

# Dyslexia WA

*harness the gift*

## NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of Dyslexia WA [www.dyslexiawa.com.au](http://www.dyslexiawa.com.au) Annette Johnston, facilitator. Contact email: [dyslexiacorrectionwa@gmail.com](mailto:dyslexiacorrectionwa@gmail.com) phone: 0479 121 163 July 2017

### Richard Branson on why we need to re-think dyslexia: "It's merely a different way of thinking"

By Dominic Powell, Tuesday, May 9, 2017

**Virgin Airlines founder** and serial entrepreneur Richard Branson believes dyslexia should no longer be treated as a learning disorder, but just as a "different way of thinking".

In a recent Sunday Times article Branson outlines how he believes the stigma towards dyslexics needs to change, highlighting the numerous famous business leaders and scientists who had dyslexia, including Albert Einstein, Steve Jobs, and Henry Ford.

In school, Branson discussed how his learning disability was considered a "handicap", with his teachers thinking he was "lazy and dumb, and I couldn't keep up or fit in".

"It is time we lost the stigma around dyslexia. It is not a disadvantage; it is merely a different way of thinking," Branson writes.

"Once freed from archaic schooling practices and preconceptions, my mind opened up. Out in the real world, my dyslexia became my massive advantage: It helped me to think creatively and laterally, and see solutions where others saw problems."

The column coincided with the launch of Branson's new charity, Made By Dyslexia, an organisation with the goal of getting the world to properly understand and support dyslexia.



*Richard Branson's understandings of dyslexia mirror the experiences we hear from the people we see each week in our office.*

A YouGov survey undertaken by the charity reveals that just three percent of people believe dyslexia to be a positive trait.

**Dyslexia:  
not a disadvantage  
but a different  
way of thinking**

"To change perceptions, we must celebrate all that dyslexic people have achieved, so that young people no longer give up before they have even started," Branson says.

"We must make sure every school not only has the resources necessary to identify dyslexia, but also the support necessary to champion dyslexics and enable them to thrive."

Branson has spoken before on how dyslexia has helped him to be a better leader and chief executive, noting the main advantage has been the need to simplify things.

"The reason why I think people who are dyslexic seem to do well in life, having struggled at school, is that we tend to simplify things," he said.

Branson said, in 2015, his dyslexia had kept things simple "for myself, and therefore, Virgin".

"We do not use jargon. Everything is very clear-cut and simple," he said.

"If you have a learning disability, you also become a very good delegator. You know what your weaknesses are and you know what your strengths are, and you make sure you find great people to step in and deal with your weaknesses."

"Whether you are dyslexic or not, delegation is such an important thing for a good leader to be good at doing."



### Two other famous dyslexics:

**Carly Simon:** most people know that Carly Simon is a Grammy award-winning musician and a Golden Globe Award winner. But few people know that the accomplished singer and songwriter struggled with dyslexia as a child.



At the age of 71, Carly is now a dyslexia advocate, and she believes that her dyslexia has a direct influence on how she makes her music.

**Princess Beatrice of York**, who is now age 28, was diagnosed as dyslexic in early childhood.

Although she struggled to read even the simplest of books, she credits her parents, Prince Andrew (the Duke of York) and Sarah (the Duchess of York) for working hard to bring reading alive for her.

In fact, the Duchess of York penned a series of children's books, **Budgie the Little Helicopter**, to help her daughter feel close to her father while he was away with the Royal Air Force.



to

# Q&A

With Abigail Marshall / Dyslexia Reader 74.

## Do all dyslexics have unique gifts?

**Q:** I am dyslexic, and I also have many gifts. I am curious about whether other dyslexics have gifts too. I can see things three dimensionally. If someone gives me some soap to carve, I can see what I am going to carve in 3D in my head. I can also duplicate almost everything I see, verbatim. I assisted in surgery and then was able to perform the exact surgery perfectly. I watched a baker decorate a cake and then, with no training or ever previously holding a decorating bag, I was able to decorate the cake perfectly and exactly like the baker. Can other dyslexics do these types of things?

**A:** The Davis perspective is that about 85% of dyslexics think mostly in pictures, and the primary screening tool for the Davis Dyslexia Correction Program is a test of 3D thinking ability, called the Perceptual Ability Assessment. So, yes, most other dyslexics have this ability – and many dyslexic artists and engineers have mentioned that as a factor in their success. Ronald D. Davis lists these 8 basic abilities as being tied to dyslexia:

- 1 They can utilize the brain's ability to alter and create perceptions (the primary ability).
- 2 They are highly aware of the environment.
- 3 They are more curious than average.
- 4 They think mainly in pictures instead of words.
- 5 They are highly intuitive and insightful.
- 6 They think and perceive multi-dimensionally (using all the senses).
- 7 They can experience thought as reality.
- 8 They have vivid imaginations. Because of the tendency to think in 3D, Ronald Davis created

the Davis Dyslexia Correction Program using tools that work well for 3D thinkers. A three dimensional mental visualization exercise is used as a key technique for the Davis Orientation Counseling procedure, and the key component of all of our programs is clay modeling, to make use of 3D media for mastery of words and concepts.

**IF I can't learn the way you teach... could you teach me the way I learn?**

## Is Davis compatible with phonics programs?

**Q:** Our daughter was diagnosed with dyslexia last summer, as the result of having difficulties in school, which eventually resulted in her self confidence diminishing. Knowing what was "wrong" with her (according to the teachers), having read tons of books to find out how to help her, and subsequently having her successfully participate in a week of training with a Davis Dyslexia Correction Facilitator with tremendous results, I still wonder if and how I can help her at school and home more than I am now. What I can't understand is why psychologists and brain science both say that dyslexic brains have a very hard time with phonemes and the way of learning through phonetics, yet the main way of teaching dyslexics is with phonetics. Even though the Orton-Gillingham method is said to be the best way of teaching dyslexic children to read and write, I can see how much my daughter struggles to grasp the concept. Is this way of teaching really the best?

**A:** We at Davis do not endorse or recommend Orton-Gillingham based programs, precisely for

the reasons you have outlined – most dyslexic children have difficulty using and applying phonetics, so programs which rely on phonetic-based teaching are the least likely to be helpful. The reason that the educators support Orton-Gillingham is that they view dyslexia simply as a mental defect ("phonetic deficit"). Their rationale is that if it is hard for dyslexic children to learn to use and apply phonetics to decode words, the solution is to teach them longer and slower and harder. Despite claims of educators, there is very little research to support the Orton-Gillingham approach, and definitely no research at all to support claims that it is the "best" or better than alternative approaches, such as Davis. The very limited research that does exist simply shows small or moderate levels of improvements with phonetic skills for students who have received the intensive tutoring, but research does not show that the phonetic improvement transfers over to other reading skills, nor does it show sustained improvement over time. As you have noted, brain research shows that the difficulty with phonics is likely connected to structural differences in the brain, and several research studies show that dyslexics who become capable readers do so by developing alternate, right-brained strategies. The researchers call these "compensatory" strategies, but in our view it is just utilizing the strategy that is the best and most natural fit for the dyslexic brain. If your daughter has not yet completed her Davis trigger word list, I would encourage you to continue to follow the home support and practice schedule recommended by her Facilitator, and to contact the Facilitator for consultation or a review session if you are experiencing difficulties. There are other particular strategies and activities that can help as well, but the key is to keep in mind that dyslexics learn best with interactive, creative approaches and usually rely on visual-spatial reasoning strategies for memory and problem-solving.



Famous Danish architect Jørn Utzon, who designed the Sydney Opera House, acknowledged what he did call his 'deficiency' in the journal **Living Architecture**: *I didn't become an engineer because I am both dyslexic and lack mathematical insight. One must have a mathematician's clear brain, which I admire, if I am to be a good engineer. Remember, geometry is something else. In compensation for the these great deficiencies, my sub normalities, I have a great innate sense of space. I dream a house then I have it my head. This was something I could use as an architect.*



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That's the number of people, adults as well as young students in primary and secondary school who have successfully completed their Davis Program with Annette here in Rockingham. An email received just last week from a family, whose boys each did a program several years ago said:

**"They have grown into charming young men and their dyslexia has been an incredible gift."** Can it get any better than that?