FIFTY YEARS IN
Dyslexia Research

by
T.R. MILES

John Wiley & Sons, Ltd
Chichester · New York · Weinheim · Brisbane · Toronto · Singapore
## Contents

Foreword vii  
Preface ix  
Acknowledgements xi  
Conventions xiii

### PART I: BEGINNINGS  1

1 Brenda 3  
2 Michael 12  
3 Thoughts on Brenda and Michael 17  
4 The Word-Blind Centre 28  
5 A Service for the County of Gwynedd 32  
6 First Steps Towards Quantification 37  
7 The Bangor Dyslexia Test I 41  
8 The Bangor Dyslexia Test II 47  
9 Assessing Intelligence 52

### PART II: THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION  57

10 PRO and ANTI the Dyslexia Concept: A Dialogue 59  
11 Concerns and Disputes I 63  
12 Concerns and Disputes II 68  
13 Legislation and Governmental Recognition 73

### PART III: RESEARCH AND THEORY  75

14 Further Quantification I 77  
15 Further Quantification II 81  
16 The Dyslexic Adult 92  
17 Talking Things Over 100  
18 Proposal for a Taxonomy of Dyslexia 106  
19 The British Births Cohort Study I 110  
20 The British Births Cohort Study II 116  
21 Dyslexia Variants 126  
22 Dyslexia and Dyscalculia: Are They Two Separate Syndromes? 138  
23 Dyslexia as a Disjunctive Concept 141

References 143  
Index 149
In this fascinating autobiographical account, Tim Miles leads us through the history of his involvement in the field of dyslexia and in so doing completes an important part of the jigsaw of the history of dyslexia in Britain. Tim Miles is well known as a pioneer of dyslexia, and most would characterise his scholarship as straddling psychological and philosophical inquiry. Here we learn that Tim’s inspiration came from the careful study of individual cases; what unfolds is the development of an insightful theory of dyslexia that explains both empirical findings and clinical observations.

The thesis expounded in this book is that dyslexia is a syndrome – it is not the same as poor reading but a disorder that encompasses a range of symptoms that include problems of verbal labelling, arithmetic difficulties, verbal short-term-memory problems and subtle speech-production difficulties. Miles is not reductionist; he has long believed that all of these signs provide clues as to the nature of dyslexia and he has been at pains to operationalise the definition of dyslexia through his widely known ‘Bangor Dyslexia Test’. Not satisfied with quantifying the syndrome in this way, he has tested his theory with reference to epidemiological data in the British Births Cohort Study, and it has stood up well. With his wife Elaine and colleagues in Bangor he has closed a virtuous circle, wherein theory has motivated teaching and diagnostic assessments of children and adults, and practical work has guided theory.

In parallel with theoretical developments in the field of dyslexia, Miles also witnessed changes in the views of the educational establishment with respect to children with specific reading difficulties. His initial cases were patients referred to Child Guidance clinics, and the predominant view was that these children had emotional problems. But Miles was perplexed that psychodynamic theories could not account for the consistent patterns of ‘reversals’, subtle language difficulties, problems of musical notation and extraordinary spelling problems that these children experienced. Rather, he thought that the problem was constitutional in origin, likely to be some form of developmental aphasia. But the world of education was not ready to accept this view and battles raged as to whether ‘dyslexia’ should be considered a medical or an educational issue. Key landmarks in the struggle for recognition included Miles’ involvement in the establishment of the Word-Blind Centre in London in the 1960s, the inauguration of the British Dyslexia Association in 1972 and the establishment of the Dyslexia Unit in Bangor, which was to offer teaching to children in schools in north Wales in an important early partnership with the local education authority long before such alliances were the norm. There was also much going on behind the scenes; the establishment of the first Master’s degree in dyslexia at Bangor, to elevate the skills of practitioners of dyslexia, and meetings of proponents of
the different teaching methods used in the UK which confirmed that, for teaching people with dyslexia, the preferred teaching strategy was structured, cumulative, multisensory teaching.

This compelling and accessible account takes us on an intriguing journey that follows the curiosity of one of the pioneers of dyslexia through fifty years of scholarship. It does not shy away from difficult issues such as the role of IQ in the assessment of dyslexia, whether or not there are subtypes and whether dyscalculia should be considered a separate syndrome from dyslexia. Miles’ work presages much contemporary neuroscientific research on dyslexia. Importantly, current knowledge confirms that his clinical intuitions were right: dyslexia does have a genetic basis and is characterised by atypical brain function. It can be characterised as a syndrome in that a core phonological deficit can explain a wide range of the signs and symptoms that are experienced by people with dyslexia, beyond reading and spelling. Moreover, there are also what Miles calls ‘dyslexia variants’ – people who show some but not all of the signs and whose difficulties may not be sufficient to fully qualify for the label. Thus, in families of parents with dyslexia, offspring may share dyslexic characteristics but not all succumb to reading problems (referred to as the broader phenotype of dyslexia). Finally, and most importantly, inheriting the risk of dyslexia need not be a cause for despair; early identification and appropriate teaching can do a great deal to ameliorate dyslexia and give those who are dyslexic the opportunity to use their talents to the full.

Margaret J. Snowling
York
September 2005
Preface

In the present book, as in its predecessor (Miles, 1993a), I have tried to maintain scientific rigour without over-burdening the main text with statistical technicalities. These are available for anyone who wishes to consult them, in the form of end-of-chapter notes.

Since my intention was to describe my own involvement with dyslexia research, I have added at the end of some of the chapters some personal recollections. These mostly relate to my encounters with the many interesting individuals whom I met over the years, and my hope is that they will add to the book’s interest.

I should like to thank Dr E. Simmons for providing me with the opportunity to teach Brenda and Michael and for giving me the crucial cue – ‘a form of aphasia’ – which started me off on my dyslexia research.

Detailed acknowledgements to individuals will be found in the main body of the book. I would like, however, in this preface to pay tribute to those friends and colleagues whose ideas on dyslexia played a major part in influencing my own thinking. In particular I would like to thank my former tutor and mentor, Professor Oliver Zangwill, with whom I discussed the cases of Brenda and Michael in some detail. He initially reassured me by saying that he considered the findings on these two cases to be ‘genuine and important’. Oliver Zangwill supported me in my dyslexia research up to the time of his death in 1987.

My thanks are also due to Professor Nick Ellis, Professor Rod Nicolson, Dr Angela Fawcett, Dr Mary Haslum, Professor Uta Frith and Professor John Stein and Professor Margaret Hubicki. I have learned much from all of them and enjoyed many stimulating discussions with them. I am also grateful for the encouragement which I have recently received from my colleagues in the School of Psychology at Bangor, Professor Virginia Muller Gathercole and Dr Guillaume Thierry. I should also like to acknowledge my debt to my colleagues at the Dyslexia Unit (attached to the School of Psychology), and in particular to Ann Cooke, Marie Jones, Dorothy Gilroy and Elizabeth du Pre.

Not least, I should like to pay tribute to those many dyslexic individuals of all ages who have been willing to talk to me about their hopes, fears and aspirations.

I should like to thank Professor Margaret Snowling both for writing the foreword to this book and for her advice and help over the presentation of its contents.

Finally, I wish to convey a special thank-you to Elaine, my wife. No words can adequately do justice to my debt to her. Quite apart from the encouragement and support which she has given to me for over fifty years, she is co-author with me of several books and book chapters, including Miles and Miles (1983a) and Miles and
Miles (1999a); she is also co-editor of Miles and Miles (2004). It is a real bonus to be a member of a husband-and-wife team each having a different contribution to make to the study of dyslexia.

_T.R.M._

_Bangor_

2006
I am grateful to the editors and publishers of the following books and journals for giving me permission to reproduce parts of the following previously published material:

*Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry,* ‘Two cases of developmental aphasia’ (Miles, 1961).

*The British Journal of Educational Psychology,* ‘More on dyslexia’ (Miles, 1971).
Conventions

Throughout this book there are many examples of dyslexics’ writings. These have been reproduced in roman type (‘dsgib’), while correct spellings for words have been reproduced in italic type (described). When reproducing dyslexics’ writings, I have striven to be as faithful to the original work as possible. Therefore, there are a few instances when a word had been crossed out by its writer; this crossing-out has been reproduced.

Lastly, since there are both male and female dyslexics, I have used the expression ‘he or she’ except when this would have been inelegant and clumsy. When I have quoted from my earlier publications, for instance Miles (1961), I have left ‘he’ and ‘his’ in place since at the time the matter was considered less important than it is now.
Part I Beginnings