



This is My Story

Garry Purchase

Garry is forty and married with two children, aged 12 and 13. He left school at 16, with no qualifications. He worked as a manual labourer for 22 years, until 2 years ago, when he suffered a back injury. A year ago he became a student at the City of Wolverhampton College.

Introduction

I am a dyslexic student at the City of Wolverhampton College, where I have been learning much more than I have ever known. It takes time, however. I did not know what being dyslexic was about until now. Each person is different, and the way one person learns is not the same as another person. I have learned about the importance for me of using coloured sheets like blue, yellow, pink and red, to help me to keep the words from moving up and down, and keep in a straight line, instead of one big block of black words. My colour is blue, what a life saver it is, the change it has made is like; wow I can read! With this reading ability, I went out and bought a pair of sunglasses with a tint of blue to help me with my reading of black and white.

Spelling is a whole new ball game. The teachers give me words to spell, but they put them in colours for me, like red and blue. For instance the word: weather! They break it down for me like (we is in red) (at is in blue) and (her is in red). So I can see the word better that way.

The course is good. I would recommend it to all people who cannot read or spell too well.

Reading and Spelling at Home and at Work

Before I started college, at home was a nightmare! I would never read the newspaper or a letter which came through the door. If my wife would ask me what was on the T.V I would give her the paper so she could see what was on, so that I did not have to read it to her. I would look as if I was reading the paper; but all the time I was reading the headlines which were in big black letters, the rest of it I would not bother with! Because it would be moving

up and down and I would lose my place. I would get every one else to read things for me, and tell me all about it. I would bluff my way through it, as if I had read it. I got very good at this.

At home with the computer I played games on it. That was all I did, because of the reading that went with it. I tried to use the spell check, but to me all the words would look the same...and with the flat packs, my wife would buy out of Argos, she would read the instructions to see if all the pieces were there. However I would look at the picture and put it together without the instructions.

At work if I got a memo, I would try to read it but not understand it! I would say to my work friends "Have you seen what they are doing now, here you read it for yourself." Any thing to do with reading or spelling, I would get out of it by passing the book to someone else...

The Road to College

One day I was watching the television, when 'Get Rid of Your Gremlins' came on. So I got the number and gave it a call, well at least five or six times. Each time it would ring and I would hang up. This went on for three or four months!

Then one day a woman answered the phone before I could hang up. I was shocked and did not know what to say...Before I knew it she had made me an appointment to see a maths teacher at the City of Wolverhampton College... When the day came around I was in two minds to go or not! I was so nervous. I was sitting outside of the college thinking do I really need to do this? I had got by for the last twenty four years, so why now? I got out of the car and walked in, sweating and shaking. When I got inside there was no turning back! However the teacher was

really nice. Christine was her name; she made me feel at ease. So I sat down and went through some things.

(On the basis of the initial interview, Christine arranged for Garry to have a dyslexia assessment)

I got there...and sat in the café, thinking what was it all about...I was so nervous my hands were sweating and my heart was pounding; however when we was finished I was ok. I was glad I had done it. I had to wait a week to get the results back. Yes I was dyslexic! For the first time in my life I felt that I was not thick. There was something I could do about it! What a relief to know I was dyslexic; daft I know but there you go!

'Dyslexia-friendly' Ways of Working

Catherine got me into one of the classes. The teachers were Val and Deb who made me feel good about the class, but the first time I walked into the classroom it was like starting school for the first time! I did not want to go in; but a little voice said, "Go on, it cannot be that bad." As my hand reached for the door it was like I had got tunnel vision, I could see no one or hear no one. Thank God for two happy smiling faces, it took the first day for my nerves to go.

The next time I sat by Val, she gave me a lot of work to do which I did not like. So the next time I sat by Deb who gave me ten words to learn to spell. Each word was in two colours red and blue, which made it a lot easier for me because I am very visual.

After about one or two months went by, I was ready for Val! I was ready for more work; so I sat by Val. Someone like me can work people out, to see what kind of person they are. Like Val is a good teacher! By making you do a lot, whereas Deb is a good teacher as well but does not push you as hard at first.

Achieving...

I like to read the newspaper now because I can enjoy it. It is nice to be able to join in with conversations and not have to make it

up as I go along. It is nice to read it and see what else is going on in the world. I cannot make out all the words but I can make out what it means with a little effort, which to me is a great improvement.

As you can see my spelling and writing has got better not 100 per cent yet, however with time I know I can get better. Like my writing, when I started at college I could write no more than two or three lines, without capitals and full stops. Now I can write up to two thousand words with capitals, full stops, semi colons, colons and with a lot more as well.

I can now use a computer for writing my homework on, and can use the grammar and spell check to do my work. I have to look at the dictionary for some of the words, which are on the spell check to find out which word I need, but I am getting there with it.

Before I went to college I would not write a Christmas card or read a letter. I would always get someone else to do it for me! However now I will write my own cards and letters and read them as well. It is so nice to be able to read and write and not feel embarrassed. Although I cannot make out all the words yet.

I was asked by Val to write an end of a story for the BBC3 competition. The piece had to be one thousand, two hundred words long which some months ago, I would have not given a second look. Maybe fifty words and that would have been pushing it for me. I had to use the computer to read it three or four times, to get to understand it. However once I had got into it, it was very good to be able to do something like that. It is a great achievement for me.

Where do I see myself in one or two year's time? Well, maybe to be a teacher's helper. Teaching other people who are dyslexic. And giving some of what has been given to me back to the great teachers that have taught me for them to be able to see that their efforts have not gone to waste.

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Kate Tomlinson from Stroud College comments in response...

I was particularly interested, as a tutor, in the idea of a student choosing the kind of teaching approach (and people) that he feels suit him at a particular stage of confidence and learning. It's not so much about one tutor being 'better', but about how the pace and methods need to be adapted for each individual at different times in their learning 'journey'.

Garry writes, "I did not know what being dyslexic was about until now." He and his tutors have been learning from each other. Being dyslexic is different for each individual and, as tutors, we need to be continually reassessing our approaches to be sure we have got it right for that person at that stage in their learning. It's too easy to make assumptions based on what we have gleaned from previous learners or what we have read.

There are two dyslexic students, Jo and Ada (pseudonyms) in one of my groups. Jo is very forceful and has definite opinions based on her own experience on "what being dyslexic is about". She often appeals to Ada for confirmation of what she says. I get the impression that Ada's experience, and certainly the way her specific learning difficulty manifests itself in reading and writing, is very different from Jo's, despite assessments that suggest they share certain dyslexic tendencies.

At a time when progression routes are often mapped out in terms of levels and tests, Garry's idea of a student marking out his progress by moving from one tutor to another because of what he is ready to be offered, is a useful idea which puts the learner in charge.

He sees for himself the progress he is making in terms of his spelling and writing, which is "not 100 per cent yet;" his reading, where understanding has improved despite not being able to 'make out all the words'; and the fact that he can now write over a thousand words, whereas in the past fifty was his limit.

It would be interesting to collect together more versions by students and tutors of "what being dyslexic is all about", what helps and hinders their progress and what for them constitutes real progress.

Ed. note:

We would welcome responses from students and tutors on the issues raised by Garry and Kate