

EMPOWERING THE DYSPLEXIC STUDENT

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Introduction

When the majority of parents hear their child diagnosed as “dyslexic,” they react as if the child is suffering from a deadly illness that will keep him confined in a bubble for the rest of his life. Instead nothing could be further from the truth. They possess an exciting child who possesses incredible talents. He is very curious, highly intuitive and insightful, thinks and perceives in a multidimensional way (using all of his senses), has a high degree of imagination, and can use the brain’s ability to alter and create perceptions. Consider these famous dyslexics who used their dyslexia to the best of their ability – Albert Einstein, Winston Churchill, Thomas Edison, Cher, Jay Leno, Henry Winkler, and Whoopi Goldberg. This is just a short list of the outstanding dyslexics that have contributed tremendously to our world.

Why do dyslexic children experience such difficulties in learning if they possess such amazing traits? The answer is simple: The educational system is not prepared for them as they consist of a small group of the total student population – about one in every five students, or 1520% of the student population. Very few public schools have qualified teachers for the dyslexic child. This child becomes the “out” child.

“I was, on the whole, considerably discouraged by my school days. It was not pleasant to feel oneself so completely outclassed and left behind at the beginning of the race.” Winston Churchill

Healthy self-esteem is a child’s shield against the challenges of the world. The dyslexic child rarely experiences feelings of good self-esteem and self-respect. He does not understand why he is different

from other children and therefore, feels defected and angry.

Definition of Dyslexia

Today’s educational outlook toward the dyslexic child is changing. Your child is on the cusp of a new time and new developments in the world of dyslexia.

The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) and the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) define dyslexia as a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.¹

These difficulties manifest themselves in the child by certain groups of characteristics. Be aware that these characteristics will vary from child to child.

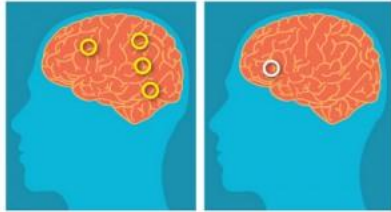
- Difficulty in remembering and following instructions or directions
- Random or nonexistent punctuation
- Misinterpretation of questions
- Use of UPPERCASE exclusively or at random
- Missing letters or words
- Letters back to front
- Same word spelled different ways
- Letters in wrong order

¹ retrieved 15 November 2011 from <http://www.region10.org/dyslexia/Dyslexia-Definition.html>

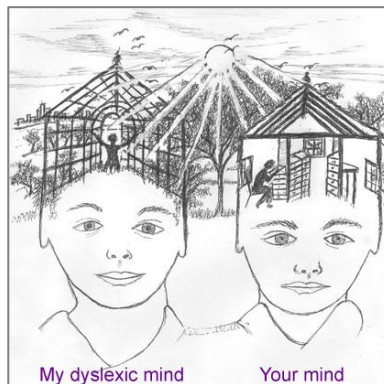
- Use of similar but wrong words (malapropisms)
- Problems with organizing materials
- Nonstandard sentence structure
- Trouble sequencing
- Short term memory
- Irregular writing
- Phonic approximations
- Errors in suffixes
- Omission of syllables
- Poor sense of timing and management

Dyslexia and the Brain

By studying the drawing of two brains; the difference in the dyslexic child and the normal child are riveting.²



At left, brain areas active in typically developing readers engaged in a rhyming task. Shown at right is the brain area activated in poor readers involved in the same task. Comparison of brain structures show that regardless of high or low overall scores on an IQ test show a difference in brain activity between the normally functioning brain and the dyslexia brain. The brain structures of the dyslexia children show similar patterns of brain activity. Thus, the child with dyslexia will need special help from individuals who have been trained to view the different types of learning.



With the correct teachers in the best setting, this image can best equate the difference in the two brains shown above.

Solving the Problem is a Group Effort

Teaching the dyslexic child is a group effort. The parents, the school, and the child must work together for the best possible results; a good, sound education for the child.

The Parents

“My problem was reading very slowly. My parents said ‘Take as long as you need. As long as you’re going to read, just keep at it.’ We didn’t know about learning disabilities back then.” Roger Wilkins (head of the Pulitzer Prize Board?)³

The parents, usually the mother, are the first to recognize a problem with the child’s learning capabilities. Many parents feel responsible for their child’s dyslexia so the first thing that needs to be said is that dyslexia is not brought about by poor parenting. Indeed, it is the parent who is most concerned about their child that brings the condition to the forefront. Yes, modern thought believes that dyslexia is caused by inherited factors, and/or by hearing problems at an early age. This does not mean that a dyslexic parent will automatically have a dyslexic child but that the probability is there. This is not the problem. The problem is how to educate the dyslexic child to the best of his ability. The first responsibility of the parent in education and socialization of the dyslexic child is to provide the right support.

² retrieved 15 November 2011 from <http://www.sharpbrains.com/blog/2011/11/06/studydyslexia>

³ retrieved 15 November 2011 from <http://www.google.com/imgres?q=dyslexia+brain>

The parents should:

Be positive. They must evaluate the child's strengths and weaknesses. Discuss problems with the school system and with the teachers involved in their education. They must be straightforward and determined that their child gets the best possible education. Always put his best interest first.

Be patient and consistent. It is up to you to make yourself known to the teachers. You, the parent, must set up the lines of communication and keep them open. Never assume that information is passed from one individual to another. You are the carrier of the information. In your best interest strive to be diplomatic which at times can be very difficult. If you become angry, walk away. Keep your anger to yourself. At all times parents should keep cool, calm, and dignified. In the same manner, be patient with your child. Patiently teach him to do things for himself, and be patient with his progress. Teach him independence and how to depend upon himself.

Be aware. Notice their problems, symptoms and signs of stress. There are going to be a lot of problems in school. Your student is apt to be called names by his peers and some adults. They will have a very hard time with schedules and finishing his work on time. They will be embarrassed and frustrated by not knowing multiplication tables and alphabet and how to spell. Their worst frustration will be caused by the teacher who insists that they read in front of the class. Remember, if you tell him it's Thursday, they probably think that it's Monday, and they may never be sure of what month it is. Do be aware that school failure is often more obvious at home than it is at school. Be aware that your child will have to study longer than the usual child. They will become tired, even exhausted so give them time to rest whether for a few minutes or a few days. Avoid causing pressure at home. This means never comparing your children! Your home must be your child's safe place, but don't become the 'neurotic mom'. Men do tend to be much more

objective. Keep emotional situations at home to a minimum. It is perfectly normal if mother and father don't see eye to eye on every situation involving their child. Work problem out together.

Be practical. Many parents find it difficult to teach their own child. At times your child may ask for help. Reading is especially difficult. That is a good point for a parent to help. Read to your child, not for hours but for short periods of time which gives them time to understand what you have read to them. Read their history, literature or whatever subject needs to be read. Watch their level of concentration and stop for a while when you see it failing. Or, you may type his notes. Books are available on type. The internet is a good place for you to find them. You can always read them to your student if time is available. Watch for educational shows on television and watch them together. Discuss what you watch. And play games – games that must follow directions, require spelling, high interest. Involve the whole family. Limit the number of times that you can help them with the game or allow another family member to take those honors. Keep your student motivated. If they appear self-assured, you must remember that deep down they are still very anxious. Boost self-esteem.

*"A teacher sent the following note home with a six year old boy: 'He is too stupid to learn.' That boy was Thomas A. Edison."
Thomas Edison*

The School

The school that a dyslexic child attends must be a school that is, most of all, willing to help them and, secondly, have the facilities needed to enrich the student's education. The dyslexic child must be seen as a whole person with individual strengths and weaknesses. The school and the student's teachers must understand specific difficulties and understand how these difficulties may affect their classroom performance. The teacher must be able to

adopt teaching methods and strategies to help the dyslexic student to be successfully integrated into the classroom environment.

The school must replace its outmoded aspect that a dyslexic child must first fail in order to be identified as dyslexic. Early recognition of dyslexia leads to a greater success in teaching and learning. Early recognition allows the strengths of the dyslexic student to become a talented and gifted member of our schools. Since these children are the children of our future, they have the right to help and support before they reach the point of failure. Therefore, these teachers need to be flexible in their teaching approach in order to find the correct method to teaching the child instead of the child attempting to assimilate the material in the same way as all the other pupils.

A teacher has an enormous impact on the lives of every student in her room. That impact is doubled for the dyslexia teacher. A teacher who understands how to support the dyslexic student is the key to making a successful dyslexic student. This teacher knows that the dyslexic student can be a positive, contributing and valued class member. They understand that the student is an intelligent person but that they do not learn the same way other students do. The student learns best by doing. The teacher is also aware that this student will often have trouble remembering.

The effective teacher of dyslexic student will:

Adapt strategies and adaptations that will help dyslexic students be more successful by helping them build the skills they need to overcome the disability. The teacher will reduce the overall reading, writing, and spelling expectations but will increase the self-confidence of the student. This will be accomplished by:

- Providing a daily outline of schedules, goals, and lecture notes
- Using a sans serif font

- Printing on colored paper
- Boldface key words
- Showing the whole picture first
- Breaking information into small, sequential steps

Constructing the classroom environment for success includes:

- Welcome and encourage
- Provide a seat near front
- Provide interactions with a peer helper
- Nurture student's growth and learning.
- Utilize technology for support
 - Record lectures
 - Video demonstrations
 - Audio textbooks
 - Use interactive, multimedia opportunities when possible
- Employ multisensory lessons
 - Consistently review previous lesson
 - Use observations, demonstrations, experiments
 - Provide kinetic or sensory learning when possible
 - Use hands-on learning activities
- Shorten homework assignments
 - Limit homework to what is absolutely necessary
 - Give credit for achievement and effort
 - Write the assignment for the student
- Testing
 - Offer alternate evaluation and testing procedures to lower stress level
 - Read directions orally
 - Give extra time
 - Test verbally when appropriate
- Recognition
 - Praise and commend often
 - Assist student in recognizing strengths

- Create opportunities to build confidence
- Never tell student that he is not trying

The Law and the Dyslexic Student

Texas Education Code §38.003 Screening and Treatment for Dyslexia and Related Disorders

Students enrolling in public schools in this state shall be tested for dyslexia and related disorders at appropriate times in accordance with a program approved by the State Board of Education.

In accordance with the program approved by the State Board of Education, the board of trustees of each school district shall provide for the treatment of any student determined to have dyslexia or a related disorder.

“The looks, the stares, the giggles.... I wanted to show everybody that I could do better and also that I could read.” Magic Johnson

The State Board of Education shall adopt any rules and standards necessary to administer this section.

In this section:

“Dyslexia” means a disorder of constitutional origin manifested by a difficulty in learning to read, write, or spell, despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence, and sociocultural opportunity.

“Related disorders” includes disorders similar to or related to dyslexia, such as developmental auditory imperceptions, dysphasia, specific developmental dyslexia, developmental dysgraphia, and developmental spelling disability.⁴

Texas Administrative Code §74.28 Students with Dyslexia and Related Disorders

The board of trustees of a school district must ensure that procedures for identifying a student with dyslexia or a related disorder and for providing appropriate instructional services to the student are implemented in the district. These procedures will be monitored by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) with onsite visits conducted as appropriate.

A school district’s procedures must be implemented according to the State Board of Education (SBOE) approved strategies for screening, and techniques for treating, dyslexia and related disorders. The strategies and techniques are described in “Dyslexia Handbook: Procedures Concerning Dyslexia and Related Disorders,” a set of flexible guidelines for local districts that may be modified by SBOE only with broad-based dialogue that includes input from educators and professionals in the field of reading and dyslexia and related disorders from across the state. Screening should be done only by individuals/professionals who are trained to assess students for dyslexia and related disorders.

A school district shall purchase a reading program or develop its own reading program for students with dyslexia and related disorders that is aligned with the descriptors found in "Dyslexia Handbook: Procedures Concerning Dyslexia and Related Disorders." Teachers who screen and treat these students must be trained in instructional strategies that utilize individualized, intensive, multisensory, phonetic methods and a variety of writing and spelling components described in the “Dyslexia Handbook: Procedures Concerning Dyslexia and Related Disorders.” The professional development activities specified by each district and/or campus planning and decision making

⁴ The provisions of this §74.28 adopted to be effective September 1, 1996, 21 TexReg 4311; amended to be effective

September 1, 2001, 25 TexReg 7691; amended to be effective August 8, 2006, 31 TexReg 6212; amended to be effective August 24, 2010, 35 TexReg 7211

committee shall include these instructional strategies.

Before an identification or assessment procedure is used selectively with an individual student, the school district must notify the student's parent or guardian or another person standing in parental relation to the student.

Parents/guardians of students eligible under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, §504, must be informed of all services and options available to the student under that federal statute.

Each school must provide each identified student access at his or her campus to instructional programs required in subsection (c) of this section and to the services of a teacher trained in dyslexia and related disorders. The school district may, with the approval of each student's parents or guardians, offer additional services at a centralized location. Such centralized services shall not preclude each student from receiving services at his or her campus.

Because early intervention is critical, a process for early identification, intervention, and support for students at risk for dyslexia and related disorders must be available in each district as outlined in the "Dyslexia Handbook: Procedures Concerning Dyslexia and Related Disorders."

Each school district shall provide a parent education program for parents/guardians of students with dyslexia and related disorders. This program should include: awareness of characteristics of dyslexia and related disorders; information on testing and diagnosis of dyslexia; information on effective strategies for teaching dyslexic students; and awareness of information on modification,

especially modifications allowed on standardized testing.⁵

To summarize the statements in the Texas Education Code, and the Texas Administrative Code, districts are required to follow TEA'S Revised Procedures concerning dyslexia and related disorders, including the State Board of Education Rule, by:

- identifying students with characteristics of dyslexia
- making available early identification, appropriate intervention and support for students with dyslexia and related disorders
- providing access to appropriate instructional services on each campus
- offering training for teachers in screening and instruction

The Revised Procedures define and describe the procedure for identification of students, and the options for intervention. Appropriate interventions may include Remedial Strategies in the regular classroom or in a small group setting; a Dyslexia Instructional Program, especially designed for students with dyslexia; or Referral to Special Education for individualized planning of the student's total reading instruction.

Remedial Strategies in the regular classroom, in small groups such as Title I or Compensatory Programs are most often a good match for students whose reading problems are a result of environmental, sociological, or other causes rather than dyslexia.

If a student exhibits the characteristics of dyslexia, and they are confirmed through documentation of

⁵ The provisions of this §74.28 adopted to be effective September 1, 1996, 21 TexReg 4311; amended to be effective September 1, 2001, 25 TexReg 7691; amended to be effective August 8, 2006, 31 TexReg 6212; amended to be effective August 24, 2010, 35 TexReg 7211

observation, records, and/or testing, he/she should be placed in a curriculum designed especially for students with dyslexia. This type of curriculum is described in some detail in the Revised Procedures. The descriptors are research based, and should all be components of any curriculum which will be effective for students with dyslexia. It is appropriate to request that a school be asked to provide evidence that the curriculum offered for dyslexia meets all the descriptors. This might be in the form of a scope and sequence chart, or some other format that outlines specific concepts taught, as well as methodology, strategies, and techniques employed. A school or individual might even contact the author or publisher of a program to inquire for whom the program was originally and specifically intended. Most reading programs have a "target" population, and are not usually as effective when adjusted for another type of learner.

It is worth noting that the state law stipulates assessment and curriculum guidelines, but does not mention particular placement. Therefore, in looking for adequate services, the curriculum is the major consideration, and it might be delivered in regular classroom settings or Special Education classes.

If the student qualifies for Special Education, this may not be the only placement necessary for him or her to receive effective reading instruction. If the Special Education Teacher is not trained as a Dyslexia Therapist (Certified Academic Language Therapist), or has not received training in a curriculum designed for dyslexia, the recommendation on the student's Individual Education Plan should be to place the student in the Dyslexia Program in Regular Education for primary reading instruction. In addition, Special Education might continue to plan and guide teachers in offering accommodations.

The State Laws are complemented by the Federal Laws to provide comprehensive instruction in

reading for students with dyslexia. Therefore, wisdom dictates that they be seen as a total "package", and the way the laws interface is important to consider. One way to view their relationship is to know the major issues addressed by each one. For example, the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act primarily addresses the needs of students with disabilities severe enough to require individually planned education by a specialist. So the major issue is placement through a qualifying process to receive specialized and individualized accommodations. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 stipulates instruction, accommodations, modifications, considerations, etc., necessary to prevent discrimination and to provide efficient and successful access to education content and activities. The major issues, then, are antidiscrimination and efficient access to educational programs. The Texas Dyslexia Law outlines procedures for identifying students and providing appropriate and effective reading instruction. Thus, it focuses upon research based curriculum designed especially for students with dyslexia.⁶

Your child is well protected under the care of State and Federal laws. This assures you of the right to meeting with the school and the principal persons caring for your child. It gives you the right to pursue a just and equitable education for your child no matter what is handicap is.

Choosing the Right Education System for your Child

Is your dyslexic child currently enrolled in an educational setting? Are you satisfied with the education your child is receiving? What options do you as the parent have in the choice of educational settings? As a parent today, you have a

⁶ retrieved 15 November 2011 from <http://www.altaread.org/statelaws.asp>

considerable say about the setting that you want your child to attend. Most public school districts allow students to attend any school inside their district and any school outside their district that has space available. You, your child, and your family need to converse and decide what setting best fits your situation. For example: Do you need a setting that offers after-hours childcare? What are the location requirements? Have you considered the financial requirement? Do keep in mind that most private schools offer scholarships.

Study the academic programs offered by the setting considered for the best program for your child. Does your child thrive on a back to the basics curriculum? Or does he perform better in a noncompetitive approach? What special learning assistance is required by your child? Are tutors, resource rooms, classroom aids, and licensed teachers in special education required? Does your child need flexible scheduling? Are there opportunities for students with learning disabilities to showcase their strengths? Do test scores rank high with you? Does your child need a rigorous curriculum that has opportunities for gifted children and advanced placement?

Do the facilities affect your judgment? Do you want your child to use cutting edge technology, enjoy extracurricular opportunities, and have access to playing fields, gyms, and auditoriums? Or can these amenities be done on an after hours offering?

Does the environment of the setting offer the amenities that you feel are important for a good education? Consider the diversity of the student population, student achievement, discipline policy, the institute's written mission. Cue in on the school's conflict resolution program and their anti-bullying initiative?

As a parent, do you want to be an active part of a PTA or volunteer opportunities? Does a learning

situation with a strong parent communication system appeal to you?

Most important – Does the school provide the basic needs for you child? Think of how your child learns best, what their particular challenges are, and then weigh those facts against the curriculum and faculty of the setting that you are considering. Talk with the teachers, get their input, and find out their teaching techniques. Take time to observe classes. Be perfectly satisfied before moving your child to a new premise.

*“In reference to his being the class clown:
‘I didn’t want anyone to know that I didn’t
get it.’” Tommy Hilfiger*

Schools Available for the Dyslexic Learner

There are several options available for types of schools to work with the dyslexic learner. Each option will have its own unique traits and teaching specialties. The parent must find the one that best fits the child or the one that is willing to allow the child to fit the curriculum. There is a learning institution for every child. The parents must be patient in finding the correct one for their child.

Public School – The function of the traditional public school is to educate a wide range of students. The advantage of the public school is that it must uphold federal law and offer special education services to any eligible students. The parent may find it necessary to become an advocate for their child. If the public schools are a consideration, obtain the NCLD's IDEA Parent Guide. (IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) It may be obtained from your local public school. The public schools do vary in the quality of their staff, academic offerings, and facilities. Visit all the available schools in your area.

Magnet Schools – Magnet schools are public schools and operate under the same principles. They do cater to a particular branch of education such as art, technology, and economics. The pupils are drawn from the public schools in the area surrounding the magnet school. There would be a process to evaluate your child's ability to attend this type of school.

Charter Schools – A charter school may also be called a “contract” school. It will have a charter that explains its mission, program goals. This will also include the assessment methods used and the means by which success is measured. It may be managed as a for-profit cooperation, by parents, community groups, or as a nonprofit organization. Look into the history of the charter school that you are considering for stability.

The charter school is considered as an alternative public school choice and is usually formed to offer flexible scheduling, staffing, and instruction. State education law will allow charter schools to skip some of the rules and regulations that apply to the general public school. The charter school is accountable for student achievement and is subject to closure if it does not meet correct procedure. All students graduating from a charter school must meet state's graduation standards.

One strong point for the charter school is that it may offer special curriculums or instructional approaches that appeal to parents of the dyslexia child. Usually the charter school has fewer students with which to assist. This offers a student more personalized instruction. This is a definite asset for the dyslexic student. Just as public schools are subject to all federal laws related to students with learning disabilities so are the charter schools.

Many charter schools have specific missions of educating children with learning disabilities and will welcome your child.

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I learn. Involve me and I remember.”
Benjamin Franklin

Private Schools – Finances are the biggest draw back to the private schools. They are expensive although some do have endowments and will offer scholarships. Private schools are not required to accept students with dyslexia, nor does the state require them to provide all the services found in public schools. The IDEA booklet referred to earlier will provide information on student rights in private schools. There are some private schools whose mission is to educate children with dyslexia. These schools have an acceptance policy dependent on whether the school and family agree that the school offers an education that will meet that particular child's needs.

Homeschooling – Many parents feel that they do a better job of fitting the curriculum to their child's need. They feel that by homeschooling their child will be protected from teasing and labeling. Homeschooling is accepted in all states. The parents become totally responsible for their child's education. They may ask for and receive help from local and national organizations. Materials for homeschooling are easily found. It is important that the homeschooling parent finds a community networking group with similar students for support. Parents need to be very truthful with themselves concerning their ability to teach their child. They will need to do considerable research, get specialized training, and be able to focus and organize. They also need to ask themselves the question “Will my child flourish if I teach them alone at home?”

“If you can dream, you can do it.” Walt
Disney

Online Learning – If your child works well on a computer and likes to work on the computer, online

learning may be a good solution. Online learning is flexible, and personalized; however, it is also solitary. The online school, its staff, mission statement, and curriculum need to be inspected just as you would any other type of school.

Tutoring – Tutoring is an alternative to seeking a new school system. When selecting a tutor, seek one with a general background in education who has had special training. In addition, this tutor will need to possess certain outstanding personality traits such as patience, friendliness, and passion for their work. They need to be able to establish a rapport with the student built on trust and the ability to engage and interest the student.

Tutoring offers many benefits as the tutor helps a child progress both academically and emotionally. The tutor teaches the student the tools that are needed to progress in reading, spelling, comprehension, and math. Thus a child builds the foundation that they need to make progress and succeed. A truly gifted tutor will help the child realize that he is truly capable in his work which brings about a positive change in his attitude. Gone is the frustration that the student has felt before. Instead a new optimism replaces the frustration, and the student becomes confident and self-assured.

A tutor will be able to advise parents on homework. They will be able to help the student advance his reading and spelling skills, making it easier for them to do their homework. The tutor will work with comprehension skills as comprehension skills are so difficult for dyslexic individuals. Improving comprehension skills improves reading skills.

Finding the correct educational situation for your child is not an easy quest. But then, being dyslexic is not easy either. The child with dyslexia is a gifted child. They have long been misunderstood by the educational system, and there is still a tremendous amount of work to be done for these children. But the first steps have been taken leading toward the

proper education. At this time in the structure of the educational field, it is wise that the parents observe the education of their child carefully. Find the best type of school for that particular child. Public education does work for some, but not for all of the dyslexic population. Take advantage of state and federal laws that will propel your values and lead to the right schooling for your child. Remember: Your child has a right to an education and no one can deny him that right. It is up to you to find the right source of education for your child.