

Teaching  
the Reluctant Learner

With, Not Against

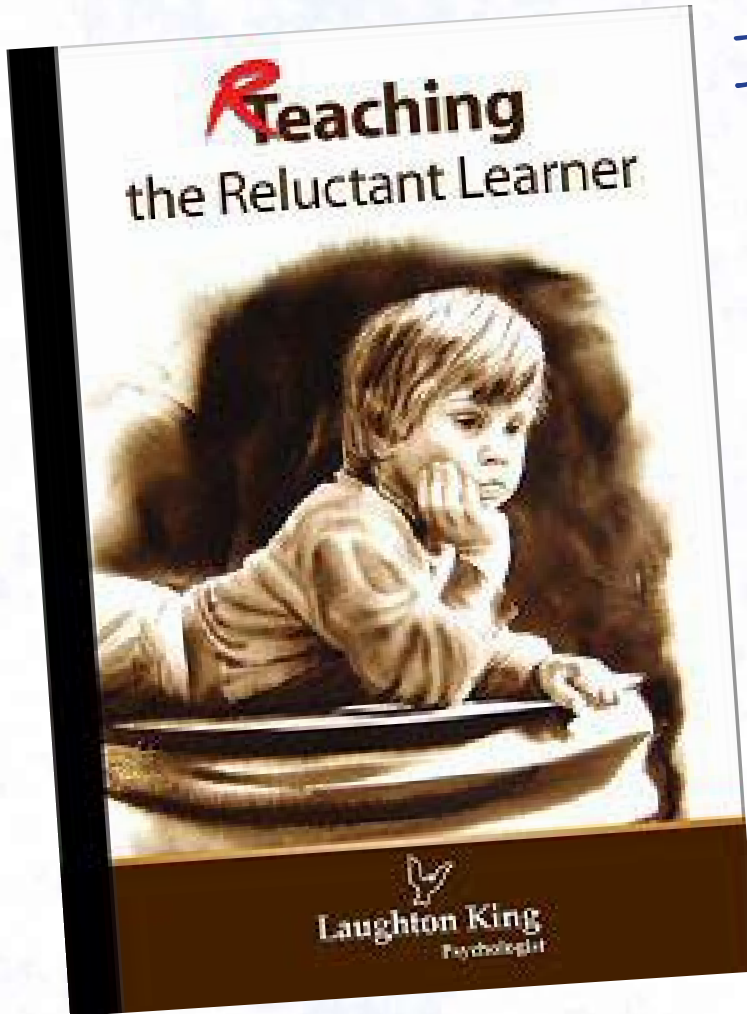


## Books and Articles

by  
LAUGHTON KING

These books and articles, all written by Laughton, give a thumbnail outline of his understanding of dyslexia, and stand as an example of what he can share with your school and your community. Please feel free to share these with teaching staff and any parents who may be interested.

# Reaching the Reluctant Learner



– A Manual of Strategies for Teachers and Parents.

Laughton King, 178 pages. 3rd edition, self-published 2006, New Zealand.

This very practical and helpful manual focuses on the learning difficulties that come under the umbrella notion of 'dyslexia'. The author examines why such difficulties are so common in our schools - right around the English-speaking world - before giving parents and teachers insights as to how to work usefully with these children. He also demonstrates from the inside what the world is like for these children.

He looks at how these children think, at how they understand the world, and at the impacts on their behaviour. He includes a biographical section based around his own personal experiences as a dyslexic child.

In clarifying the fundamental differences between linguistic and pictorial thinking styles, and the connection between learning difficulty and behaviour problems, this book opens the way for parents and teachers to reach, and therefore to effectively teach so-called reluctant learners.

Cost: \$40 plus postage

Orders: e-mail [laughton.king@win.co.nz](mailto:laughton.king@win.co.nz)

# With, Not Against

– A Compendium of Positive Parenting Strategies.

Laughton King, 121 pages. 2nd edition, self-published 2008, New Zealand.

Written with the busy parent in mind, this book is designed to taking the head-on fight out of parenting, and is based on the author's 30 years of clinical work with parents of young children.

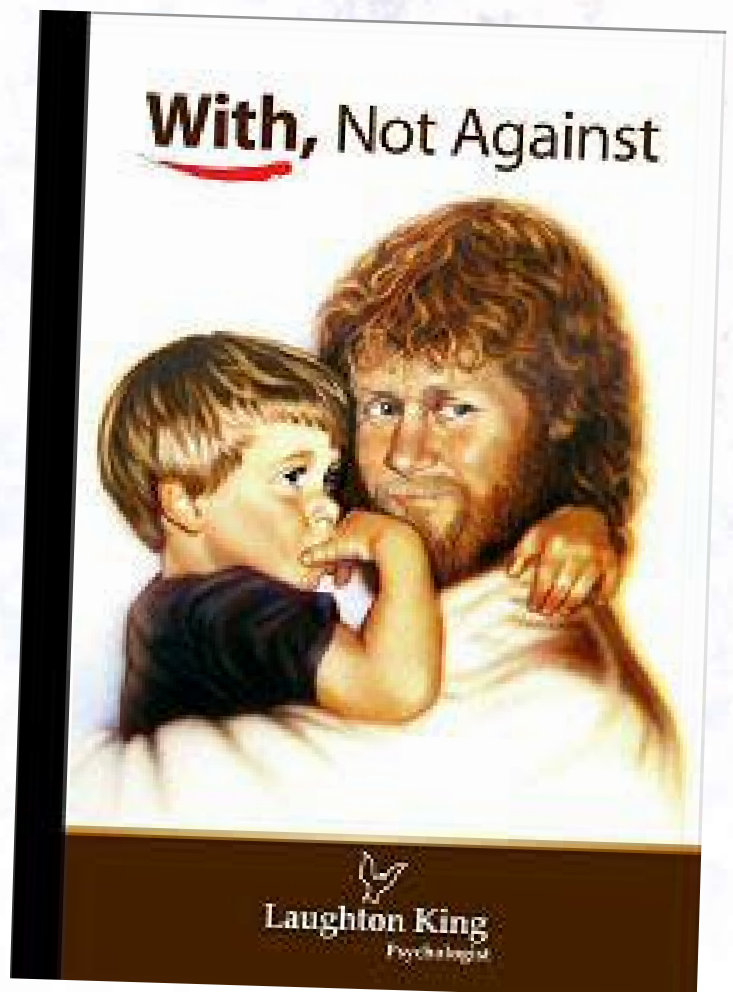
This book is written as a practical manual, has a simple, bite-size presentation and is free from the pages of theory that commonly restrict easy access to useful information.

The book focuses on the small things parents do that make it difficult for children to comply and co-operate, and gives examples and illustrations of how we can easily work with our children to achieve happier households.

Includes: bedtime strategies, behaviour management, language of parenting, toileting, mealtime behaviour, arguments, use of praise and humour, and other issues that can make parenting a lonely and difficult role.

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# Help!

## Our Boys are Thinking in Pictures!

The headlines are emotional, sensational and repetitive: 'our boys are failing'. Irrespective of how often we hear it, the message is nonetheless upsetting for anybody with a direct or indirect interest in children, the education system, or our future. Our boys are not succeeding satisfactorily in their elemental academic learning.

Acknowledging that issues of academic failure on the part of our younger generation, particularly of our boys, is a journalist's paradise-playground, the harsh downstream realities, so currently evident in our youth subculture, and so predictable from the evidence to date, raises concerns fueled by emotions ranging from love to fear.

Although recorded history shows clearly that there is nothing new about this situation, our current 'progress to perfection' mind-set leaves us little room to sit in complacency while the evidence dances so vividly before us. The education system is failing our little boys, somewhere, somehow. Our little boys stand to become big boys, and at this rate our big boys stand to become big problems.

Although the reports persistently tell us there is a problem, they just as persistently fail to indicate where and how the problem lies, and fall glaringly short in terms of any suggestion or indication as to what might be done about it.

As a little boy who experienced such difficulties at school, and who ran perilously close to becoming one of those problematic youths, psychologist Laughton King believes he can shed light on the situation. He claims the explanation is as dynamic, yet as simple as the difference between petrol and diesel.

In his seminars and his books he reminds parents and teachers what happens when we inadvertently put petrol in our diesel car – the engine goes sluggish, overheats, then finally fails to perform. This, he says, is what happens when we fail to recognize that many boys under the age of 12 years think in pictures.

He smiles when I look quizzically in response to this statement, as if expecting or indeed predicting my confusion. Thinking just happens – doesn't it? Few of us probably ever bother to stop and think about thinking, let alone ponder such deep-and-meaningfuls as how we might think. By way of explanation he gives a thumbnail description which in essence highlights major differences between the way in which most males and females think. He describes girls and women as having a much greater natural skill – and a much greater tendency – to think in words. Boys and men, on the other hand, have less skill in this arena, but correspondingly more skill in thinking in pictures. This, he says, explains a lot of the differences in the way men and women operate, and consequently a lot of the difficulties the two experience in communication. This part is familiar ground for most of us.

Despite our gender prejudices, this difference in style of thinking is not just a matter of personal obstinacy, but more a product of the different wiring systems that we have. He talks of 'masculine' wiring systems and 'feminine' systems, and neurological research that indicates that the feminine system involves up to eight separate centres for language processing (but few for spatial relationships); the masculine system has a solitary (and sometimes very lonely) centre for language processing, but has more processing space dedicated to the kinesthetic, tactile and spatial functions.

He points to the obvious – little boys are all touch, crash and go, whereas little girls are more physically reserved, but talkative in their style. He points to a nearby example – the café where we met for this interview has two or three groups of women talking with varying degrees of animation, and one solitary man hunched over his laptop. Through the window and across the way we see eight large motor-cycles parked outside a café-bar, and their red-and-black leathered owners – the current version of ‘middle-aged-gentlemen’ – sitting quietly with their bikes and their beers in the sun. Their bikes do the talking – or should it be, ‘their bikes make the statement’. Admittedly, two women accompany the men, but Laughton draws my attention to their upper-arm tattoos, and with a wordless gesture suggests that I take this into account. What I notice is his distinctly male communication style – gestures, not words.

‘And the relevance to education, and educational success?’ I ask.

“Excuse me for generalising”, he begins, “but after working with children – mainly boys – with learning difficulties for over 30 years, I feel it is reasonably safe to suggest that up to the age of about 12 years, most boys think predominately in pictures. Girls tend to think in words, almost in sentences, creating ‘straight-line’ or a linear thinking style which really suits our schooling system. Our schools are full of words – reading, writing, listening, talking etc – and girls lap this up, with words being a fuel to their thinking. It makes teaching the ‘feminine’ brain a piece of pie.”

He pauses, and a flash of pain passes his eye, “- but for many boys it is different. To varying degrees boys think in pictures. I call them ‘Diesels’. This is a function of their brain wiring. Words are just not a significant part of their system. Their fuel is different, their brain is different, their style is different, and as parents and teachers we need to know this.”

I listen to him speaking, and note the change in his own language, his shorter sentences, as he obviously reflects on personal experiences.

“Consider the teaching staff at your local primary school – primarily female?”

Yes, in my case, exclusively female, and I pre-empt his next question by acknowledging that they are all very adept in their language skills.

“What if they were inadvertently – with the best intentions – putting petrol into these little boys’ diesel tanks? What I mean is, what if the words they are using were making little sense to the boys? What if their ‘masculine’ wiring system meant that they simply cannot make sense of the words – the language – that their teachers (and parents) are using?”

He invites me to draw a picture, a picture of the instruction “hurry up” – one of the most common instructions given to children.

“If boys think in pictures, what is the picture that comes up in their head that will tell them what “hurry up” means?”

I’m not much of an artist (more of a word-smith really) and he grins when he sees my rendition of someone running.

“Nice picture of ‘run’, but I really wanted a picture of ‘hurry up”.

Eventually I’m obliged to acknowledge that there is no specific picture of ‘hurry up’, and he pushes his point by suggesting I draw the word ‘quickly’ (can’t do), or the instructions ‘tidy up’ (equally can’t do), or ‘put your gear away’ (still can’t do).

“Enough of this; what should we be saying to boys?; I protest.

On his invitation I find I can draw “Put your bag on the hook behind the door” – it’s a bit like a comic strip, but any pictorial (diesel?) kid could comprehend my efforts there. Similarly the instruction “go brush your teeth – run” fits nicely into picture form, and I am beginning to think of my own family early-morning rush and some changes that might happen very soon.



"That's Iceberg Number One – and there are lots more like it that sink many of our little boys, and severely deflate the self-concept of many others. We tend to call these children 'dyslexic' because we see that they are having trouble with language – reading, writing etc – and we tend to think that there is something wrong with them. There is nothing wrong with them, they are perfectly well formed diesels (picture thinkers), and they don't need fixing. They also don't need more petrol squirted into their engines – and unfortunately most of our remedial assistance approaches involve just that – more petrol."

"What they do need is a basic understanding of their natural style, acceptance of their pictorial processes, and for teachers and parents to take this into account. Let's stop blaming the victim. We need to change ourselves, and what we do, rather than trying to fix the children".

This is his mission as he moves around the country with Natalie, his portrait-artist wife, in their five-tonne mobile home. Currently in the South Island, they have dedicated several years to personally calling on most towns in New Zealand, visiting schools, running seminars, and introducing parents and teachers, social workers and policy-makers to what he considers to be one of the most commonly misunderstood social dynamics of our time.

The implications are horrendous, he says. Firstly it cuts so many of us out of successful education. This has a huge impact on the self-concept of a large proportion of our male population. This in turn is reflected in their use of drugs and alcohol, physical and mental health, employment dynamics, incidence of domestic violence and split families, attitude to authority and the law, and directly to our rising prison population. His passion is obvious.

Our discussion goes on and on, and I learn the impact of negative language (Iceberg Number Two) and can now clearly see the hypnotic effect when I tell my four-year-old son 'don't use the front door'. My blaming the child now seems so unfair and I begin to wonder about the recently coined label 'Oppositional Defiance Disorder'.

Iceberg Number Three is created by a set of school rules (e.g. 'respect other people's rights') which simply cannot be transcribed in pictorial form, and which therefore completely eludes the pictorial child's understanding. A sense of sadness floods over me as I suddenly realise who it is who repetitively stands in front of the principal for breaking the school rules – yet again – and I see a completely new causal connection between learning difficulties and behaviour problems.

Iceberg Number Four appears as a complete difficulty when it comes to 'creative writing' in the classroom. So many of these children have a wonderful creative fantasy - which presents itself in pictorial form. They have a head full of pictures, but no words – there is nothing for them to write, because you can't write pictures. For the person who thinks in words this is so hard to comprehend, and they just see the child as lazy, or unmotivated.

And here comes Iceberg Number Five. The parent or teacher really wants this child to succeed, and so 'remedial help' is arranged. Although this is done with the very best intentions, so often this is more petrol for the poor little diesel, and he struggles to comply but ends up failing yet again. Whereas in the past he has been motivated to achieve, now his repetitive failure takes its toll and he becomes motivated to self-preserve – so he withdraws his co-operation and his effort. 'If I don't try, I can't fail'. For his efforts he is tagged as 'unmotivated', and with 'an attitude problem'.

Iceberg Number Six is apparently more like an ice sheet, and consists of a whole raft of further dynamics that predictably accompany the 'dyslexic' condition. These include a tendency to food intolerances, or even food allergies, a social loneliness born of other children's intolerance and teasing, an inability to filter-out distracting stimuli (often called ADD – Attention Deficit Disorder, but really an Attention Overdose Disorder), a tendency to reverse direction in both reading and writing, speech and language difficulties (the butt of further teasing), and an inability to think before he speaks.

Iceberg Number Seven, predictably like the polar ice-cap, covers all and takes the form of a major lack of self-confidence and anger that often pervades the rest of his being. This then can either preclude any subsequent personal success, or in some instances create such a powerful sense of purpose and determination that nothing is ever allowed to get in the way of achievement and success – what ever 'success' means.

'Is it all bad?,' I ask, recalling some reference to dyslexia as a 'gift'. The look he returns is tolerant, but barely so.

"No, it's not all bad, but it can seem that way. At 58 years I still regularly have nightmares about my primary schooling. Before we start singing the benefits of being a diesel motor let's start by getting clear about what a diesel motor is, how it works, and getting really clear about the fuel we put in it."

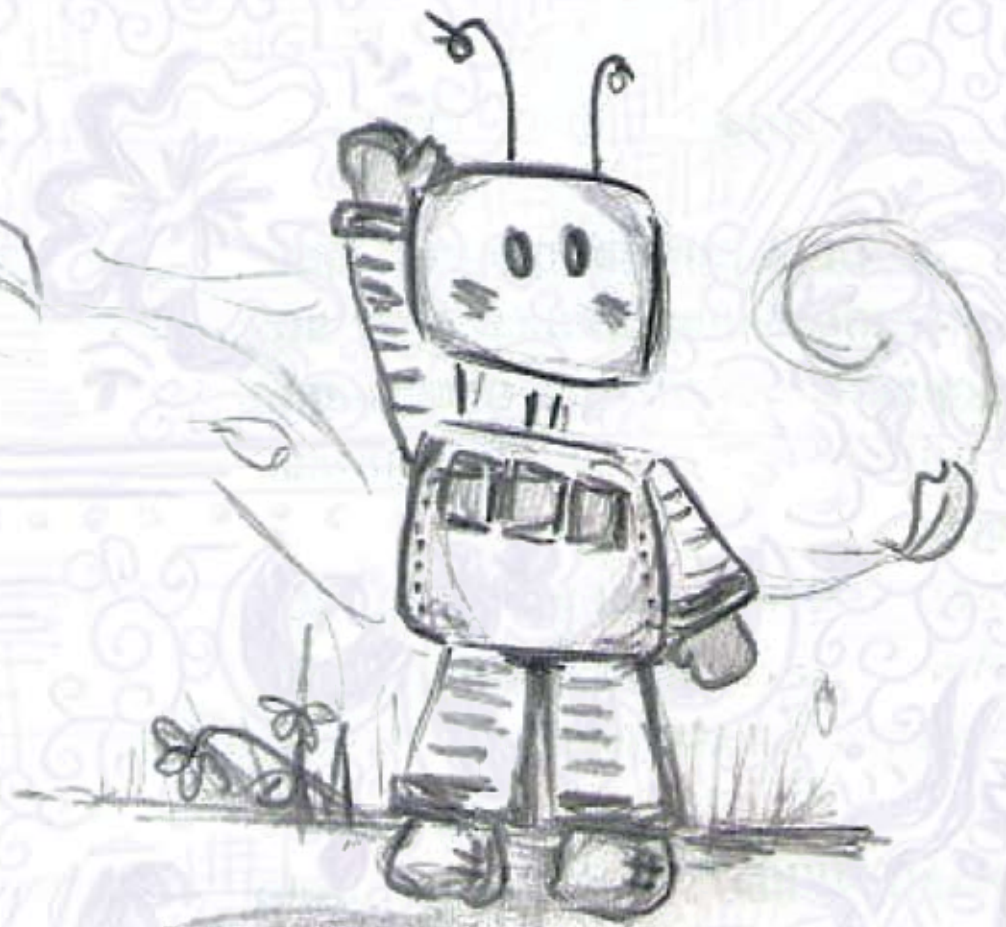
He pauses, breathes out then adds, "I guess that's my job."

I leave the café and our interview with a mixed sense of despondency and guilt, gratitude that I was never one of these, and a determination to join up and present as clear a picture as I can through the words of my profession. Yes, I have a lad of my own, fortunately not dyslexic, but certainly one who leans toward the pictorial.

Laughton's books contain insights for teachers and parents. He is adamant that they do not contain programmes for the 'dyslexic' child. He avoids this approach on the basis that each child has a different presentation – and different needs, and that the teachers already know how to teach. He is convinced that the parents and teachers are already concerned and motivated. They just need insights as to how these children think, how they feel, how they react, so that we can reach them and then teach them. Then we may better work with them – not against them. Hence the titles of his two books; Reaching the Reluctant Learner, and With, Not Against.

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**Laughton King July 2008**



# Tell me, what is it like to be dyslexic?



That's a good question and it makes me think – because being dyslexic is normal for me; I've always been dyslexic, and I don't know any other way. I don't know what 'normal' is.

For years I thought I was 'normal' – although perhaps a little stupid, or maybe just 'dumb'. I knew I was always a little behind the eight-ball, I didn't understand what the teacher was talking about, and couldn't 'pay attention' to the classroom situation, but with enough effort, huge concentration, and a degree of canny strategising I got through.

Being dyslexic is usually associated with having reading and writing difficulties, and that is certainly the case for me. Eventually, somewhere round about my 10th birthday I figured I had mastered the art of 'reading' and became an avid reader - for the next three days. Finally I gave up exhausted, having read my first book five or six times – up to page six – and eventually realizing that although I could read, and say each word, I had no idea what they meant, or what the book was about. Now, as an adult, I will happily dig your garden or mow your lawn in preference to reading a book.

'Dyslexia' is about language, and about not being able to do language well. Difficulty with reading is only one part of being dyslexic – but let's explore that for a moment.

As a dyslexic, I know that words are the things that come out of your mouth – and into your ears. The things in books, or in the newspaper are not really words at all – they are just pictures of words, they are things to remind you of the words that you can say and hear. The really hard part is that they are made up of squiggles – black marks on white paper – and these things have no recognisable resemblance to anything real at all; and especially not to whatever it is that they are meant to be referring to.

What I mean is, whereas the Chinese symbol for 'mountain' actually looks like a mountain, the squiggles called 'letters' bear no similarity to a high hill at all. This might not be a problem to you, but I'm dyslexic, and that means that I think in pictures, and with these 'letter' things, I don't get the picture at all.

I don't know what you see when you open a book, but the first thing I see is flashes of lightening jumping all over the page. When my primary school teacher asked what I meant, I drew a line where the lightening went, and she said that it followed the gaps between the words down the page. I said yes, this is the same as the ladders in 'Snakes and Ladders', and I always hit the bottom.

The same teacher asked me why I like to draw a line around my page, and I told her it is not a line, but an electric fence – like on our farm – to stop the words, and my eyes, from wandering off the page. I was not allowed to draw my lines on school reading books, and that made reading too hard - the words wouldn't stay still long enough for me to work them out, and they kept jumping from one line to another. The teacher put a blank card under the line I was reading, and that helped – but they wouldn't let me do it at college. Now, as an adult with my laptop, I can finally write (neatly what's more) because the computer puts all the bits in the right place. I know I can't get a computer to read for me, but the interesting thing is, comics work really well for me because all the pictures are there and I can see exactly what the message is. I can even read the words in comics – and this is because they are all in square letters or capitals, which people like me find easier to understand.



## What about 'writing' for the dyslexic?

Yes, this is hard too.

The first reason is that 'writing' always seems to involve words, but that is obvious. What is not obvious is that to write words you first have to choose words to write. What if you don't have any words in your head? Yes I have plenty of ideas, memories, fantasies and creations – but I see them, in pictures, and I cannot readily find words to represent them. In my head my internal video shows a pack of crazed chihuahuas terrorizing the police in the city, and I write on my page 'The little dog...' then give up in disgust.

The other main reason for writing being hard has got something to do with our tendency to carry what I call a 'residual left-handed orientation'. Normal people don't often realise that most tools are designed for right-handers (most of our population), and don't really suit left-handers. They certainly don't realise that this is just the same with the letters of the alphabet, and the direction we read and write in – which are both designed for right-handers. Apparently the Phoenicians designed all this – with no consideration for the lefties in the population. I'm not saying that all dyslexics are left-handed, but most that I have met can quickly identify a left-hander in their immediate family tree.

Being a lefty (we used to be called 'cack-handers' which is an insult to the Indian people as well as to the lefties – you can work this out for yourselves) isn't so bad in itself these days, except that lefties naturally go from right to left across the page, and naturally draw our circles in a clockwise direction – and this is in reverse from what our reading system demands. So we just spend all our educational life in reverse-gear. Great.

So what is it like to be dyslexic? Well, we think in pictures, we chase words around the pages of books, and we have trouble finding any sensible connection between squiggles on paper and real things they are meant to refer to. And this all happens in perpetual reverse gear. School is not cool.

## So you think in pictures?

Yes, I think in pictures. You say "dog", and I get a picture of a dog in my head. You probably do the same – and that doesn't make you dyslexic. You say "fiction" and you probably know what it means – but I just look at you funny because I can't get a picture of that word. I can't draw a simple picture of what it means. I also can't get a picture of "respect", or "tidy", or "behave" or lots of other words that parents use, and I have only a very hazy idea of what these words mean – but you keep asking me to do these things. You probably don't realize how hard this is for me; I want to please you, but you won't or can't understand.

## So dyslexia affects behaviour too?

Yes, it affects behaviour too. I often don't understand your words, or what you want of me. You know what you mean, but the words make no sense to me. It's even worse when you say "Don't ..." then put a picture of me doing something in my head. You do this with "... slam the door", and "... spill your drink", "... be late" and lots of other hypnotic commands. When I comply with the pictures you give me, I get the blame, and I am told that I am naughty and a trouble-maker. I see that there is no picture for "don't" – can you see this? Can you understand that you are blaming me for following your instruction as best I can? Best that you tell me what you do want – not what you don't want.

You think in words – I think in pictures. This is a bit like petrol (words) and diesel (pictures). You put petrol in my diesel tank and I can't make it work – I can't learn and I can't cooperate ... but I get the blame.

Back to the question: What is it like to be dyslexic? What goes on inside my head? What do I think? Do I think? Now that you ask, really the answer has to be "No". I'm not really sure what 'think' means. You have a petrol brain that uses words to think with. In my head there aren't any words, and there aren't really any thoughts. I have eyes inside my head that have lots of pictures going through them, lots of videos, all at once. Some of these are now, some are from the past – and some are from the future, all at once. Some are 'true' and some of them I create – but I can't tell one from the other, they all look the same. You say I have a good memory, but this is only for pictures. You say I have a good fantasy – when you like it. You say that I tell lies when you don't like it.

When you ask me what I am thinking I can't answer. The first reason I can't answer is that I can see about 6000 things in my videos at any moment – so which bit shall I tell you about? It is easier to just say "nothing". The second reason is that there are just pictures in my head – and feelings. 'Telling you' means using words, and I'm not good at that. I often end up wanting to share, but can't find the words – or use lots of wrong words – or far too many words, too fast. And then you growl at me. The worst is when I say words, and you hear them – but I used the wrong words that don't say what I mean. But you say that that is what I said, so it must be what I mean. More than this, please, please, please don't ask me how I feel – that is just too hard.

And while I'm on the subject, when you want me to learn something, or to understand something, telling me with words is not the best way to go – show me, walk me through it, and I will have a far better chance of understanding and giving you what you want.

### *So what is it like to be dyslexic?*

It is like always getting it wrong. Being 'bad' when you are trying to be good. Being always in the dark and thinking that you must be dumb and stupid. Finding things hard when you are told that they are easy. Like working yourself to exhaustion, then being told you are not trying hard enough. Like being unable to share your ideas usefully with other people and not even knowing how you feel. Like being too scared to try, because you know it will only lead to failure – again. Like living a daily nightmare where everything is out of control, and being too scared to sleep at night because of the horrendous nightmares that come in under cover of dark. The anxiety, the fear and the insecurity is horrendous – it's overpowering and depressing, and it doesn't go away.

Thank you for your interest, but I almost wish you hadn't asked.

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# What do we mean by ADD and ADHD?

It seems to go with being a boy – being accused of being ADD, or even of being ADHD. Hardly a boy I know has not had this label thrown at him at some point in his life.

Well, maybe that is a bit of an overstatement, but do you get my drift? In terms of style, boys seem to have a need to be overt, noisy, physical and loud – as if hearing the echoes resounding off their environment confirms their very existence. It has even been suggested that this is how males determine their presence, their identity – the more noisy they are, the more real they are. Or is it perhaps the other way around – that the more insecure they are, the more need they have to express their presence through such overt means as noise, or at least loud visual image.

Boys stomp and crash – where girls giggle and talk. Girls preen themselves in the mirror – for hours on end – while boys roar through the town on their Harleys (peripheral vision glimpsing flashes of reflection in plate glass frontage). Women 'multitask', using their exclusive endowment of eight separate cranial language-sites, each like a linguistic octopus, to the confusion and oft-times chagrin of their male counterparts. And our sons get labeled ADD or hyperactive.

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), is a moniker often bandied around with very little close examination or understanding of what is really going on – but that is par for the course in the whole arena of 'dyslexia'. The words themselves would suggest that the culprit has some lack of ability, or even some lack of willingness, to engage with learning activities at an intellectual level. The label is commonly accompanied by the descriptor 'highly distractible', but with a slight tonal hint of accusation, suggesting an element of anger or intolerance by the speaker – invariably the parent or class-teacher of the accused.

ADHD, or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, becomes like a double-barreled shotgun, additionally endowing the individual with a physical style that might match that of a cornered possum – leaping from door-handle to curtain rail in perpetuated frenzy, or at least at levels that prevent any associate or family member any predictable moment of peace.

Such labels, it would seem, are invented, and imposed by people who have themselves never participated in or been subject to the affliction at a personal level, and therefore label what they see – as opposed to what they know. From the inside the story is different.

How many senses do we have? Our various senses all operate individually and so at any one moment we may be subject to signals through our eyes, our ears, our skin, our nose, and our tongue - all signals being received simulataneously. Our eyes, ears and skin may, in actual fact, each be bombarded by literally thousands of signals at any one moment. How could we ever begin to measure how many visual signals our eyes are subject to every instant? And the same goes for the ears and the skin, meaning that the human sensory system is receiving saturation input much of the time.

Fortunately, to protect us from burn-out, a compensatory shield is deployed where our major computer scans, sorts and prioritises the items in this sensory flood, ascribing preference and priority to a very small proportion of the available input, allowing us to select and focus, to effectively pay attention to what we regard as most important at that moment. Thank God for such an effective neurological system - what would life be like without that screening ability!

Good question – and if you want a good answer, just ask the ADD kid - because this is what daily life is like for him.

For reasons beyond our current knowledge the children we label as ADD have a significant deficit in terms of this protective screening device, and their 'attentional energies' are perpetually hammered by an enormous array of input that they are unable to block, sort or selectively prioritise. Every sound, whether natural or man-made, demands identification and attention, whilst at that same moment every movement within their direct or peripheral vision vies for visual contact. Just watch their eyes and get a glimpse of what they are taking in.

But equally every available smell, natural, industrial or human, will be stacking up for olfactory analysis, as will the tactile interference of air movement past the hairs of his leg, the rumble through his seat of the truck beyond the wall, and the elusive itch somewhere on his scalp. Addressing those that he can, trying to ignore those that he can't, and fighting off the intrusions of the many more becomes a seriously exhausting continuous routine for the ADD child.

### *ADD?*

Not at all. There is no attention deficit here. There is rather a very clear, and equally extreme attention overload situation that dominates his very existence. It puts question to the real value of the intentionally stimulating environment we often promote and value in our classrooms.

There are three real difficulties here – the first, **a consequential difficulty in application and learning**, being quite obvious. The other two are more insidious, and in themselves are perhaps even more personally crippling.

The second is the **attitude of the adults** in his life. The parents and teachers of this child may not realise that he is subject to input that he cannot control, and of which they have no knowledge. At least initially they cajole him for not paying attention, for not concentrating (his energies) on the task in hand, and for being distractible. So often he is admonished and penalized for something he is completely unable to control.

The third is that **he himself has no notion that he is different in this regard**, and that the bombardment he experiences is not the norm. He experiences life as he knows it, and like everybody else, assumes that this is normal. It does not appear to him to be a bombardment – it is just as it has always been – it just is.

The upshot of these is that as well as having a consequential learning difficulty, he is blamed for being uncooperative by the people important to him, and he himself, in his naivety, accepts the label, the blame, and the responsibility. Anxiety, anger, a low self-concept, and eventually depression are the predictable outcomes.

**For more articles on a range of associated topics email Laughton direct at: [laughton.king@win.co.nz](mailto:laughton.king@win.co.nz)**

### *And ADHD?*

Hyperactivity means very high levels of activity – as opposed to 'hypo-activity' which means just the opposite.

The hyperactive child is more than just an intensively active child. This child moves at an unbelievable rate, is generally erratically spontaneous, and moves constantly and intrusively into and through everything. He recognizes few barriers and no sensitivities – nothing is out-of-bounds as far as his inquisitiveness is concerned. He will commonly have an explosive start to the day – eclipsing the local rooster – and will move like a turbo-charged maniac until dropping in his tracks sometime prior to midnight.

Although many are labeled 'hyperactive', few really fit the bill – and for this we should be grateful.

More often we have children who, although excessively active, do not warrant the title, and certainly do not warrant medication. They do however warrant assistance and investigation of the possible dynamics that may be causing a lifestyle that is as uncomfortable for them as it is for those sharing their life-space.

Many children who fall under the descriptor 'dyslexic' present as having heightened sensitivity to a multitude of environmental factors, which can individually, or as a group create a stressed neuro/muscular system. Identification and monitoring of these can bring huge relief to all concerned.

The sustained physical function of the human body is a product of an harmonious interaction of two major physiological systems – one being chemical, and the other electrical – together being major factors in our neurological functioning. Each individual person has slightly differing needs in both respects, and any maladjustment has the capacity to impact on the way the individual will operate.

As with motor vehicles, some persons are highly tuned, and hence highly vulnerable to variation within their system, and others are so low-tuned that nothing seems to impact on their performance at all. Too much or too little of anything ranging from trace-elements, through vitamins, minerals, proteins, sugars, to foreign chemicals (as in preservatives, flavouring chemicals etc), to foreign electrical impulses, can push a child well beyond their own ability to cope.

Foreign chemicals and metals can be entirely natural and in our natural food (salicylates in apples, feijoas etc for example), can be natural but presented in unnatural ways (dried fruits having a changed sugar product, squeezed juices having sugar concentrates out of balance from that of the raw fruit), or can be natural, but not naturally in our food chain (aluminium powder in our town drinking water, lead in tin packaging).

They can equally be present as part of our food preparation process, or be remnants from cleaning processes (chlorine in cleaners), or be present as additives to preserve, colour, flavour and 'stabilise' our food. Your local naturopath or nutritionist could tell you much more than this.

As part of their heightened sensitivity, food allergies, or at least food intolerance is almost par for the course with these children, with dairy and wheat products (gluten) being the two most common.

Although there tends to be a predominant attitude that "they wouldn't give it to us if it wasn't good for us", few people stop to consider the poisons they regularly put into their own body – or actively provide for their children – under the guise of 'food'. Few consumers realize that the sulphides and sulphates that are a common ingredient in our canned and bottled fizz, act like a brick on the body's accelerator, and bolt-cutters through the brake cable – producing what is arguably the first significant mind-altering experience in the young child's life.

And then there is the electrical side of our mechanism – the entire nervous system.

That our modern lifestyle involves a multitude of electrical and electronic gadgetry is readily recognized – but what of the impact of electrical radiation?

Consider the battery in your wrist watch, and the radiation from your cell-phone, your kitchen microwave, TV and computer, or the alarm/radio beside the bed. What of the ever-present current from your electric blanket, your home meter-board, and the sub-station or transformer on the street. What about stray radiation from the local cell-phone tower and local microwave relay station – these may all be draining your own energy, and wrecking havoc with the delicate balance of your child, making it impossible for him to regulate his activity or his behaviour.

In this case, is it at all appropriate for you to berate your child, or to punish him in an attempt to change his behaviour? To punish him for something that may well be beyond his control?

And medication? Is it legitimate to add yet another chemical ingredient to the environmental cocktail of poisons your child is experiencing, in the form of a 'medication' to calm and regulate him, and do you include these in the 'must be good for us' category?

As author, psychologist, 'hyperactive' child/become highly energetic adult, this 59 year old psychologist of 30+ years experience in working with such children, urges a responsible examination of the possible dynamics of each individual child by those primarily charged with their safe-keeping – you, the parents.

Take charge of the child's environment, so he can take charge of his own behaviour.

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Some will develop quick verbal response skills, and earn the reputation of a 'smart-mouth'. This may get them into trouble with both adults and peers.

Often they will forget what they were going to say, and will normally show no ability to control what comes out of their mouth. They usually cannot work out what the word 'think' means.

When given instruction they may have difficulty in understanding it, remembering it, or complying with it.

When being cross-examined they will often have the irritating habit of repeating the question. This is not stalling for time, but rather the only way they can internalise the question so as to process it. Under emotional pressure they may use words that do not represent their thinking: "what I said was not what I meant".

They do not respond well to physical punishment, nor 'loss of privilege' – this tends to make them resentful and surly.

They often talk of killing themselves, or wanting to die, and their behaviour may involve serious risk-taking.

It is common for boys to show a predilection to lighting fires, and these can find a box of matches hidden anywhere! As young adults they may become pyromaniacs or even serial fire-lighters, and later become the best – or the worst – member of the local fire-brigade. Some advance their interest to firearms and explosives.

They tend to have a very inventive mind – both pictorially and practically, and in terms of their creative fantasy. They are often accused of exaggerating or lying.

The boys often have good, practical, hands-on skills, and become 'Mr Fix-it' in their local community. As adults they are often perfectionists, or workaholics.

They are often artistically endowed, or musical.

They are usually very practical, often sporty, and may excel in sports roles demanding instant reactions.

Some (labeled 'dyspraxic') will appear very clumsy, will have poor eye/hand co-ordination, and a poor perception of body-space. Left/right confusions are standard.

Many will be very sound sleepers, and bed-wetters, and others will have major sleeping difficulty.

As infants it is common that they will sleep flat on their back, with their hands beside their ears. By morning the bed may appear to have been ripped apart by wild horses.

They may show a tendency to use parallel thinking, and have deep understandings or insights into unlikely topics.

In the classroom they may show considerable distractibility, poor concentration, and a disinclination to become involved in academic lessons. Reading and writing are likely to present as hostile territory.

Teachers will typically regard them as being 'unmotivated'. However this is not specifically true. In reality, finding school-work so difficult, and having failed to achieve over and over, they are highly motivated to avoid further failure – and will therefore avoid the task they are likely to fail in if at all possible. In this they are totally normal!

Handwriting and printing is commonly very messy – but varying from day to day – and they often find it easier to print in capitals, or block-letters. Many mix upper and lower-case letters.

Day-dreaming in the classroom is standard, as is the most annoying tendency to demonstrate 'remote hearing' – the capacity to hear (and butt into) private whispered conversations on the other side of the room.



They may 'lose the plot' if their predictable routine is in any way disturbed – or if their class teacher is suddenly replaced by a relieving teacher. At the same time they have the tendency to be totally spontaneous themselves.

They usually have considerable difficulty learning to tell the time, in understanding notions of time, are generally late (or paranoid about being early) and have no idea what 'hurry up' means.

They manage to collect up a variety of labels of a helpful and unhelpful nature, and are often seen to have a problem that needs therapy or medication.

Demonstrating a history of difficulty with the learning process, these children are commonly our 'behaviour problem' children as well – although they are characteristically very likeable children.

With a combination of the above, their social skills are predictably poor, and they earn personal kudos becoming the 'fix-it' man, or the class clown. Computer games, and cyber activities may provide a personal hide-away, an area of escape, or even an addiction.

As adults, the males may turn to alcohol, drugs or cars, and may become bullies, critics, workaholics – or perfectionists.

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