As president of Dyslexic Centre Australia I have assessed thousands of children, and adults from all over Australia. I have discovered that many are actually being home schooled because they struggled in mainstream education. The majority of urban home schooled kids I see turn out to be dyslexic.

Dyslexic kids are slipping through the educational net all the time. Virtually the only dyslexic kids I assess who can read and write have been educated in the UK or a small private school in the USA or some that have been home schooled.

I am myself dyslexic and have been teaching dyslexics for 35 years, mostly in the UK. I returned to my native Australia nine years ago and am shocked at the lack of knowledge about dyslexia and the lack of available help. This is why I have set up Dyslexic Centre Australia.

Even if you have been told repeatedly that your child is not dyslexic then s/he is still likely to be if s/he struggles with mainstream education.

Dyslexics are not stupid, disabled or lacking. Dyslexics often turn out to be the brightest kids, but far too often their potential is not reached until they leave school.

Facts about dyslexics

- In the UK in 2003 a study was carried out on 5000 self-made millionaires, culminating in a BBC 2 TV series Mind of a Millionaire. They studied the mental make up of millionaires to determine what they had in common. It was found that the “huge majority” had dyslexic type learning problems right through school. 40% knew they were dyslexic.

- Dyslexics it was found were the single most successful set of people in business. At least 9 American presidents have been thought to be dyslexic.

- In his book In the Mind's Eye, Thomas West talks about why dyslexics make the best scientists and architects. He says, “The conventional education system may be focusing on the wrong kind of skills and on rewarding some of the wrong kinds of learning. Conventional education practices may be substantially weeding out many of those who might have the most to give.”

- Geschwind described dyslexia to the Orton Dyslexia Association as long ago as 1982 as “Pathology of superiority”.

- More than half of all NASA employees are dyslexic because NASA considers them to have better problem solving and spatial awareness skills than other people.

- It is my belief that dyslexics are the people who, more than anyone, will move Australia forward, will invent, produce, set up and run multi-million dollar companies. We need dyslexics.

What is it?

Dyslexia is a learning difference and people with it perceive the world and learn differently from the norm. They are more right-brained and as such tend to have enhanced inter-personal skills, creativity, design potential, spatial ability and are more able to see the “whole picture”. But they find reading, spelling, remembering sequences and numbers, and visualisation very difficult. Because of this they should be taught in a different way from the norm and need a different set of learning strategies, life skills and academic work.

Most dyslexics display some auditory processing problems and many also have Irlen Syndrome (they find reading easier with a tinted overlay on the text).

Dyslexics cannot recall the look of words or numbers so need to learn how to word build and decode. We need to learn phonics if we are to read and write. When giving seminars at schools about dyslexia I have been asked...
again and again to recommend a phonics course to use with these kids. The ones used in Australia are appalling, and mostly based on speech programs. In the end I wrote one that is interactive and multi-sensory and that can teach a child to read and write in just a few weeks. We now sell this through the site as cheaply as we can. Its really easy to use and mostly consists of games.

If your child is dyslexic then it is important to understand what it means, how your child thinks and learns and to teach him/her in a way best suited to them. That is why I have written websites full of information and plain English books about what it is. These can be purchased as hard copies or as downloadable files, so that they can then be listened to using a free voiceover.

How to recognise dyslexia
Dyslexic children and adults display some or all of the following:
- Lack of progress in reading and spelling
- An avoidance of reading
- Verbally good but has difficulty putting ideas down on paper
- A slow reader who keeps losing his/her place and cannot read quickly even when reading silently
- Can read a whole page and not remember the content
- When reading silently mouths the words or “says” them in his/her head
- Finds it hard to read and spell those small irregular words. Eg. who, once, their, thought.
- Spelling tends to be bizarre
- Messy presentation with lots of crossing out
- Finds reading tiring and complains of sore eyes
- Difficulty remembering times tables
- Difficulty following long instructions
- Finds it hard to hear what is being said in a noisy place
- Is good at creative activities
- Is good at making friends and can talk to anyone
- Always questioning things rather than accepting what s/he is told as mere fact
- Tends to do badly at school even though the teachers say s/he is bright
- In the case of adults, has become very successful in his/her own business or skills.

For further screening please go to www.dyslexia-testing.com.au. Click on “tick tests” on top menu bar. Full assessments can be arranged by visiting the centre or through SKYPE.

Statistics
- International Dyslexia Association USA suggests that 20% of school children are dyslexic. Dyslexia is becoming more common all the time.
- In a study carried out by our centre we discovered that most aboriginal children are dyslexic.
- This would mean that there are currently over 100,000 children and students with learning differences being educated in WA, and not one school that knows how to teach or assess them.

In schools far too much time is spent concentrating on what a child is struggling with. While it is important to teach every pupil to read and write well, it is equally important to concentrate on what the child is good at. This is what s/he is most likely to do for the rest of his/her life.

Dyslexics can easily be taught to read well and write well; it’s just a matter of teaching him/her in a different way.

Tips for teaching dyslexics
- Encourage him/her to use a word processor or laptop, and do not ask for first drafts to be handwritten. Teach basic letter sounds in a multi-sensory way. Dyslexics need to learn to associate the look, sound, and feel of the letter shape. Phonics has to be drastically over learnt.
- The teaching of phonics and spelling rules is a must. This must be structured and multi-sensory. I have written a complete course with audio files of each letter sound that is dead easy to use. You should teach phonics a bit every day.
- Encourage him/her to use a calculator, especially with long division and multiplication.
- Remember that he/she has auditory memory problems and can only properly concentrate for a few minutes when spoken to. Please do not talk continuously for more than 3 minutes at a time without a break.
- Dyslexics learn best by doing, experimenting and being shown things. They do not easily learn from written text or from merely being told. They will pick up something through conversation.
- Make as much of the learning multi-sensory, hands on as you can. Use real objects that your child can manipulate and experiment with.
- Ask your dyslexic to work a thing out for him/her self rather than being told how it is done.
- Mathletics (www.mathletics.com) is the best maths course in Australia for dyslexics. This is an on line course and therefore multi sensory in nature. When using this try to do just one concept per lesson. It costs about $100 per year. ($30 per year for HEN members – contact colita@hollyburton.com.au with your membership number to enrol)
- Teach the time with a digital clock only, during primary years. It is important that your child actually understands time and knows how long things take and at what time things happen. I recommend giving your child a digital watch so s/he can tell the time at all times. Girls” digital watches are hard to find but Smiggles do a nice cheap one which is available in a number of bright colours.
- Discover what s/he is good at and concentrate on his/her strengths.
- Dyslexics are very distractible. This is due to two reasons. The first is that they tend to have what I call “super alert” brains. Dyslexics seem to be using all of their brain all the time. See the diagram on the following page. The second reason is that they tend to be long sighted and have excellent peripheral vision.
For a dyslexic, what they see out of the corner of the eye is as, or more important that what they see in front of them. This is another reason why they need to be taught in a multi-sensory way.

Remember that many dyslexics grow up to be super successful. It is very important that your child understands why s/he is struggling, why s/he is different and how s/he thinks and learns. Then your dyslexic can work out strategies for him/herself.

Above all, it is important for any dyslexic to know s/he is not stupid. Good self esteem and interpersonal skills are much more important than good reading skills.

I have lived for over 50 years with dyslexia and I would not wish to have it taken away.

ADHD and dyslexia

Many dyslexics in Australia are mistakenly being diagnosed with ADHD. This is awful because they are then prescribed class A drugs instead of being taught correctly. While it is possible to be both dyslexic and have ADHD, it is unlikely.

If your child has been diagnosed as having ADHD then please consider that the diagnosis may be incorrect and that your child may be just dyslexic. Here are some ways of telling how correct this diagnosis is for your child.

If your child truly has ADHD then:

- S/he will have to be on the medication all of the time, not just when doing school work.
- S/he will be so impulsive that it puts her/his life at risk.
- S/he will find it hard to concentrate on anything, not just school work.
- When on medication the child is completely different. Parents describe the difference as “chalk and cheese.” The difference will be so great that everyone will comment on it.

Please do check that your child does actually have ADHD. You do not want your child on these drugs if they do not have to be. I have written a book on this with lots of different tick tests, descriptions and advice. It can be purchased on CD from the website. I wrote it to help prevent the overuse of medication that is going on in this country. Because I do not want to make money from this I donate the profits of this book directly to Dyslexic Centre Australia.

There are masses of free materials and downloadable sheets to be found on our sites and all are written in plain English. Please go to www.dyslexiccentreaustralia.org.au and follow the links.

We also have instructions and links to free text-to-voice software, which make excellent editing tools and help relieve stress for dyslexics. Go to the top menu bar and click on “Voiceovers”.

If you join this site you will be sent a newsletter every month containing more free advice. We plan to set up self help groups across Australia. So please keep in contact.

There is an interactive blog on the site so please do leave comments and if you have found a good way of teaching your dyslexic child then please do leave the information on the site so that others can use it.