

Book Reviews

Rose Blue.

ME AND EINSTEIN: BREAKING THROUGH THE READING

BARRIER: New York, N.Y.:

Human Sciences Press, 1979

\$6.95.

There are many conceptualizations of dyslexia in the literature on the study of reading disability. Among them is the widely-held belief of the perceptual-deficit theorists that severely impaired readers suffer from visual anomalies. Rose Blue, who apparently subscribes to this theory, affords the uninitiated an insight into dyslexia through a dramatic account of a nine-year-old's frustrations in his efforts to cope with a reading disability. The youngster's peer and adult relationships gradually deteriorate, in spite of his accomplishments in physical activities, drawing, and mathematics. Disillusionment results. This unfolding story of confused emotions and of a search for both self-worth and compassionate understanding seems intended to sensitize both children and adults to the world of the dyslexic.

The plot is simple. After an active summer free from books, Bobby is plunged into fourth-grade studies. He soon discovers he cannot bluff his way through reading sessions, and his fear of disclosure causes him to react emotionally to what would otherwise be normal reading assignments. Following unsuccessful class placements, Bobby is withdrawn from the school. Subsequent testing proves him to be intellectually bright and he is enrolled in a private school dedicated to teaching children with dyslexia. Here he finds he no longer has to hide his problem and, with the pressure released, he is able to concentrate on his lessons. Success is his.

Blue has produced a readable text told from a child's point of view. This technique allows the reader to empathize with Bobby, the nine-year-old, to experience his feeling of well-being with those who do not make reading demands of him, and to understand the humiliation he suffers when he cannot respond in class and must endure the taunts of his peers, particularly when he is placed in a special education class where he is even more frustrated. This is reality on the doorstep.

The force of this story rests in the reader's recognition that Bobby's disability, left untreated due to lack of identification, not only created problems with assigned work but also caused deep emotional reactions.

"In a way he felt put down . . . If he was a problem it would be because he gave them a hard time. Not because he was stupid."

While the story, as told, is supportive to parents whose children are experiencing similar difficulties in reading, its neatly resolved ending may give false hope to both child and adult. The story concludes with Bobby's suddenly being able to read.

"Then suddenly, all at once, as Bobby stared at the page, the funny squiggles he had seen all his life turned into letters, real letters, and the letters came together and made words."

The time span for the special instruction appears incredibly short. It is implied that a "cure" for dyslexia is a real possibility in a special school setting. This conclusion is hard to accept, given all the evidence in this area to date.

In general, the story line fosters the plausibility of the situation. The approach to one aspect of dyslexia is direct: Blue's book makes crystal clear some of the problems encountered by a learning-disabled child. Both teachers and pupils could gain valuable insights, in spite of the questionable conclusion, through the reading of *Me and Einstein*.

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