Peer-Reviewed Article *by Petronilla Whitfield*

Shakespeare, Pedagogy and Dyslexia

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Introduction and context

I expect there are many of us who are familiar with the following scenario. We have planned an exciting voice and text session for our students, built around relishing and igniting spontaneous re-actions to Shakespeare's words. Our session begins and is starting to flow. The language is passed around, developing increasing momentum as the textual baton is passed to each student. Suddenly the impetus jolts and stops. The dynamic momentum is frozen, hangs in the air and then collapses. We hear the refrain: "I'm sorry, I'm dyslexic." We pause inwardly, gathering our teaching skills to the fore and bounce back with full support. The dyslexic student's attempts to lift the baton and run with the text remain half-realised, staccato and mumbled. We try harder to assist and the dyslexic student becomes more anxious. An air of tension gathers in the room; there is a perceptible impatience permeating the atmosphere. The journey of discovery has been broken. Bearing pedagogical responsibility, we are aware of the discomfort the dyslexic student is experiencing and conscious of our inadequacy in effectively assisting. The other students become bored and we move on, feeling an inner disquiet, uncertain about how to proceed.

I am senior lecturer in voice and acting at the Arts Institute at Bournemouth in England. This action-research article is an examination of three of my acting students on the Acting degree course at the Arts Institute and their work during the Shakespeare Unit, which I teach. They are severely dyslexic and yet reveal artistic strengths that are in stark contrast to their learning differences, which appear as literacy weaknesses. Some of their work has been exceptionally inspiring. This dichotomy has provoked within me a fascination and desire to understand more.

In this article, I share my experiences with you. I explore some of the manifestations of dyslexia and discuss pedagogical strategies to ease dyslexic challenges and to reinforce any underlying talents.

So, what exactly is dyslexia?

Dyslexia–a brief overview.

The word "dyslexia" comes from the Greek. "Dys" means difficulty and "lexia" refers to words or language. A bewildering condition, dyslexia appears in each individual in a variety of ways, and has varying degrees of severity. It is most commonly known for the difficulty it creates with reading, writing and spelling, despite an average or above average intelligence. However, to restrict the description of dyslexia to a generalised problem with literacy is too simplistic: dyslexic characteristics permeate into other areas of cognitive and physiological behaviour. There are several conflicting theories as to the causes of dyslexia, but it is generally agreed that the following factors, (although not always present), are involved to a lesser or greater degree (McLoughlin, Fitzgibbon &Young 1994):

- Significant deficits in working memory
- Inability to store speech sounds in memory related to the written word
- Mispronouncing or confusion with articulating speech sounds and words

- Problems with visual processing
- Problems with auditory processing
- Difficulty with motor skills, co-ordination, and poor balance. Sometimes there is an overlap with dyspraxia[1]
- Short attention span and distractibility. Sometimes there is an overlap with attention deficit disorder
- Emotional or behavioural factors due to stress and anxiety
- Disorganisation, inability to sequence, poor time management
- Delayed automaticity of skills
- Differences in brain structure, particularly in the balance of symmetry between left and right, or a dysfunction of the cerebellum(Galaburda 1993) (Nicolson, Fawcett & Dean 2001)

To succeed in the non-dyslexic world, the dyslexic has to find compensatory methods to counterbalance their limitations. They are often highly motivated and develop their own systems to support their work. It is also said that they use a global and holistic approach to learning (DFES 2004, 9). There are numerous records of many that have shown exceptional talents, in spite, (or because), of their dyslexia. Some say that these talents are compensatory developments, while others assert that the dyslexic mind enhances extra- ordinary talents, even while coping with the obstacles of dyslexia (West 1997).

Renowned actors who have talked publicly about their dyslexia include:

- Susan Hampshire
- Orlando Bloom
- Tom Cruise
- Anthony Hopkins

Some other extraordinary dyslexic minds include:

- Einstein
- WB Yeats

Curiously, the positive factors of the dyslexic condition are often ignored, but it is important to note that they run in tandem with the more negative traits. The positive factors include (Davis 1997):

- Visual thinking
- Strong intuition and 'whole picture' thinking
- Artistic talents
- Problem solving
- Spatial awareness (DFES 2004, 6)

1. Dyspraxia is an impairment in the brain's control of movement. This can cause clumsiness or lack of co-ordination in physical tasks, including a deficit in articulatory skills.

In England, there has been a steady increase in the number of students diagnosed with dyslexia in higher education in the past few years, and it is a common phenomenon amongst my acting students. The following statement sums up my own experience:

> at all levels of the education system, students with dyslexia have found themselves experiencing difficulties in the learning situation of which their teachers have little or no understanding. (Dyslexia in Higher Education: policy, provision and practice 1999, 14)

Beginning my investigations.

I contacted several leading experts in the field of dyslexia. I sent some of them a description of my students' work and dyslexic difficulties and asked for their opinions. Their expertise has made a significant contribution to this article.

Contributions are given from:

• Albert Galaburda, Professor of Neurology at Harvard Medical School. He is an internationally recognised expert in dyslexia research.

• David Crystal OBE. Crystal is a world authority on language and has written several books on Shakespeare's language.

• Rod Nicolson, Professor in Psychology at Sheffield University. Nicolson is a highly influential international expert in dyslexia.

• Maria Farry, is a speech and language therapist who specialises in assisting those with dyslexia.

• Jan Haydn Rowles,is voice and dialect coach who is Master of Voice at The Globe Theatre in London. She is dyslexic.

• Robert Burden, Emeritus Professor in Educational Psychology at Exeter University. He has a special research interest in dyslexia and has published widely on the subject.

A description of the students' work and my pedagogical challenges

Student One: David

David was diagnosed as dyslexic whilst at secondary school. Of the three students discussed in this paper, I have given most consideration to him, as his struggles and successes during the Shakespeare unit impacted powerfully on all who observed him.

David is a student who struggles to read a text line by line. During the Shakespeare unit, when reading aloud, the class would have to slow down considerably to accommodate David's hesitant contribution. It would not have been appropriate to miss David out from reading with his fellow students, nor did he want to be. He is keen to meet the full experience of his actor training and have parity with his fellows. Wishing to reflect the professional expectations of an actor and valuing shared experiential discovery with all the class, I chose not to follow the typical path with dyslexic students of giving him the text in advance. Familiarity with the text might ensure some comfort with the words, but spontaneous interpretation would be destroyed. Flushed pink with effort, David would stumble on every sentence. Endeavouring to build his confidence, I would side coach as he tried to read. His acting ability could scarcely be glimpsed in the few times that he might manage to read a sentence without a block. Pronunciation and articulation of words also posed obstacles. Despite my guidance, he could not seem to adequately hear or retain explanations. A glazed expression of panic crossed his face as he wrestled with the words.

However, I noticed a significant improvement in his grasp of reading when we had worked on a Shakespeare text using the Cicely Berry inspired deconstruction methods (Berry 1993, 149; Berry 2001, 99). The whole class of students reading round in a circle, word by word, punctuation to punctuation, sentence to sentence, helped break it down for him so he could get an overall comprehension of the piece, although a discomfort and lack of fluency with words prevailed. Further progress developed when we physicalized the whole piece, sentence by sentence. As they spoke the text, each student used physical actions to express the core of meaning or feeling, as they saw it. Getting the words into his body/mind through the physical actions meant that suddenly David could read for about a paragraph without stumbling, and therefore had more freedom to exercise his acting instincts. However, once he stumbled on one word, his brief fluency crumbled and the former pattern returned.

Mindful of his vulnerability in a class of eighteen students, I planned exercises that might help him to begin to achieve the acting depth demanded by Shakespearean text. Whilst working in class exploring Shakespeare's sonnets, I paired students for the *Ghost exercise* (Marshall 2001, 156; Berry 2001, 144). In this exercise, one student reads the text and whispers it into the other's ear in a neutral tone. The recipient lets the received words process within them, then immediately utters them again, infused with their own instinctive feeling. I thought that releasing him from actually reading the text might allow him to simply perceive and feel the content of the words, thereby enabling him to act and re-act. His partner read him the lines of a sonnet in small graspable phrases. I assumed that this exercise might assist him. When put into practice, this did not work very well. David did not seem to be able to mentally grasp the content of the words sufficiently to make them his own. Thus my personal experiment was not a success with this particular student. With the noted exception of the assistance of the physicalization exercise, I had not found any dependable pedagogical tactics to empower David in the performing of Shakespeare.

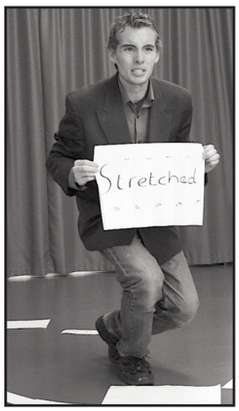
Description of David's personal breakthrough

I was, however, amazed by a performance Dave gave of Shakespeare's *Sonnet 17*, in the sonnet presentations. (The students had been assigned a task to perform a sonnet in their own chosen style.) David's sonnet interpretation was magnificent in comparison to his previous efforts in the unit. When commenting on this work, linguist David Crystal pointed out, that the language in this sonnet is easier than some of Shakespeare's later sonnets, as many of the lines are a self contained sentence or a clause—thus, this was a helpful vehicle for David's "word play".

Sonnet 17 by William Shakespeare

Who will believe my verse to come?
If it were filled with your most high deserts?
Though yet, heaven knows, it is but a tomb
Which hides your life and shows not half your parts.
If I could write the beauty of your eyes
And in fresh numbers number all your graces,
The age to come would say, 'This poet lies—
Such heavenly touches ne'er touched earthly faces'.
So should my papers, yellowed with their age,
Be scorned, like old men of less truth than tongue,
And your true rights be termed a poet's rage
And stretched metre of an antique song.
But were some child of yours alive that time,
You should live twice—in it and in my rime.

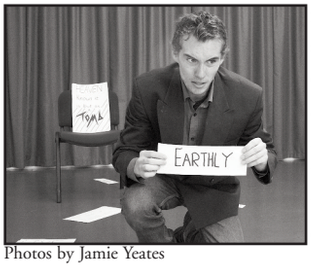
David had devised his own methodology of inhabiting Shakespeare's sonnet, which appeared to be a kind of mind map-in-action (Buzan, T 2005). He used cards with key words or phrases written on them in big letters which he physically presented as he spoke and moved. As he proceeded through the sonnet, he flung himself energetically around the performing area, running to grasp and present each card to the audience as he uttered each separate chunk of text. He took this further by using the cards in a choreographed manner to explain/inhabit Shakespeare's meaning. For example: when Shakespeare used the word *stretched*, Dave had a piece of folded-up paper with that word penned in elongated print that he gradually stretched out and revealed as he said it. "Heavenly" was written



on a sign shown upstage and held high, whilst "earthly" was shown downstage and low. Antitheses were made clear for the audience by variation in written style. For example, "Heaven" was written in light pressure pen, whilst its contrast word, "tomb" was put into heavy bold. "Not half your parts" was written on a half shaded piece of paper and another piece of paper was folded in half with "hides your life" while the word "life" was hidden by David's hand movements. The words "beauty" and "graces" were words that Shakespeare was speaking/ writing from his heart and therefore David had them tucked away in his jacket pocket and delivered, as he spoke, "from his heart". During the words "live twice" David showed a card with "live" written on it front and back, which he flicked twice as he spoke the words. The word "scorned" was presented on a yellowing, aged piece of paper, as Shakespeare had said his words would be "yellowed with age".

The whole sonnet was thus performed in a semiotic dance of body, voice and cards. The written words were grafted to David's visceral response and voice.

I was astonished by the strength of his performance and how freely and confidently he took hold of this sonnet and gave it to his audience. I found it moving to watch because David had found his own authentic language and style of performance that opened him completely. His seemingly naïve method communicated the sonnet's content thoroughly, whilst his interpretative choices revealed his comprehension.



Photos by Jamie Yeates

Analysis of David's work

In analysing why it had worked so well, I realised that David's method ran in parallel with Cicely Berry's methods of the psychophysical—*finding the action in the words* (Berry 2001, 73). Employing a highly visual focus, David was using the written word as a kind of physicalization, embodying Shakespeare's meaning through his penned signs. The signs were manipulated into expressing the content very exactly, living it though his own brain images. He was therefore giving his imagery to the audience in a multi-sensory manner. It was led by the visual, but also worked kinaesthetically and aurally. Because of this symbiosis of thought, feeling and intention, anchored by the written cards, David's voice and articulation of word appeared "freshly minted" (Barton 1984, 18).

In seeking to understand David's approach, my research led me to a teacher/researcher called Nanci Bell who, in her investigations into Language Comprehension Disorder, has developed a programme for assisting poor readers. Her process is described in her book *Visualizing and Verbalizing for Language Comprehension and Thinking* (1986, 1991). In order for adequate intellection to take place as we read, Bell states that we have to realise the whole gestalt (organised whole). In weak readers, she explains, only parts are taken in, but not the entire whole. The sentences therefore seem incomprehensible and consequently there is an inability to read fluently. She states that to effectively understand words and meaning, we need to have a visual image in our minds to adhere to that word.

> With specific attention to the integration of imagery and verbalization, it is possible to develop an imaged gestalt from which interpretation and reasoning can be processed. (Bell, *Annals of Dyslexia* 1991)

Bell has devised a sequential process of stimulation which apparently produces improvements in language comprehension. A reduced summary of Bell's sequence is described below as laid out in: *Gestalt Imagery: A Critical Factor in Language Comprehension.* (*Annals of Dyslexia. Vol 41*, 1991)

The Process

1. Picture to Picture
The individual looks at a picture and describes it. Structure of what size, colour, shape, where, when, mood …
2. Word Imagery.
The individual describes an image relating to a word…
3. Sentence Imaging
The individual visualizes and verbalizes a sentence…
The individual images and describes a sentence for creating an imaged gestalt…
4. Sentence by Sentence Imaging.
This stimulation is then directed at assisting the individual with creation of an imagined gestalt.
5. Sentence by Sentence with Interpretation.
…the stimulation extends to interpretation and critical thinking. The imaged gestalt is used as the cognitive base for higher order thinking skills of main ideas, inference, conclusion, prediction and evaluation.

6. Multiple Sentence Imaging.
In a paragraph the gestalt is visualized, verbalized and interpreted from oral and written language.

It is apparent to me that David's instinctive use of "acting" with words and written signs was related to this scaffolded sequence. It clearly assisted him in embracing the gestalt of the sonnet. This is a technique that might be taken into exploration of a classical text; writing the words out with the images vividly held in the mind or drawing pictures to illustrate the words could assist those students with poor reading comprehension skills.

The reactions of my panel of experts to David's case were very instructive. Professor Albert Galaburda suggests that reading for David takes such effort that there is little left for paying attention to other details. Voice coach, Jan Haydn Rowles, who has had to find resourceful strategies to overcome the adverse effects of her own dyslexia, advocates using *layering* as a way for the actor to hear the text and "build up the pictures". In dyslexics, Jan explains, immediate comprehension is difficult and auditory memory is weak, therefore emotional connection is impossible. She explains that "layering" is a solo activity. The individual reads aloud to a punctuation mark, then returns to the beginning, and then reads to the next punctuation mark and so on until one has read the whole text. The repetition of words sinks into the memory, thus freeing up response and removing anxiety. Professor Nicholson sheds light on this:

> Adding emotional overtones to 'dry' text is a cognitively demanding job, and it… can be considered as dual tasking. It may be particularly hard for a dyslexic adult because it involves interplay between two neural systems, one the intellectual system for explicit verbal processing, and the other the emotional neural system that is not in general consciously accessible…David wouldn't be able to process your explanations because all his resources were taken up with the trying to read aloud.

This is a pivotal pedagogical challenge when working on Shakespeare in ensemble groups.

In retrospect, I now realise that David would have had to make an enormous cognitive leap to immediately arrive at a fluency in the Ghost exercise. In addition, he was, no doubt, hampered by the stress of being observed, which would accelerate any aural weaknesses he might have. I suggest this exercise still might prove successful in sequenced stages which could offer the required underlying support. Professor Galaburda suggests that one could back up the auditory approach with the visual. David could hold the text in front of him as a safety guide at the same time as the partner whispers the lines into his ear. This could remove the pressure of "getting it right" and utilise two learning styles, providing that David could take in the word as he looked at it.

A programme for assisting readers called *The Neurological Impress method* (Reid 2007, 185) is of immediate relevance here. In this programme the learner reader is paired with a guiding reader who sits just behind their right ear. They both read the text aloud together and the guiding reader speaks into the right ear of their partner. The intention is to stimulate the left side of the brain that is involved in word formation and the eye tracking needed for reading. This programme is directly related to another technique called *paired reading*, also described in Reid (2007, 183). By reading in pairs with an instructor, the responsibility borne by the reader of getting every word correct, decoding and pronouncing, is removed. They have the support and echoing reflection of the instructor reading with them. As they gain confidence and familiarity with the text the instructing reader gradually withdraws until they read alone.

Commenting on the Ghost exercise, David Crystal emphasises the need to establish a dyslexic student's short-term memory capacity if expecting him/her to remember chunks of text. He is wary of the observance of sentences in language thought processing. He stresses that: "[P]eople do not process language sentence by sentence. Some sentences are just too long. The approach has to be modified to allow for…processing… phrase-by-phrase. The above might work fine for short sentences, but that's a long way from Shakespeare." As my student David demonstrated in practice, a large chunk of language could be overwhelming, or if too small, the meaning would be unclear. In his book *Think On My Words: Exploring Shakespeare's Language* (2008), Crystal discusses the relevance of short term memory ability to the structure of the iambic pentameter. He states that the five beats of the pentameter form a length unit that a human being can naturally remember, and he believes: "...the pentameter comes closest to the way our brain actually processes everyday speech." (Crystal 2008, 120) Since one of the methods of developing phonological awareness in dyslexics is to build an awareness of rhythm in language (Broomfield & Combley 2004, 84), I surmise that a primary emphasis on iambic rhythm (rather than on meaning) in the Ghost exercise could give a student permission to play, thereby removing the restricting anxiety-making conditions. Once the student had found a freedom and release, textual meaning and pronunciation could be focussed on.

David's system in performance has reminded Galaburda of the idea of the Peripatetic School of Aristotle. He connects this ancient philosophical tool and how it relates to memory with the process David embarked on:

> This peripatetic approach was used by early Greek philosophical schools. Being positioned in space at a given place triggered a stream of memories, each bout [of particular memories], to that place and to no other. If the dyslexic could associate words with locations in space, then he could be helped, as many have a strong development of the sense of space. (Galaburda 2008)

Investigating Galaburda's ideas further, I have come upon the ancient practice called the *Method of Loci* (Location). This involves a concept called *The Memory Palace*, where the things to be remembered are placed in different rooms of the *mental palace*. For example, when working on a speech, one breaks it up into sections. One then chooses a striking image that is directly related to that section. The images should be intense and will be more effective if associated with an emotion. In the imagination, these related images/sections are then placed in different locations within the mind, and are ready to be called upon when needed (Wikipedia.org/Method of loci 2008). (Yates 1966, 37). David's precisely placed cards and carefully choreographed phrases, clearly mirrored his inner memory palace. Galaburda states that dyslexics may well be born with a visual strength or develop one to compensate. "Both elements play a role: nature and nurture." (Galaburda 2008) Galaburda explains that David was using *declarative memory,* which is a way that we store facts. There is both semantic (factual), and episodic (related to episodes), types of declarative memory. Galaburda suggests that David was using semantic memory to instil the facts of the sonnet in his mind, whilst calling on episodic memory to relate these facts to his own autobiographical experience. It seems that David's mnemonic visual and kinaesthetic card system anchored his declarative memory.

Going beyond the obvious pedagogical role of transferring skills, Professor Burden stresses the necessity of building the self-confidence of each dyslexic individual and helping them to realise the inherent value within them. As a specialist in education, Burden emphasises the psychological:

> As far as David is concerned, I believe that the answer lies in his tremendous motivation to succeed, due to the need to communicate and express his talents. He was helped to do so by drawing on all his senses.

In conclusion, this analysis of David's methods has revealed a powerful engagement with the visual. His work holds great pedagogical significance as it demonstrates that David's visual/spatial intelligence has the potential to diverge into innovative new performance language, if given the opportunity and support.

Student Two: Tom

Tom was diagnosed with dyslexia at primary school. Tom's work has revealed a different, almost imperceptible aspect of dyslexia which I have carefully noted, as it could easily be misunderstood. When trying to read, he describes the words jumping about on the page as he looks at it. In particular he has difficulty taking in the little words such as "but" or "the", and cannot look up from the page as he then forgets the rest of what he was to say. Sometimes he wants to read lines backwards, starting from the right rather than the left. The more complex the grammar and language, the more difficult it appears to be for him to speak the words with clarity. Although Tom's acting is considered by observers as unusually compelling, I have noticed an extremely subtle effect transform his speech in Shakespeare performance. Sometimes, his words seem to have a strangely muffled sound with an unusual fuzziness in his speech. The listener can hear his voice, but many words are lost. Observing him in performance I note that many of the defining consonants are dropped, vowels are not given their full voice and the words are curiously smudged together. His jaw becomes stiff and the muscularity of his mouth reduces. This is not due to his lack of attention to his articulation. It does not happen when Tom is acting using common-place, contemporary language, only when he is confronted with a more semantically-challenging vocabulary, such as in Shakespeare.


Photo by Jamie Yeates

Tom states that he has to "overwork" when acting in Shakespeare. To manage the roles, the speaking and comprehension of the text, he spends many dedicated hours outside of class, voicing the words and feeling the vibrations and rhythms of the language in his mouth. I presume that the way Tom speaks the language is a clear indication of how those sentences are perceived in his brain. He voices what he is processing.

Explanation of Tom's speech indistinctness

Galaburda's scientific descriptions of the dyslexic brain offer us clues to Tom's speech idiosyncrasies. He reports:

> Anatomical evidence suggests there are differences in the symmetry of brains of dyslexics, in the specific areas dealing with language. This form of symmetry indicates that the

> language areas of dyslexics are organized differently and that they probably process linguistic information differently as well. (Galaburda, A. 1993)

Maria Farry, speech and language therapist, specialises in working with dyslexic actors on their speech difficulties. She advises that articulation exercises simply for clarity and muscularity are not particularly helpful for the dyslexic. She describes her work with adults on phonological awareness: breaking up the syllables into segments, taking each segment alone and then blending them together, or removing a syllable and asking the reader to identify what is there. I related the strange fuzziness of Tom's speech to her, and Farry defined what she suspects is happening:

> adults with dyslexia have a weak internal representation of the speech sound system... and a problem with the brain's ability to decode the sound system for smooth and easy retrieval. Reading involves a combination of phonological and—later—semantic processing. New words…continue to present difficulties in the 'mapping' of alphabetical symbols to speech sounds.

According to Farry, the condition of dyspraxia is often associated with dyslexia, due to "shared brain mechanisms involved in both disorders". She points out that dyspraxia is a problem with organisation of movement which involves motor planning, sequencing of speech sounds and slower processing—therefore the articulators and the brain work more slowly or more clumsily. This can mean that speech becomes "faltering, hesitant with omission of sounds."

Much of an actor's function is to record, synthesise and give voice to the science of human feeling/thought. When commenting on David's work, Professor Nicolson explained that dyslexic adults would have difficulty with the interchange between two neural systems of intellect and emotion. He believes that Tom will be having the same challenges. He states:

> In my view the framework that best explains these early and continuing problems is… the Nicolson/Fawcett Automaticity Deficit Hypothesis (1990), in which we argue that dyslexic people have difficulties making skills automatic, and so even for relatively mundane skills they have to concentrate harder, to *consciously compensate* for their lack of automaticity. The verbal working memory is reduced because more conscious processing resources are devoted to routine matters such as balancing etc and the information processing is ...slower anyway... (Nicolson 2008)

Without this information the voice teacher might embark on an ardent plan of articulation exercises for the dyslexic student, which probably would not be effective. The prevailing pedagogical challenge is how to assist the actor in the repetitive practice of overcoming blurred speech without destroying the actor's instinctive impulse. There is no doubt that the dyslexic actor has a feeling for words, but that initial feeling needs to be released through developing a relish for speech sounds.

Theatre director, Peter Gill, in discussing the importance of the actor's ability to speak text stresses:

> A feeling for the integrity of language for its own sake is required, an identification and celebration of the word…As for the connection between acting and speaking: why it is the same thing. The action is encoded in the way something has been written. Acting and speaking are bound together…there can be a kind of censorship in denying the way a line has been written, reducing it to what can often be an arbitrary decision about acting and intention, when it is only in the writing that you get any information about what these really are. (In Haill (Ed) 2008, 19)

This statement underlines the fact that there are no short cuts in lifting the text off the page; the dyslexic actor has to find ways to serve Shakespeare by fully inhabiting all the words and being true to the text. The words, as the writer has written them, are crucial to character and the essence of the work. If the dyslexic student just skims the language, cutting and supplanting what the author has intended, they are actually censoring the writer's voice!

Student three: Eifion

Photo by Arts Institute

Eifion was diagnosed with dyslexia when he first came to the Arts Institute. As the third of my student case studies, he has demonstrated a markedly positive aspect of his dyslexic differences.

Displaying typical dyslexic weakness, when Eifion reads he is continually tripping over a sentence. He tells me that having read a sentence he cannot understand it and has to go back to read it again. He then discovers he mis-read the words. When encountering a sentence, he takes it word by word and analyses each word to comprehend it. He calls his reading process: "building a puzzle of the words."

However, Eifion's other abilities are extraordinary as they seem to conflict confusingly with his dyslexia. For example, when I

started teaching Eifion phonetics, I was astonished by Eifion's dexterity in the subject. Although he cannot spell very well, he appeared to memorise the phonetic symbols and their related sounds almost immediately. In the phonetics assessment I gave, he achieved Distinction. He tells me that the reason he was so successful at this is because phonetics seems to him like code breaking, and he was good at maths and science at school. He now often writes notes in class using mirror writing back to front, or phonetics.

Explanations about Eifion's ability

There are two models that are used in the study of reading and dyslexia, which describe different approaches to the reading process. The term *Bottom-Up* is when the student examines the components of each word and gathers information about it as one proceeds through a text. What are the letters? What is the sound relating to the letters? What is the word meaning? The other term is *Top-Down*. This is when the reader skims the text for clues of context, which can rely on guessing from the general look of a piece. (Reid 2003, 33; Broomfield & Combley 2003, 34). Galaburda recognises that *Top-Down* reading trips Eifion up. He points out:

> What is happening here is that he is not really reading the word, but only picking up on some visual feature of the word and completing it based on context. If he makes an error on the context, then he 'reads' the words incorrectly. For instance, take the words 'symphony' and 'sympathy'. The words look similar, especially to one who will not read it letter by letter. If the story in which it appears has a picture of a man in a tuxedo holding a baton, the reader will read the word as 'symphony' even if it says 'sympathy'. Dyslexics rely more on contextual clues, especially visual ones, and sometimes they trip because of it."

Bottom -Up reading can create enormous problems for a dyslexic who relies on a phonic approach of sound, related to letter, corresponding to word. Nicolson emphasises that it is difficult for a dyslexic to understand the diverse spelling and pronunciation of some English words. He cites the example of the letter string "ough" which has several pronunciations. Nicolson specifies that the dyslexic needs "consistent mapping between the stimulus and the response" for their reading skills to become automatic. Eifion's apparent ability to learn phonetics so quickly is because the phonetic symbol is consistently related to the sound and therefore more accessible. Nicolson concludes that a "positive vicious circle" was created in that Eifion's initial success fed his motivation, thus stimulating his capacity to learn more quickly, which led to more success. Haydn Rowles argues that because dyslexics use a strong visual sense, the phonetic symbol shape associated with the phoneme is more easily assimilated. Interestingly, Rowles describes that she *sees* an accent and that the *hearing* part is secondary. Yet again we are in a visual world.

Paths of future direction.

In my quest for information, I have discovered there is a dearth of printed literature and data on the subject of training dyslexic actors. My research-in-action, (although still in its infancy), is gaining momentum as the avenues of further investigation become clearer. My dyslexic students are in regular discussion with me, sharing and documenting their discoveries on what assists or inhibits their reading, confidence and access to their acting instincts. I have several ideas that I will be exploring further in my own teaching practice. They include:

• In conjunction with a multi-media student, Martin Canning, at the Arts Institute, I devised an interactive teaching program with pictures for each phoneme symbol for dyslexic students to work with in their own time. This can be found at www.wonderfulworldofphonetics.co.uk. (The pictures were adapted and originally came from Selingson 2001). I plan to create interactive software aids to assist with language and pronunciation. These are likely to have strong visual and auditory elements.

• Elements of working with two track paired readings could be incorporated into ensemble class exercises.

• The visual strengths can be harnessed in drawing and painting linked to word connotations, metaphors expressing instinctive as well as literal meanings. Using a visual emphasis, text illustrated with drawings above the words giving suggestions of meaning could be utilised in reading.

• Linklater's sensory realisation of word exercises that build from individual words, into phrases, into unpunctuated text and finally into the whole text could be introduced as games before the text is read in plenary, so the dyslexic actor will have already encountered the sound, picture and the sense of the word before trying to manage the reading of it on the page. (This idea is directly related to reading flash cards and Bell's Gestalt Imagery.).

• Further examination of the efficacy of using physical constructs related to words, reading and speaking of language, both kinaesthetically and visually.

• Crucially, I will also examine matters of self-esteem. Battles with self-confidence are issues that are common in the psychological makeup of actors. The dyslexic student has even more

to contend with. In our role as voice teachers we recoil from any practices that humiliate a student. We are acutely aware of what it takes to perform, especially in an emotionally and linguistically demanding text like Shakespeare. Nicolson speaks of the importance of having sensitivity in working with dyslexic students as they "will have had a traumatic time at school forced to concentrate on precisely those skills with which they have the most difficulty." He warns that certain exercises might "unleash a confusing series of emotion" if it reminds them of unhappy times at school.

Finally, I wish to reiterate my ultimate objective in carrying out this research: to extend and celebrate the dyslexic potential, to give full credence to those that might walk another dimensional path, to those whose talents might not have been fully exercised. Working on Shakespeare places the spotlight onto those individuals. Shakespeare offers us an image-laden and metaphor-rich language environment which can excite and release an actor's heart, intellect and imagination. Shakespeare envelops the human experience; surely the perfect vehicle for the field work ahead. This article is only the beginning of that journey.

> …it would appear that the dyslexic mind can create much that is unexpected and highly beneficial…But that may depend upon whether …educators understand that the talents and special abilities exhibited by such individuals are often quite different from the talents and abilities most highly valued in a conventional academic sense. (West, T. 2000)

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