

I can see clearly now:

Beating dyslexia with clay

Find a Davis Provider Worldwide:

All Areas

Search

By Brigid McConville

© 1998, Reprinted with Permission.

AS ALL too many parents know, the quest for "solutions" to dyslexia can be a long and frustrating one. But now a new teaching method - in which dyslexics model key words in clay - promises to put an end to the problems of dyslexia once and for all. The Davis Dyslexia Correction Programme, which was devised in America in 1982 by Ron Davis (himself a dyslexic), has come to [Britain](#) where it is rapidly winning converts.

The programme, essentially a week's one-to-one tuition with follow-up work to do at home, claims an extraordinary [97 per cent success](#) rate. Its basic premise is that people with dyslexia have a special gift: they think mainly in three-dimensional pictures rather than words. This means they can be immensely talented but that they cannot think with abstract words. Every time they read words such as "a" or "the" (which they can't picture), they experience a mental blankness. As these blanks accumulate, confusion sets in, causing "disorientation" (distorted perception) as they try to make sense of the two-dimensional words in front of them.

Davis's training starts by showing dyslexics how to control their ever-roving "mind's eye" or imagination. Once they can stay focused - "on point" - they begin to work through the alphabet, removing confusion by making each letter three-dimensionally in clay.

Once they have got the hang of this, and have "mastered" punctuation marks (called "road signs" in reading), they set to work in the same way on "mastering" all the abstract words in our language.

There are 217 of these "trigger words" (because they trigger confusion) and Davis's clients simultaneously model not only the letters of each word in clay, but their own chosen image of its dictionary definition. The word "which" might be modelled as a little figure standing at a crossroads; "together" might be a couple holding hands. Then the client speaks the word aloud, "telling" its meaning. In this way (the theory goes), the three parts of a word - meaning, sound and written form - become united, those disorienting blanks are replaced by images and the dyslexic finally gets the full picture of what is on the written page.

"What we are about is creating new neural pathways," explains [Hilary Farmer](#), who became the first of three [UK Davis facilitators](#) in 1997. Farmer, with an MA in Education, has 12 years' experience of teaching in FE and has specialised in working with dyslexic students. She also has a dyslexic daughter of 19 who has recently completed the Davis programme, which is available to anyone from eight to 80.

"Davis is like complementary therapy," she says, "in that we tackle the causes of dyslexia." And the programme has an impact not just on the mind, but on the emotions too. "Dyslexia can involve horrendous frustration and lack of self-esteem," says Farmer, "and while the Davis programme can be a literacy 'jump start', it can involve changes in confidence and self-esteem as much as in spelling and writing."

The Davis method also claims to "correct" Attention Deficit Disorder, dysgraphia (handwriting problems), dyspraxia (co-ordination problems) and discalculia (maths problems).

"These are all different symptoms of disorientation," says Farmer, "depending on which perceptions are distorted."

At around £1,000, the programme is not cheap, but it is nonetheless in great demand and Farmer currently has a six-month waiting list. (By the New Year she will have two qualified colleagues to help her out, with 30 more Davis trainees in the pipeline.) She stresses that it is no use parents dragging unwilling children along for a "cure"; each client has to be willing and highly motivated.

And most, she says, "respond with overwhelming relief that at last someone has understood them".



Today we made Friendly F and Colossal C and photographed them. I'm happy about them now.

Diary of 13-year-old Bridget Dalton's week with her Davis facilitator.

Monday

I WAS really excited because I was having a week off school and coming to a place I didn't know and staying in a bed-and-breakfast. But I was also quite nervous, mainly of being on my own. But it was really nice because when I got there, there were all these nice ladies (trainee Davis facilitators) and we had tea.

We did this thing called "release" because I had a headache. I had to let my mind's eye release all the tension in my body. I felt tingly all over, my headache went and it was really nice. Doing release has helped me quite a lot, like when I was trying to remember how to say the alphabet backwards: I was tense and sort of bunched up, but then I released and got back on to my "point" and then I remembered it.

My point is that place where I put my mind's eye when I want to pay attention, say when I'm reading. In my imagination it's right above my head. For all my life, until today, I couldn't concentrate on things and my mind's eye wandered and went off in places that usually weren't very convenient. Sometimes my mind's eye doesn't stay on-point; I see something outside the window and I drift off. Then I remember to put my mind's eye back on-point and I can pay attention for longer. Today, Lin told me there were 26 letters in the alphabet and because I was on-point I remembered it!

Today, I also modelled the upper case alphabet. I had trouble with F and C but we made them in really, really big block letters - "Friendly F" and "Colossal C" and we photographed them. I am happy about them now; they no longer trigger (confuse and disorient) me.

When I first came here I was worried that I would lose my flair for art and acting, because I didn't understand how the Davis method worked, but it doesn't change my good abilities. It's good; I can switch it on when I want to.

Tuesday

I've already mastered my upper case alphabet and now my lower case too. I don't get Bs and Ds and Ps and Qs mixed up any more. I got a headache again so I did release, without taking a pill as I usually have to. It went instantly. And then I got my alphabet completely right!

Next we did 'spell reading', where I had to spell out the word and say it. We also did 'sweep sweep spell', where I dragged my finger along, revealing each letter in the right order and then it works; the word just comes. We also did 'picture at punctuation', where I had to stop at every bit of punctuation, and say what picture I saw. Before doing this, I used to read loads without taking it in at all.

Wednesday

Today I had to make up a word; I made a massive clay ball and pulled bits of clay out and called it "fluppi!" It means when you are really excited, like being in a dyslexic box and kicking the box in. Before I came here, I was 'fluppi!'.

Lin helped me to get an "energy dial" in my imagination to control that "fluppi!" feeling. My dial is like a sharp, silver arrow with a crescent moon on the end. It's in a chrome case, which is electric blue with silvery-black numbers from one to 10. Ten is for when I have loads of energy, but when I am having trouble sleeping, I turn it down to three and then one.

We also made the meaning of the word "lamb" by making a model lamb in clay. Then I had to say it and model how it's written with letters in clay. I also mastered punctuation marks today so they can't trigger me when I'm reading. This was my "hump" day; I felt really tired, but I got over it.

Thursday

Today I did the trigger word "full". I made a box full of cherries in clay. I had to point at the model and say: "You are full!" I also had to run my finger along my modelled letters and say "You say full!". We also did "fine tuning" to help me balance. I had to throw a ball standing on one leg while catching two balls thrown at me - and I can do it! I never used to be able to. I am much quicker now.

I also did spelling. I learned how to spell "peace", "choose" and "renaissance"; I can spell them backwards because I can see the pictures of the letters in my mind.

When I am spelling, I have to write down the pictures (of letters), write the possibilities, then cross out the wrong ones and get rid of them out of my mind. Then Lin tells me the right spelling; I go on point, say it through and then say it out loud. I remembered them! It's really good; I'm going to use that again.

I also made clay models of what "consequence" and "responsibility" mean, and I mastered them.

Friday

We did another trigger word - 'into' - and I mastered that. We also did trigger reading - reading to find which words trigger me most. We also did more 'sweep sweep spell', exposing one letter at a time. If the word pops out, I say it, but if not, I say each letter and then it might work.

I have only had half a day as Lin talked to mum about keeping up the good work when we go home. I hope I will because this is really going to help me.

Frances Randle (Bridget's mother) describes how her daughter is getting on a month after the course:

Bridget is reading better now and she did a piece of work recently with hardly any spelling mistakes. Before the course, anything distracted her and she couldn't sit at a table for five minutes, but now she is able to pay attention and do things on her own.

And in total contrast to how she was before the course, Bridget came home and said 'I want the alarm clock so I can be ready in the morning'. Now she is up before me to make her own sandwiches! She is in control: the course seems to have freed her from that feeling of internal persecution. When I read the Davis book **The Gift of Dyslexia** I burst into tears: I thought, this is my child, this is what it really is!



Davis Dyslexia Association International

Books & Materials: 1-888-999-3324 [1-888-999-DDAI]

Workshops & Licensing: 1-888-805-7216

Fax: 1-650-692-7075 • Local Phone: 1-650-692-7141

URL: <http://www.dyslexia.com>

E-mail: ddai@dyslexia.com

Orders: orders@dyslexia.com

Training: training@dyslexia.com

Webmaster: webmaster@dyslexia.com

All materials on this site © 1995-2007 DDAI unless otherwise noted.