

I am nearly 48 years old. I have language and literacy communication issues that have never been properly diagnosed because progress in these areas has only been made in the last twenty years or so as far as I can see.

I learnt how to read visually when I was four. When I say visually I mean I learnt what the words looked like. According to my parents I was a child interested in learning. When I got to school I was ambidextrous which created its own problems and my handwriting has never been neat. I also sometimes struggle to locate the word I am looking for in my brain. I call it 'fishing' and the more I get stressed the worse it can get. In prep I wrote letter 'b' and 'd' and 'p' and 'q' back to front making my writing hard to understand. By grade two I had been given thick daggy glasses for the problem. I have never been able to spell. I see words visually in my head but sometimes for no reason I cannot see even small words like 'cue' I only find 'queue' and know that that is the wrong word.

Grade three was when I had a major crisis. I refused to speak and according to my parents went into a depression. I am grateful that they were not satisfied with the teacher's remark that I was 'just dumb' and I was sent to the Observatory Clinic for assessment. I was very intelligent but of course they did not understand my inconsistent school progress. When I was stressed, as a tyrant teacher tends to do to someone with a learning difficulty - my problems got worse. Children like me were often branded as lazy, messy or naughty or most often all three.

Throughout my schooling and well into my adulthood I experienced my own intellectual inconsistencies. On a good day I can remember all the grammar and spelling I need to and can work very efficiently. On a bad day it is like I am blind to all my spelling or grammar mistakes. I also have trouble with tenses. It is actually the inconsistency, which is most difficult to manage because you can seem too sloppy with administration etc. sometimes without being aware of the problem. Everyone wants to do a good job and I enjoy structure and order in my own life as it has helped me to cope in a fast paced world.

I am currently completing a PhD in History. I still don't know when to capitalise but having a computer with a spell check makes me look less of a fool to others when I have bad days. My work is still inconsistent but I have spoken to my supervisors and they are supportive but sometimes they must raise their eyebrows at some of the drafts I send them.

I am not good with wordy descriptions and still cannot comprehend all types of writing. It has to interest me. Visually many modern websites are extremely difficult for me to navigate because they are so BUSY. Flashing advertisements and certain colours also make reading difficult on line. I worry that with everything going on-line many companies are not making their websites accessible for people with literacy issues. Contracts such as for mobile phones etc. are also very frightening and I have relied on other family members to provide me with the details from these types of documents.

Despite my problems I have always been a reader and this I believe has improved my language and literacy skills somewhat. I have not been able to settle to a specific career. Partly that was my choice but I am afraid of too much responsibility in case I make a blinding error. It is hard to explain what is going on inside my head when I am often unaware of it myself and can be greatly embarrassed when someone points out an obvious error.

I have a friend who is a Speech Pathologist who specialises in school-aged children with language and literacy issues. We have spoken often over the years about my issues, and she has 'unofficially' been able to explain some of my quirks. In 2012 I began working for her assisting her to build her practice. This has been a great opportunity to support someone who I wish had been able to help me when I was a child. Communication issues are invisible in the classroom unless you have a trained eye.

The work of Speech Pathologists is vital but more education for people my age would also help. People my age often encounter their own issues when their children are diagnosed but are still unable to receive a formal diagnosis themselves. My issues have not gone away either, even though I have dedicated my life to learning. I believe support for people with language and literacy issues, not just those diagnosed with 'dyslexia' which seems to be a 'catch all' for people my age would be great. Research into how we can diagnose and then support adults who, for whatever reason, did not receive a diagnosis as a child would also help.

I have been laughed at by well meaning family, talked down to by them also throughout my life. Educating the general public and reminding them to respect those of us with such issues is important. I am an intelligent adult with a series of communication issues, which have made my progress more difficult, but I will be a successful PhD student. I hope you consider those such as myself in your deliberations.

Thank-you for the opportunity to share my story. I live it but my relationship with a Speech Pathologist has given me a greater understanding of it and newfound respect for my own determination.