

“Librarian’s Shelf” by Theresa Wachal, PVLA Staff

A Visagraph for PVLA

Platte Valley Literacy Association is a United Way agency located in the Columbus Public Library. It provides free classes for adults who want to get a GED, learn English, earn citizenship, or improve basic literacy skills. In our Family School, our adult students can bring their children to evening classes. While the parents are in class, their children obtain help with their homework, improve their reading, and learn computer skills. When I taught public school, I was often amused when people would comment about how lucky I was to have my summers “off.” They were surprised to hear that my summers were when I took classes so that I could be a better teacher. One summer I took classes that not only helped me professionally, but also personally.

About twenty years ago, I learned that both my daughter and I were living with a vision disability. Both of us had annual vision examinations, but no one ever explained that our vision was not efficient. I learned that one can pass a vision examination with 20/20 vision even without binocular coordination. That means the eyes don’t work together. I grew up thinking that reading resulted in headaches. During my college career I earned both a B.S. and M.S. in education, but didn’t discover my problem until I was in my 40’s. I thought it was too late for me to improve. Yet, with special glasses that included a prism, I was delighted to be able to read without headaches. However, it was even more thrilling to be able to provide my daughter with a remedy that would improve her vision so that she could grow up to enjoy a career in architectural design.

The large, machine that identified my problem is now available in a small box and goggles which plug into a computer! The Visagraph is an eye-movement recording system that generates a printout showing how the eyes move during the reading process. This enables me to show my students why they need a Developmental Examination by an optometrist who has been trained to evaluate whether the eyes are tracking together during the reading process. This determines the ability to benefit from remedial reading strategies.

For more information about binocular coordination, you should read two tremendously important books in the Columbus Public Library. “20/20 is Not Enough” (617.7 SEA2T) explains many ways in which eye behaviors can interfere with learning. A brand new book called “Fixing My Gaze” (617.7 B279F) tells a story very similar to mine. Although the author, Susan Barry, is a neurobiologist, she didn’t realize that her eyes lacked coordination. After eye surgery to correct her eyes’ appearance, they still sent conflicting messages to her brain. As a professor, she tells a fascinating story enriched with scientific facts that she explains very clearly. If you are a parent, teacher, or a curious person, you will gain remarkable insight about your eyes and your brain.

A United Way Impact grant this year enabled Platte Valley Literacy Association to obtain a Visagraph III. In appreciation our agency will provide screening for school children in the community as our schedule allows. Our staff is part-time, so there is a limit to our hours. If you would like a screening, call 564-5196 on Mondays or Wednesdays, between 5 and 8 p.m.

Theresa Wachal has been an Educator with Platte Valley Literacy Association for 18 years.