

How many children in your class struggle to read?

Robyn Pearce

Every now and then we hear comments about the high proportion of adult non-readers. It's not hard to draw a very short bow between academic struggles and diminished productivity, frustration, under-achievement and often poor self-esteem on an individual level. Then add the corresponding social cost and lost national productivity due to underperforming citizens (through no fault of their own) and we end up with a huge but silent productivity drain. This of course leads us directly to the topic I usually write about in this column – time management.

For this issue I'm sharing a personal story in the hope that it might help others.

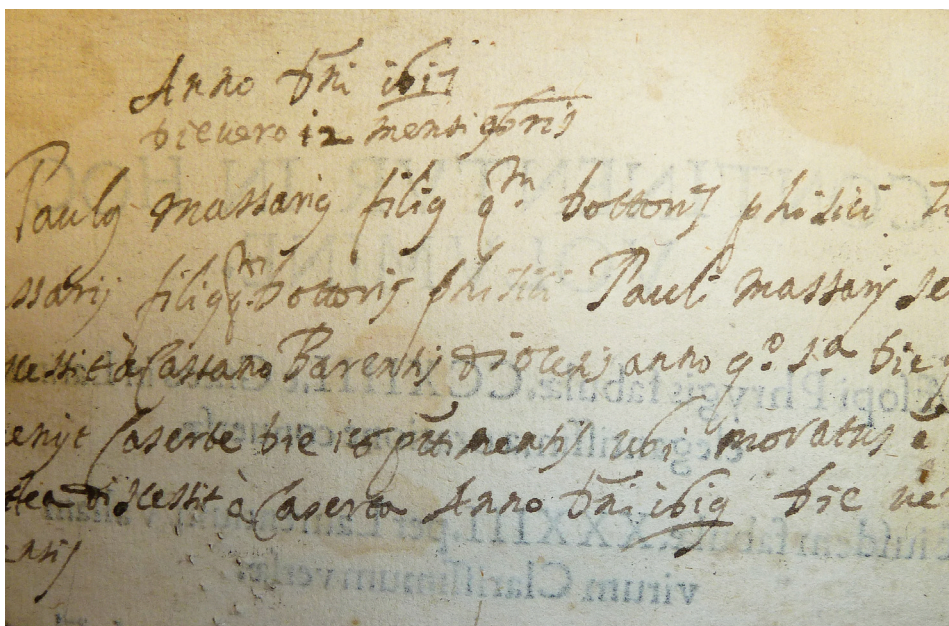
There are many reasons for poor literacy and numeracy skills, but a family experience recently has caused me to wonder how many kids (and adults) with visual processing difficulties are never correctly diagnosed.

My oldest grandson of 18 has always struggled with reading. He's a bright boy but school and he have never really jelled, despite a lot of effort on many fronts and by many dedicated teachers over the years. He's never been a naughty boy. Instead, he has become very skilful at disappearing into the mass, not lifting his head above the radar, and being masterful at not drawing attention to his challenges with reading and study. Even in his home life, the quiet one in a family of four children all close in age, he became very adept at keeping a low profile.

Sam has been living with me for the last six months while his parents have been overseas so I've been in a position to observe things more closely. One night I noticed that he was really struggling to read complex and dense writing that a senior student would be expected to read. Glasses was the first thought – and sure enough, he did need glasses for close-up work. They have definitely helped but I felt intuitively that there was also something else.

Fortunately I'd heard of Irlens Syndrome and the Cellfield Therapy program so instead of going to the budget optometrist chain (I'll spare their name but they're big advertisers with a green logo) I took him, on recommendation, to an optometrist with knowledge of Irlens and Cellfield and the equipment to diagnose correctly. Yes – the biomechanics of his eyes weren't right.

The more I hear about Irlens Syndrome,



the more I realise how common and yet how poorly understood it is. It is not an optical problem, which is why it won't show up in a standard eye test, nor with most other regular educational or medical tests. It's a perceptual processing disorder. The brain can't process visual information properly. My layman's understanding is that there is too much light coming into the eye and the owner of said eyes can't see the words properly. (I'm sure there are many other nuances). The standard treatment is to tint the glasses, thereby cutting down the amount of light coming on to the retina of the eyes. It often runs in families – my daughter also has two sons with Irlens.

Cellfield is, or can be, a separate issue. It's a treatment created to help people with forms of dyslexia, problems in focus and concentration and poor comprehension, to list some of the indicators. Look it up and you'll find more details, but basically the treatment is to retrain the eye to see correctly. If someone struggles with Cellfield issues, the words will be shimmering or jumping around on the page. None of us can read if the words won't sit down!

So, Sam completed the two weeks of Cellfield Therapy and his reading has *dramatically* improved. The reading skills are tested on three levels. Here are his pre- and post-test results.

Word Identification Pre-treatment test: 13.1 years. About four weeks later: 16.7 years

Word Attack Pre-treatment test: 15.10 years. About four weeks later: 18.6 years
Passage Comprehension Pre-treatment test: 13.10 years. About four weeks later: >19 years

Not only has his reading improved but so has his self-confidence. In the last couple of months, since he began the treatment, he has made massive strides in every area of his life.

Each person's results will vary and of course these treatments are not the panacea for every learning difficulty, but as I've talked about our experience I've been surprised to find that very few people have heard of Irlens, let alone Cellfield. Yes there is a reasonable cost, but what is it worth to fix such a profound and life-defining issue?

ET



Robyn Pearce is known around the world as the Time Queen, helping people discover new angles on time. Check the resources on her website <http://www.gettingagrip.com>

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