

LITERATURE HIGHLIGHTING LESSER-KNOWN FACTS ABOUT DYSLEXIA

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ABSTRACT

Dyslexia is one of the most common Learning Disabilities. The students suffering from dyslexia are unable to read written text fluently because their brain is wired in such a way that they cannot properly decipher the alphabet, letters and numbers scripted in a sequence. Because of this, they develop a disinterested attitude towards reading and lag behind in their studies. It affects their grades, resulting in them being labelled as 'stupid' or 'dumb' in the classroom. The dyslexics have an IQ level similar to that of other students in the same class. They are very good in understanding concepts and very innovative in their application. From the fictions selected for the study in this paper, one prominent aspect highlighted is that the dyslexics are very crafty and creative. Many a time they know the answers but they are unable to express. They develop an introvert attitude which further results in their alienation. The society has made a structure of its own norms. It has set parameters to judge people and categorize them. When someone is different, the system marginalizes that individual. The marginalization leads to traumatic experiences. In the present research paper, the researcher tries to bring forward the fact that dyslexia is a hereditary disorder by studying the central characters in the selected fictions.

KEYWORDS: dyslexia, dyslexia is hereditary, problems in classroom, creative & crafty and marginalization

INTRODUCTION

Dyslexia is a neurobiological disability and it is genetic; it is a learning disability (LD) that affects the reading ability of an individual. The dyslexics are unable to identify the alphabet correctly and they are unable to trace correct sequence of letters in words as well as in sentences. As a result of that they are unable to read fluently like the other students in class. Because of it, they lose interest in studies as well as in classroom activities related to reading and writing. Their inability to read hampers their grades and as they secure low grades in exams, they are labeled by different names like 'stupid' or 'dumb/dummy/dumbo'. Because of this labelling, they develop contemptuous attitude towards studies and scornful

attitude towards people who bully them. To hide their inability to read fluently, they search escape routes, either they remain silent and behave stubborn in classroom, pretending to be dumb or notoriously escape the situation by making mischief. But in real, they are very much petrified and terrified because of the fact that even after trying their level best they can't match even half of the reading level that of other students in the class. The researcher tries to study the central characters in the selected fictions who are suffering from dyslexia or reading disability by using Disability studies in literature. Disability studies is one of the recent theories developed in literature to study and analyse that piece of literature, which talks about impaired capabilities of individuals. This theory helps to examine the meaning, nature and consequences of disability. Here, the researcher by taking the selected three fictions *Eleven* (Giff) by Patricia Reilly Giff, *Fish in a Tree* (Hunt) by Linda Mullaly Hunt and *My Name is Brian* (Betancourt) by Jeanne Betancourt as base tries to locate the problems faced by dyslexics. Trouble in reading is the major problem faced by them. Other positive features associated with them such as they are very crafty and creative are highlighted. They are very innovative in application of ideas into practice.

DYSLEXICS ARE HIGHLY CRAFTY AND CREATIVE

Though medical science doesn't completely approve the fact that the dyslexics are highly crafty and creative, but when the researcher tries to analyze this fact from the selected fictions in pages of history and in present scenario, examples of well-known names of artists, athletes and entrepreneurs appears before him. Some of them are mentioned here. The dyslexics may be poor at reading and spellings that doesn't mean they are good for nothing. The world class painters like Leonardo da Vinci and Pablo Picasso were believed to be suffering from dyslexia. Their paintings still stand as unmatched master pieces in the passage of the floating time. Popular musician Lou Reed and Stewart Copeland were dyslexics. Tony Bennett winner of nineteen Grammy Awards, who is also awarded by Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award is a dyslexic. He says that the secret behind his success is that he is a very slow reader. Steven Spielberg, the legendary film director is also a dyslexic. He says that at school he was bullied by the other children of the class that he is a very slow reader. Spielberg has made blockbuster movies like *Jurassic Park*; *its series* and many other movies. Actors like Keira Knightley and Tom Cruise are amongst the highest paid celebrities having dyslexia. The famous celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, who has written many cookbooks and designed is too a dyslexic. He says that he is a very slow reader and finished reading his first book when he was 38. Famous athletes like boxer Muhammad Ali, star basketball player Tim

Tebow, Olympians like, Carl Lewis and Meryl Davis are dyslexics. They say if they would be good in reading they would have found a job in an office and would never have such dedication towards sports. Famous entrepreneur like James Banister who is the CEO of FXecosystem whose company provides global money in exchange markets was dyslexic. In this research paper, the researcher is trying to locate how the selected authors have brought this fact into light through the central characters of the fictions.

Sam MacKenzie, the central character of the fiction *Eleven* is shown suffering from dyslexia and that's why he is slow in reading. Sam's grandfather, Mack is a carpenter and there is a carpentry workshop at his place where he lives with his grandfather. At school when Mrs. Stanek announces 'The Castel Project', to be made from cardboard all eyes in the class are on Sam, as he is very creative and crafty. When Mrs. Stanek hands him cardboard, paper, scissors, glue and other things required to make the castle along with the instruction manual. Sam makes the castle accurately without even looking at the guidelines from the manual. Coincidentally, he is paired with the new girl in the class, Caroline who is a very good and keen reader. In fact, according to Sam, she can't stop reading. He finds working with her as an opportunity to befriend her and ask her help in reading the letters which are secretly hidden in the attic of their old house by Mack. Sam wants Caroline to help him in reading the letters which can reveal his identity, his parentage. Sam tells Caroline that that he will make a castle from wood. He chooses the best seasoned wood to make it. He rubs, paints and polishes it like a professional. He cuts it precisely and craftily arranges all the pieces to make a perfect castle. When his grandfather looks at the castle, he tells Sam that he has a gift, a gift of a true carpenter that he can talk to the wood.

Ally Nickerson in the fiction *Fish in a Tree* is shown suffering from dyslexia but she is very creative. She loves drawing, sketches and painting. She plays with colours like poets play with words. Ally is shown such a good painter that she can communicate her feelings by using different colours. In her class when her teacher asks all the students write a descriptive note about their favorite fictional character. Ally creates a fictional character 'Roy G. Biv.' and she explains that instead of writing about any fictional character like Alice from *Alice in Wonderland* she has created one new character which is made of all the colours in the colour spectrum. Her teacher appreciates her for thinking out of the box, instead of just writing about any fictional character from the comic world. Next day, she illustrates her fictional character in a very creative manner. She says Roy G. Biv. spreads happiness in all the situations. She shows all of them a colour which she made at home; she has divided the wheel

into seven pie-shaped sections. She has figured each pie piece to be of 51 degree in angle so that the wheel is divided into seven different parts to be filled by seven different colors. She attaches the wheel to a wall and fixes it to a free rotating axel and when she rotates the wheel all colours get mixed and start getting fade and ultimately disappear and turn white. When the speed of the wheel starts getting slow, the colours start appearing. All the students including her teacher get very much impressed by her innovate and creative thinking. When all the students were writing about fictional characters from the comic world, Ally created a fictional character of her own. This shows the innovative and creative thinking of Ally.

Similarly, in *My Name is Brian*, the central character, Brian Toomey who is shown suffering from dyslexia is very crafty and creative, as he can design and built brilliantly. His mother tells his new teacher, Mr. Bigham, that when Brian was only eight years old, he and his grandfather Al, won a prize in August craft fair of their town for making fancy bird houses. This shows that Brian is very crafty. One day at school his teacher announces a project called ‘animal-life project’. In this project, the students have to collect information about the animal of their choice. As the project has to be done in pairs, coincidently Brian is paired with one of the most avid and quick readers, Isabel, in the class. Isabel is unhappy because of it. She thinks that Brian is dumb and because of him her grades will get affected. She collects information about Canada geese by reading information from different books. As Brian is a slow in reading, he thinks about an innovative way to collect information about Canada geese in their natural habitat. He decides to collect information and learn about them by tracing them at different locations of his town. First, he makes the use of tape recorder given to him by Ms. Crandal in the resource room class. He follows the flock of Canada geese and make an audio report on their different actives like flying in one formation, eating and guarding each other from any harm or attack from others. He tries to make extensive audio report by mentioning the date, time and place. When he gets an appreciation for it from his teacher and the project partner, he decides to make a video tape of Canada geese at the large barley field. Now, Isabel also acknowledges his creativeand innovative side.From this discussion, the researcher tries to bring forward the point that dyslexics are very creative. They are born crafty and skilled and they canapply ideas in an innovative manner.

DYSLEXIAISHEREDITARY

When the researcher studies the fictions, one thing which can be noticed is dyslexia is a hereditary disorder. It gets transmitted from one generation to the other; it is a genetic disorder. This neurobiological condition can never be eliminated but by proper training from expert trainers, who are specialized in training dyslexics, this problem can be minimized to a large extent. Parents who are suffering from dyslexia must keep a minute watch in reading, spelling and writing activities of their child. It is highly possible that if one parent is suffering from it, the disorder can get transmitted to their child. This fact is explored from the selected fictions in the present paper.

Ally Nickerson is a dyslexic and her elder brother Tarvis also faces the same problem of trouble in reading. Because of this, he lags behind in studies but he is a very skilled mechanic. He can repair motors and engines without looking in the instruction manual. As both the siblings suffer from difficulty in reading, it can be clearly inferred that dyslexia is a genetic disorder. It is very likely that Nickerson brother and sister have inherited the disorder from one of their parents. From the fiction, it is learnt that their father is in services. According to a study many times dyslexia is not diagnosed because the elderly members of the family get dropped-out from school because they are good in sports and join army before completing their education. Ally's father is in army and therefore there are high chances that her father is dyslexic and joined army before getting diagnosed from this learning disability. And later this disorder got transmitted to his children.

In *Eleven*, Sam doesn't know about his parentage. The entire story of the novel is about Sam discovering his parentage. He finds a letter which can reveal his parentage but the biggest problem before him is that he cannot read the letter because of dyslexia. It is learnt from the fiction that Sam's grandfather, Mack is also very slow in reading and Sam has inherited that disability from his grandfather. There are many incidents in the story where the reader finds that Mack avoids reading. Their neighbor, Anima reads bedtime stories for Sam. In a study, it is revealed that when medical science was not developed as it is today, there was no awareness about dyslexia. The older generation might have been suffering for it, but didn't get diagnosed and treated like in the case of Mack. After correlating the condition of Mack and Sam, it can be said with certainty that Sam has inherited dyslexia from his grandfather Mack. This makes the argument prominent that dyslexia is a hereditary disorder.

Betancourt in her fiction *My Name is Brian* shows that the male members of the Toomey family from three generations are all suffering from dyslexia. After the medical

examination of Brain by expert medical professionals, it is confirmed that Brian is suffering from a specific learning disability related to reading ability of an individual called as dyslexia. His teacher arranges a trainer for him who can mentor him and train him in a professional and scientific way to improve his reading by teaching him how to break words in syllables and read them according to the phonic sounds. His trainer tells Brian that his father, Roy Toomey was herstudent when he was in the second grade and he too faced the same difficulty in reading like Brian is facing now. She tells him that like him his father was also very weak in reading but during that time there were no such medical tests which could diagnose it and no specific training module were developed which could teach and train so effectively. Brian wonders that his father is also a dyslexic. One day, Brian's family receives a letter from his grandfather Aland when he reads the letter, he finds that his grandfather has misspelt several words like him. His grandfather has greeted them by writing 'Deer family' instead of 'Dear family'. His mother tells him that when his father had written her a letter during their college days, he had also made the same spelling error of writing the word 'dear' as 'deer'. From this, it can be concluded that Literature has pointed that dyslexia is a hereditary disorder and gets transmitted from previous generation to the next generation.

CONCLUSION

The discussion in the paper brings certain points in focus like the dyslexics are highly creative and crafty. They have a gift of looking at things differently. They are well aware about their limitations and that allows them to experiment with things in which they can excel. Their limitations compel them to seek and invent different ways for learning. It makes them innovative. They are not weak in understanding, but their method of learning and expressing is different. Another noteworthy thing highlighted in this paper is that dyslexia is hereditary disorder and it is genetic. Parents should understand this and instead of compelling and forcing such children to be good in reading and writing, they should support and motivate their children in the things they are interested in, which may be painting, music, sport or any other activity, take carpentry for example. They should help their children by appointing a specialized trainer who can train them professionally. This will make the life of the dyslexic easy and happy.

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