

Help for a dyslexic learner from an unlikely source: the study of Ancient Greek

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This paper recounts the process by which a severely reading-disabled adult student taught himself to read and write Ancient Greek, and in so doing, improved his ability to read and write in English. Initially, Keith's reading and writing were slow, difficult, and inaccurate, accompanied by visual disturbance. However, motivated by a strong interest in Ancient Greek literature and philosophical ideas, Keith enlisted me (his Faculty's academic skills adviser) to help him learn the language. Working on transliteration focused Keith's attention on the alphabetic principle separately from meaning, while practising translation focused on the formal markers of meaning. Relieved of the stress of performing under pressures of time and others' expectations, Keith made good progress with Greek and, after six months, found himself reading more fluently in English, without visual disturbance. This paper seeks to contribute to our knowledge of how adults learn to read, looking at the interplay of motivation, phonological awareness, knowledge of how form conveys meaning, and the learning environment. It both draws upon, and raises questions for, the neuroscientific study of dyslexia.

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