education. Even so a novel has the potential to be clear and interesting. This can be achieved in any level of creativity, thinking on type size, leading, the amount of words on a sentence and the character/paper combination.**

Semoteims wehn you are reiadng and the txet deos not folw or you hvae to psauw to raed a wrod it can bomece dfiluct not jsut to raed but to udenstrnad waht you are redaig and you may lsoe the imacct of putnuiatcon and hvae to read thnigs sevreal tmies oevr.

IN adDition You SometimEs see things Look EXtremely dIfferent As shown

## Dys-lex-ia

This is just to try and give you an idea of what it can be like rather than an accurate replication. It is also a good demonstration of how the mind processes words.

These are not literal examples but an attempt to give you some idea of what it might be like to have difficulties with reading. What is perhaps harder to put into a usable example is the difference in how the dyslexic mind processes words. It is interesting to note that, dyslexic or not, you were probably able to work out what was being said in the above examples even if it took you slightly longer than usual. This is all down to that remarkable thing between your ears; not the hard bony bit but the altogether more squidgy bit in-between. Somewhere in the brain is the key to understanding dyslexia – and hopefully this chapter will help you along the way.

Dyslexia was originally described by the term ‘word blindness’, which is far from an apt description of the condition and is probably why it was abandoned. However, the medical profession could have chosen something easier to spell than *dyslexia*! Still, perhaps by the time this book is finished I may have mastered the spelling at least. Despite the name change, the idea of ‘word blindness’ still persists – that dyslexia is the inability to read.

Worse still is the perception that dyslexia is associated with the ‘less able’, which couldn’t be further from the truth. Linda Silverman of the Gifted Development Center has found that

## The Little Book of Dyslexia

children who tested as gifted also seemed to share a number of learning problems associated with dyslexia.<sup>3</sup> Although not exclusively, many dyslexics tested demonstrate extremely high and above average IQs. Indeed, it is the discrepancy between IQ and levels of reading and writing ability that currently acts as the most used test for dyslexia. As an example, my reading level is below average (98) and my written level is around average (114), however my verbal IQ is quite high (149). That said, it is easier to reach a lot of people with a book than to give you all my phone number! It has been suggested that as some areas of the brain develop considerably better than others, it is the difference in processing speed between the left and right brain that causes problems. The areas in the right side of the brain – associated with conceptualisation and creativity – are considerably quicker than those linked with decoding symbols, such as reading.<sup>4</sup> This is why people with dyslexia can also experience a number of positive traits. For example:

- Their perceptions can be created or altered by the brain (the primary ability).
- They have a high level of environmental awareness.
- They think and perceive multidimensionally (using all the senses).
- They can experience thought as reality.
- They have higher than average levels of curiosity.
- They are visual thinkers.
- They are highly intuitive and insightful.
- They have vivid imaginations.<sup>5</sup>

## Dys-lex-ia

I wouldn't always consider my dyslexia a 'gift', as Davis and Braun do, but every cloud has a silver lining and it would seem that it can have its benefits. At the very least it somehow landed me a publishing contract, if not just for the irony.

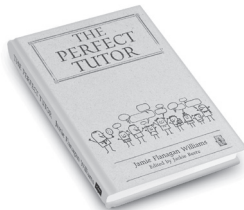
The word dyslexia is derived from two Greek words, *dys* which means 'bad, abnormal or difficult' and *lexis* meaning 'word'. Φοβερό δημιουργικότητα was obviously a bit of a mouthful (for those of you who are a little behind on your Greek humour that translates as 'awesome creativity').

Dyslexia is a learning disability that impacts on the *form* in which information is presented; it is not the information itself that is the problem. Dyslexia has an effect on everything from reading, writing and listening to organisation and processing, but specifically not intelligence. It affects people in different ways and it is this large degree of variation which means that, as with all learning, we need to ensure that as teachers we tailor our approach to the individual. This should be a primary consideration throughout this book – many of the strategies may need to be adapted or may not even work for some of your students. It is important to be selective and find what works best for you and them.

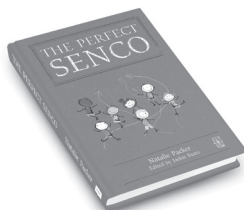
Research has highlighted that dyslexia is affected by developmental and genetic characteristics.<sup>6</sup> There is not one gene which is responsible for dyslexia, but a series of genes which can lead to an increased chance of its development. In this respect it is hereditary but not a promise. Dyslexia is a learning difficulty and therefore, like its counterparts, it is a



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# THE LITTLE BOOK OF DYSLEXIA,

written by a dyslexic student teacher, references both personal experience and current research findings to highlight issues faced by people of all ages with dyslexia.

It looks at a number of strategies that can be used both inside and outside the classroom as well as listing various resources all designed to create a learning environment that helps – not hinders – the dyslexic learner. The book works through the various challenges faced at different ages, starting with the youngest, including some of the early indications of dyslexia and moves up through primary and secondary school and finally onto university and being a student teacher.

*“This is a must-read for anyone who has met dyslexia – in their own approach to learning or in a child or children they know.”*

Roger Pask, Education Leadership and Management Consultant, Facilitator and Coach

*“This book will appeal to trainee teachers, newly qualified teachers and practitioners across all phases of education. It will also prove to be a practical guide for all parents on how to cope with a child who has dyslexia.”*

Debbie Coslett, Chief Executive Officer, The Hayesbrook School Academy Trust

*“Any parent of a child diagnosed with dyslexia would find this book excellent in that it is written by someone who really knows how that diagnosis impacts on a child’s life.”*

Andrew Massey, Fox In The Box Consulting Ltd

*“This is a gem of a book that will be useful for working with all pupils and students. It is packed with common sense strategies and insights that will make learning fun and productive.”*

Carol Frankl, leading personality of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) industry, founder of The Southover Partnership

**Joe Beech** was diagnosed with both dyslexia and dyspraxia at age seven. He is currently coming to the end of studying a BA in Physical Education and Education before moving on to complete his PGCE.

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education teaching of dyslexic children