

Edinburgh International Book Festival – The Write to Read: Discussing Dyslexia****

What could be more wonderful than an event at the book festival discussing opening up the beauty of storytelling?! Well that's precisely what children's author Vivian French, Barrington Stoke MD, Mairi Kidd and Pete White, the founder of Positive Prisons, did.

Vivian French, who suffered as a child from reading difficulties, writes not only for Barrington Stoke, a publisher who dedicates their time to printing dyslexia-friendly books, but also promotes the idea of reading through pictures and illustration.

Pete White who originated an organisation that encourages storytelling in prisons, where reading levels are often very poor, quickly replaced author Cornelia Funke, who was sadly too ill to attend. The last on the panel, Mairi Kidd, is the MD of a publisher that focuses their efforts entirely on providing dyslexic children with more improved and easier formats for reading, making it a less frustrating and overwhelming task, thus making it enjoyable.

It was actually rather insightful having the experience that Pete White has in the room – he reinforced the fact that the reading statistics within prisons are poor – even letters sent to them by lawyers and lovers were things that they were often not able to read, never mind reply. “We are no idea how lucky we are that we can read and write,” White reminded us.

Vivian French, who spent a time in her life acting, orally telling stories, stressed throughout the discussion that illustration and reading aloud are fantastic ways in for children to get enthused by storytelling. “I've always felt

that if the door is shut, let's go through the window," she exclaimed, showing that there are alternatives to the written word. She highlighted an example of taking ten illustrators to an area where reading levels were poor (as opposed to ten authors) and how this had enthused and excited the children, as they understand drawing, and it really captured their interest, opening up the possibilities for them to love stories.

Mairi Kidd highlighted how printing on heavier paper, which is not white can have the desired effect with children that have dyslexia. Focusing their efforts on opening up the possibilities for children that do suffer from reading difficulties, Barrington Stoke are a small commercial publisher that have recently been publishing classics such as *Of Mice and Men* in their dyslexia friendly format.

Her focus is not on the learning, it's on the enjoyment, as she reminded us that she wants to "open the doors for children to love reading." And if her sales pitch was not enough to convince us that Barrington Stoke (and their lovely team) are making the right moves Vivian French pipes up, "one of the things of which I am most proud is that I wrote one of the first books for Barrington Stoke."

What an absolute joy to spend a Friday night listening in on how storytelling and reading can be accessible things. More of this type of thing please Edinburgh International Book Festival.