

# THE DYSLEXIA REVOLUTION

Quarterly Newsletter from The Dyslexia Initiative



## IN THIS ISSUE:

- A Message From Our Founder - 1
- Six Decades Later: Why We Can't Wait! by Faith Borkowsky - 2 & 3
- Facing Giants by Ashley Roberts - 4 & 5
- Playing the Game by Nikki Barner - 6
- What Does Dysgraphia Mean? by Ashley Roberts - 7 & 8
- My Pencil Is Covered In Sharp Rose Thorns by Eric Staib - 9
- You Are Cordially Invited - by Jennifer Knoph of The Reed Charitable Foundation - 10 to 12
- Fundraiser Alert - 13
- The Parent Sessions - 13
- Featured Blog Article- 14
- The Dyslexia Initiative YouTube Channel - 14

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER

Welcome to the new year! I don't know about you but I'm anxious to leave 2020 behind and move into the future, but other than turning our collective backs on what was a very challenging year on multiple levels, I find that I am asking myself what I learned.

Having listened to numerous conferences and seen a glorious sharing of information, I asked myself how that share impacts the every day family facing the challenges of fighting for the education of our dyslexic children in the schools across the country. While we cannot measure the impact, I truly hope it was profound, but I would still like to see sessions, conferences, seminars, etc. geared to the parent audience that is out there more so than any other sub-group. Don't read that as a dismissal of the very critical and necessary professional development opportunities for our teachers who are on the front lines with our children, but given the population dynamics, families are in the overwhelming majority, so families need the tools, information and empowerment necessary to challenge the status quo and through united voices seek the educational changes necessary for all of our children when it comes to reading and writing instruction.

We believe, as we always have, that parents will be the ones to change the current situation for it is in the family unit that we see and experience the greatest consequences for a failure to implement the science of reading; so as we march into 2021, let's hope the information share that was so dynamic in 2020 continues on, and that the parent becomes a targeted audience.



# SIX DECADES LATER: WHY WE CAN'T WAIT!

BY: FAITH BORKOWSKY

In thinking about how to effect real change in 2021 to fulfill "the dream" of seeing all children learn to read, I chose to read two of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s most famous books, [Why We Can't Wait](#) and [Where Do We Go from Here](#). As a child growing up in the 1970s, all I was ever taught about Dr. King was the watered-down story of a peaceful man who gave up his life fighting for civil rights for African Americans. Although I learned about his great skill as an orator and knew that he had given a speech in Washington, D.C. in which he stated, "I have a dream," I never knew that he was also an accomplished author. Even after his birthday became a federal holiday in 1983, there wasn't one course I took in college that required me to read anything he had written. One would think that a university course in history or sociology in this country would, or should, have included more about Dr. King.

I wanted to learn more about how Dr. King helped create a movement that resulted in real change. What I found was that Dr. King was, perhaps, one of the most compelling writers I have ever read, and I feel smarter for having finally discovered his books. He provided a roadmap for what it truly takes to bring about positive and necessary change in a peaceful and courageous manner that resonates even today. While I do not in any way mean to equate Dr. King's struggle for civil rights in the 1960s with our goal of bringing proper literacy instruction to our schools, there are parallels that cannot be ignored.

Quotes taken from Dr. King's books are embedded in bold below.

A philosophical divide has propelled the "Reading Wars" for decades. As an educator fighting what seems to be an uphill battle to bring common sense to literacy instruction, I understand why schools have latched onto safe, socially-acceptable themes such as "balance" to market an image of positivity and progress. And, I have witnessed with increasing alarm how the major players in literacy education have cultivated, over the past year, the illusion of compromise and reflection in response to the inroads the Science of Reading proponents have made in trying to shake things up.

Unfortunately, many people see this as a win, and they naively believe that with continued education and dialogue the balance will eventually tilt in favor of literacy instruction that aligns with scientific evidence. But science and research articles alone will not change the hearts and minds of people who are steadfast in their beliefs. Balanced literacy proponents often interpret even hard science in a manner that affirms their entrenched ideas. **"The old guard in any society resents new methods, for old guards wear the decorations and medals won by waging battle in the accepted manner."**

And so, the balanced literacy camp has done what parties in control always do when confronted with a rising tide of protest and undeniable truth. They co-opted the parts of reading science that they could not dismiss or deny and pretended it was a part of their program all along or, even worse, that they were able to build it into their existing programs, creating even more... balance.

We must not be fooled. This half-hearted effort to rebrand Balanced Literacy is dangerous and must be exposed for what it is: a wolf in sheep's clothing. The soundbites may make us feel good in the short run, but they really do more harm than good because they serve mostly to placate and distract us from taking the necessary steps to really move forward. We rarely get the raw truth; instead, we see our words parsed and included in new marketing efforts that make it look like we've been heard, when, in reality, nothing has changed. **"Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection."**

In the interests of compromise and avoiding conflict, advocates for the Science of Reading often appease the Balanced Literacy camp by giving in to their desire to maintain "balance." After all, balance in all things has become a mantra in so many aspects of society today, and it all sounds so reasonable. This has created a great deal of tension among those of us who advocate forcefully for a structured approach because we know it is right for all children. We know that good things never come from comfort zones.

If we want success, we must get comfortable being uncomfortable.



**"I must confess that I am not afraid of the word 'tension'... there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth."** We cannot be afraid of creating a stir. School districts are not going to throw out materials and books that have been part of their culture for years without opposition. **"We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed."** As dyslexia advocacy groups push for legislation to make necessary changes that uphold the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), we must also educate the public and keep applying pressure to school districts, publishing companies, unions, and government officials to begin to make real change for all children. **"I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. Lamentably, it is an historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily."**

I have grown increasingly frustrated with the lack of straight talk and the unwillingness of so many on the side of science to say "enough is enough." **"[I]njustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent and determined action."** Our schools have been given more than enough time to figure out how to truly teach children to read. Government grants and initiatives have not made a dent in the literacy crisis, especially in Black and Latino communities. In a recent study, only about 18% of African American fourth-graders were proficient in reading. And yet, my experience is that the problem persists in even the most sought-after school districts. This is because the Balanced Literacy framework that is so entrenched is a failure. We all must have a sense of urgency and not stay silent.

This problem will NOT go away with time.

**"We must get rid of the false notion that there is some miraculous quality in the flow of time that inevitably heals all evils. There is only one thing certain about time, and that is that it waits for no one. If it is not used constructively it passes you by."** In order to eliminate stagnation, we must be persistent in creating a stir. We must involve parents outside the dyslexia community and educate as many organizations in our communities as possible. Social action must involve pediatricians, preschool teachers, daycare workers, religious leaders, librarians, and entrepreneurs. **"We must involve everyone we can reach, even those with inadequate education, and together acquire political sophistication by discussion, practice and reading."**

**"A social movement that only moves people is merely a revolt. A movement that changes both people and institutions is a revolution."** A 'Reading Revolution' will only occur when all vestiges of Balanced Literacy are removed from our schools. We cannot think for a minute that university professors, who have sent and continue to send thousands of young teachers out to our schools every year, ill-equipped to teach reading, have not heard that their "research" and unproven strategies have been debunked. We must make it difficult for their employers to allow them to continue lecturing to pre-service teachers on Balanced Literacy without critically considering its failure over the past decades, and without discussing the Science of Reading.

Dr. King touched upon so many of these issues over 50 years ago. **"The sad truth is that American schools, by and large, do not know how to teach – nor frequently what to teach. The ineffectiveness in teaching reading skills to many young people, whether white or black, poor or rich, strongly indicts foundations and government for not spending funds effectively..."**

**"The road to effective education requires helping teachers to teach more effectively. The use of nonprofessional aides would reduce class size and provide needed assistance to teachers. More direct training and aid in teaching youngsters from low-income families is needed. Parents should be involved in schools to a much greater extent, breaking down the barriers between professionals and the community that they serve. Education is too important to be left to professional fads and needs. This is not to assert that professional competence is unnecessary, but that there must be a greater evidence of competence and a new and creative link between parents and schools."**

These words could have been written today. Significant levels of illiteracy in minority communities is a social justice issue and must be made a priority. But the fact that only 40% of our fourth graders are reading at grade-level proficiency across the country is evidence that the problem is widespread and systemic. If we want REAL change for ALL children, we must emulate the tactics that actually work.

This is why we can't wait.



Faith Borkowsky is the founder of High Five Literacy and Academic Coaching with over thirty years of experience as a classroom teacher, reading and learning specialist, regional literacy coach, administrator, and tutor. Ms. Borkowsky is a Certified Dyslexia Practitioner and provides professional development for teachers and school districts, as well as parent workshops, presentations, and private consultations. Ms. Borkowsky is the author of the award-winning book, Failing Students or Failing Schools? A Parent's Guide to Reading Instruction and Intervention and the "If Only I Would Have Known..." series. She is also a board member of Teach My Kid to Read, a 501(c) non-profit organization with a mission to support and empower students, teachers, and parents through education so all kids, including those with dyslexia, learn to read.

# FACING GIANTS

BY: ASHLEY ROBERTS

Right, wrong or indifferent, when I joined the advocacy world I was not under any illusions that any movement towards change would be easy. Doing what I do for a living, having deeply political parents, and a passion for history, I knew that the battle ground was monumental in size.

While I do not possess illusions, it hurts me to see a new entrant into the fray throw themselves completely at the opposing side, thinking a win will be quick and decisive, just to see them slam into a wall and find out just how far the corruption of #BalancedIlliteracy runs.

Perhaps that sounds jaded, and likely it is, but I prefer to think of it as realistic. Knowing what one is up against is truly the only way to understand that while change is essential to everyone, change will not happen quickly or easily.

Every time I myself think the battle is almost over, I have to remind myself that it is far from ending. This is a battle for a lifetime, yet I hope that it is within my lifetime that we see real change happen.

I'm sounding cryptic, so let me explain.

Many have said it, but this is a money game. Education is now a corporate entity, and while I am a supporter of corporations, I believe that they have a responsibility to society. The educational corporation is essentially a Ponzi scheme. It is selling bad content to willing buyers. The ed corp is ignoring science in favor of profit even though they are supposed to create and print content for the education of children. They are willingly feeding the PR machine to keep their current content seemingly relevant at all costs. They see failure on the horizon if anti-Balanced Literacy proponents keep on with their fight, but they keep fueling the fires of the reading wars to keep from having to abandon what they've always sold, afraid of losing their market share to those publishing companies that are supporting SoR curriculums. Instead of taking the opportunity to contribute to the necessary change our educational system needs, they remain in power, fueling all those who keep the reading wars going, praying their scheme doesn't collapse under their feet.

When publishing companies transformed themselves into consulting companies they made a dynamic play to ensure and retain their power. First, it was a brilliant move from a business perspective. Now instead of just selling books, they have consultants the districts can put on their payroll to help "train" and "roll out" the materials and ensure they remain up to date with the latest updates, extension packs, hand outs, printables, etc. The presence of these consultants ensures materials keep being purchased, and it sells the concept that without the latest tool the curriculums are incomplete and that teachers and children will suffer from the lack of materials, and ensures the "consultants" stay deployed, earning even more for the corporation.

The continual PR spins, bolt-ons, add-ins, etc. maintains a facade of relevancy, while doing nothing to change the actual materials themselves and reprinting the same staid, failed curriculums year after year.

The partnership between the publishing companies and the American university runs deep. A recent article I read pointed out how Columbia's Teacher College educated a bunch of PhD's who then spread out across the other American universities and tainted the teacher educational colleges with Balanced Literacy, staining the concept of structured literacy, aka the science of reading as outmoded, boring and useless.

Teachers are indoctrinated with methods that do not support reading and writing. Those teachers are well meaning, altruistic individuals, but they find themselves ill equipped to truly teach reading. They, like our children, are equal victims in the Reading Wars, unwitting accomplices to the choice made by others to NOT actually educate our children, yet as long as the university system stays entrenched in this outmoded and damaging pedagogy, teachers will continue to, year after year, enter the educational environment without the necessary knowledge to teach reading and writing.

But, there's more to this Ponzi scheme than that. A successful Ponzi scheme requires people that one admires as names to banty about to entice others to invest. First it begins with the scholars. Enough published papers on a topic warrants a publishing deal, then you sell the educational agencies the idea that they're missing out on the latest and greatest mind on any particular subject. Result? They buy in since they don't want to be left out. Now you have a few education agencies so you throw those names out to other education agencies. "Well, if State A and State B are doing it then so will we!" This continues so on and so forth, but this isn't yet enough.



One must further solidify this position. Enter the lobbyist.

Seemingly well meaning people meet with decision makers, congressmen and senators both state and federally based, and do what they do best. The state educational agencies have bought in and their districts are supporting it and we have the greatest modern day thought leaders materials we're publishing so we know best what is needed for the educational system. Without other voices loud enough to create dissent, policies are entrenched.

So they control the universities, the state education agencies, and the school districts, but how do they ensure their scheme isn't toppled? They create trenches and solidify the opposing sides into separate camps and then they weaponize words like "love;" yet they can go one step further too. They weaponize the protection of the teachers who are teaching their materials by making it evil to ever question a teacher's knowledge, actions or motives by insinuating that a question to a teacher should be perceived as an attack not just against that teacher but against all teachers everywhere. This is a successful move which ensures that the altruistic people who willingly went into teaching are entrenched at all times protecting one another against the unknowing and unwitting parent. Then to top things off, they ensure the parents are seen as unknowing fools.

They've figured out that making this a heated and deeply personally emotional battlefield ensures the opposing sides simply tear each other apart instead of having sensible conversations about the actual, real, genuine needs of the children the establishment is actually supposed to be serving, but seriously, who cares about them.

Now, double down by ensuring the lawyers hired by the state educational agencies and the school districts do everything in their power to ensure that these children's parents stay bullied, lied to, intimidated, retaliated against and continually lose their mediation and due process hearings because no one actually understands the science of reading anymore and if they do they damned well won't admit it on the record otherwise the whole thing collapses, hence the intimidation to be silent permeates the schools too.

Yet, all alone stands the parent whose child can't read. The parent is given a litany of excuses about why it's either their fault or their child's fault why the child can't read. Years go by, testing may or may not ever happen. Maybe federal timelines are followed, maybe they aren't. IEP meetings convene and poor goals are presented since no one really understands how to close the gap.

Dyslexia is therefore a real disability, right? These children can't really learn how to read, right? Fluency is just how fast one can read words in 60 seconds, right? It has nothing to do with comprehension ability, right? Let's just give them AT so the computer will do it for them and we don't have to help. What does the parent know, right? They are only a parent after all. They don't have education degrees.

So parents hire advocates. God forbid a district hasn't engage in a smear campaign and under anonymous names entered hateful, awful, misogynistic, abusive comments on a website where parents might look up the advocate's name to see if they're worth hiring or not. Advocates may or may not get anywhere, but they do try. Enter the SpEd attorneys when the advocates have exhausted all means of defense, assuming the family can take on a cost allocation of roughly \$50,000. What are the political dynamics in the state? Who pays the hearing officers, the state education agency or someone else? At what rate are parents winning their due process hearings? If less than 10% of the time, why is that? Is the system that has been contrived by the educational establishment to function outside of the court system truly impartial and just, or is it all tied together? Is getting the Federal DOE involved the only way to implement change for a single child?

The point of saying all of this isn't to create a level of intimidation, but quite the contrary. The point is to open eyes. The battle front for change is not going to be easy or quick. This fight is not for the faint of heart either. There are some dirty games that get played and you need your eyes wide open to understand what you're up against.

Alone each of us can only do so much. For each of our individual children we stand alone. We can't take our community into the IEP meeting with us; spiritually we can hold each other up, but not in person; but together, united, voices raised as one, we can topple giants. Historically speaking it's the only way that has ever brought about REAL change.

But that's the other thing too. Change isn't quick, even when you win. Note the comment Dr. Louisa Moats made during her Dyslexia Coffee Talk session when she said that implementing real change will take at a minimum three years, but realistically five. That's five years where the dogs are nipping at the heels of those you've convinced to make change, stating their methods are tried and true and there already. Change takes powerful leadership, committed to lasting change and the time it will take to get there. Proof is in the changes that have taken place in Mississippi and are taking place in Arkansas. Our laws can't be vague, but have to be specific about what can and cannot be used as curriculum. State educational leaders have to be invested in real change, not political careers.

We are in the fight of our lifetimes, and it is for all children, not just our dyslexic children. This is the greatest equity front of all time as literacy is the key to self determination and what I mean by that is literacy is the key to society, earning income, taking care of oneself, and ensuring the next generation is taken care of too. This is a #LiteracyRevolution.

# PLAYING THE GAME

BY: NIKKI BARNER



So, you have suspected that your child has a learning disability in the area of reading. The district provides all of the assessments and your instincts were correct. Although a school psychologist cannot diagnose a student with dyslexia, he or she can state that your child meets the criteria for dyslexia. If the school psychologist does not offer that information then you need to ask the psychologist if your child meets the criteria for dyslexia. Surprisingly, you should get an honest answer.

Now, you're sitting at the IEP table, or in front of your computer on Zoom, and the district gives you their offer of FAPE (Free & Appropriate Public Education). Let's say they offer your child 30 minutes of intervention in a small group three days a week. You can ABSOLUTELY ask for more time, and if the district denies your request make sure that you clearly state that you would like your request and the district's denial to be added to the notes page (some states refer to it as the deliberations page) of the IEP document. This way it is officially documented. The problem is that even though you know their offer of FAPE is probably not going to help close the gap for your child, you should try the program they offer to prove it does or does not work with as much data as possible.

The next step is for you to request an IEP meeting for eight weeks in the future, and request that data on your child's progress be collected during that eight-week period. I like to call this a "Progress Check-In" IEP meeting. The district will usually try to talk you out of this but stand strong! The problem is that parents usually have no idea that a program is not working until the next IEP, a year later, when the student has not met the goals and has not made progress. In that instance, an entire year has been lost; so bear this in mind when standing firm as this is a valid argument for the meeting eight weeks after services begin.

Once you have made your firm request for the eight week "Progress Check-In" IEP meeting, you can sign the IEP, but you can check the box that states "I agree with the exception of" and physically write on the IEP and state that you authorize the implementation of the IEP but you disagree that it provides FAPE. If you are signing digitally, request a text box and then type that statement into the text box (for the record, we recommend paper copies only unless the district is using a contract tool like DocuSign for signature purposes because you want to ensure what you are signing is the document you've reviewed and that nothing has been edited, switched out, etc.). You can absolutely sign that you agree to all parts of the IEP if you would like to, but signing with exception helps build your case if you ever need to hire a SpEd attorney down the road.

Now, fast forward eight weeks later, and make sure that you request to see any written work and ALL data. Make sure that you have the information regarding what level your child was when intervention started and what level your child is currently. If the data given shows that your child has made significant progress, that is great news! If the data shows that your child did not make significant progress, or none at all, this is your argument to either request more service time, 1:1 intervention, or a completely different methodology. (Note: we do not recommend staking your claim on a specific methodology because if it does not work then the district can blame you, the parent, for forcing a method that was not sufficient.) This "Progress Check-In" meeting either will give you peace, or the upper hand.

The end result is that you followed the protocol. You tried what the district offered, and if it worked, great! If it did not, you did not waste any more time trying to close the gap nor allowed the gap to get any wider. If your child did not make any progress and the district denies your new request, again, make sure that you ask that your request and the district's denial be added to the notes page of the IEP. Remember, an IEP meeting is similar to a negotiation meeting. Try to meet in the middle. If they offer something you can live with you can try that and request another eight-week "Progress Check-In" meeting, then do that. The ball is in your court.

Lastly, if that meeting is an absolute failure and the district refuses to make any changes you can then consult with a SPED attorney to see if they feel that you have a case. I know that this is not the route most parents will want to take, especially depending on the state you live in. If you do choose to hire an attorney the fact that you tried what the district offered, you proved it did not work, you asked for more, the district denied your request, you signed the IEP "With the Exception of" will make the attorney's job much easier. Why? I have been told that mediators and judges seem to side with the parent when that parent has agreed to try what the district offered, has the data to show their intervention services did not work, and has made a request that they feel will provide their child the ability to make progress in which the district denied, but of course this depends on the dynamics within each state so take that into consideration as well, hence, **Playing the Game**.

\*\*Ms. Barner is a board member for DI, an Educational Advocate and is not an attorney. This article is not to be mistaken for legal advice,



# WHAT DOES DYSGRAPHIA MEAN?

BY: ASHLEY ROBERTS

"Yes, his handwriting is messy, but he holds his pen perfectly!"

"I'm not concerned about his handwriting. I can read it so it's fine. There is worse handwriting in his class."

Parent: "He NEEDS a goal for grammar and syntax." IEP Team response: "Well, we don't teach those things so we won't agree to a goal. Besides, he's doing fine and making a B in Language Arts so I don't understand your concern."

The dysgraphia journey has been far harder than the dyslexia journey. As a parent advocate I couldn't find any real answers, didn't know what questions to ask or where to turn. The reading issues were so overwhelming for our child, dysgraphia seemed to be something we could just deal with later.

Boy, were we wrong.

After a year of diving into what dysgraphia is and seeking help for my child, I have such a deeper understanding of written expression and how it relates to reading. I cannot recall who said the following quote:

**"Reading is breathing in. Writing is breathing out."**

I wish I could credit the author behind that quote because it is just so spot on. Why? Because reading does not exist in a bubble. We live in a society where one must be able to express themselves in writing as well as be able to read.

Reading and writing instruction are two different yet conjoined concepts. One can learn to read without necessarily understanding the art of grammar and syntax, but reading comprehension and fluency are enhanced by gaining that understanding. Writing however cannot exist without reading, after all, how can one express what they cannot read themselves.

Yet, writing is not the same as speaking. It is a different skill set entirely, and like reading, must be taught explicitly. All children need a firm grasp of grammar, and beyond grammar, how to construct first a sentence, then a paragraph, aka syntax, in order to shape more elaborate writings.

For a dysgraphic child, they struggle with written expression and handwriting. One of the varied definitions of dysgraphia says it is a "deficiency in the ability to write, primarily handwriting, but also coherence." The definition I prefer is one that was given by the first private diagnostician we had seen when I asked what she meant when she said my child had dysgraphia. She said, "some children struggle with handwriting while some with expressing their ideas on paper. For the latter set, they have the idea in their head plain as day, but seem to have a disconnect with their hand in being able to get their idea onto paper."

Sometimes the struggle is difficult to see. In the lower grades there doesn't seem to be too much emphasis on written content, even though they're writing all of the time. It's easy to dismiss the idea in one's head that they've just not been provided the skill set yet to generate writing, but the truth is that the groundwork needs to start being laid in the early grades. In my state, like most others, the educational standards have grammar beginning in first and second grade. By the end of 2nd a strong understanding of nouns, verbs, and other parts of speech needs to be rooted, but as with all things the instruction of parts of speech needs to continue for several years.

Spelling is critical too. Don't let someone write an accommodation that "student will use a dictionary to look up unknown words" and not also teach the six rules of spelling. Siri and Alexa can only do so much, and to the angst of the #BalancedLiteracy camp, it is a fact that spelling contributes to comprehension and fluency.





But, there's an important component that cannot be ignored...SYNTAX.

A word few people understand, syntax means, "the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in a language." To reframe the definition in a slightly different way, syntax is how one puts a sentence together, builds a paragraph, and constructs larger, more elaborate writings. Without an understanding of syntax one cannot write well.

Yes, handwriting is a part of dysgraphia. There can be motor skill issues which may require Occupational Therapy to treat properly. There are also numerous handwriting programs (print and cursive) one can do at home with your own child, and handwriting specialists exist in the remediation space that can work privately with your child. Thanks to COVID, the availability of the limited number of professionals in this space has widened thanks to Zoom.

And, just to throw this in there, my child is an amazing artist, but his handwriting is deplorable.

Like dyslexia, there are numerous forms of dysgraphia.

1. In **dyslexic dysgraphia**, spontaneously written text is illegible, especially when the text is complex. Oral spelling is poor, but drawing and copying of written text are relatively normal. Finger-tapping speed (a measure of fine-motor speed) is normal.
2. In **motor dysgraphia**, both spontaneously written and copied text may be illegible, oral spelling is normal, and drawing is usually problematic. Finger-tapping speed is abnormal.
3. In **spatial dysgraphia**, people display illegible writing, whether spontaneously produced or copied. Oral spelling is normal. Finger-tapping speed is normal, but drawing is very problematic

Dr. Brenda Taylor, Ph.D., CALT, LDT, NCED also talks about **orthographic dysgraphia**. Specifically she talks about the orthographic loop which links the orthographic codes in the mind's eye with the sequential finger movements to form the letters (working memory component). "At risk" characteristics include excessive erasures, mixture of upper and lowercase letters, inconsistent letter formations and slant, irregular letter sizes and shapes, unfinished cursive letters.

Where I'm going with this information is to make a point that like reading, writing IS NOT natural. It is yet another human invention and the components of written expression must be taught explicitly to all students, but most especially our dysgraphic students in order to help them succeed in this world where access to society is gained by the ability to read and write.

As we've said before, literacy is the key to self determination. Literacy means both the ability to reading AND to write.

I hope this small table will also help guide you on your journey. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to reach out to DI either through our website or our Facebook page.

Dyslexia	Dysgraphia
Difficulty with lower-level foundational skills of reading (word reading)	Difficulty with lower-level foundational skills of writing (letter production)
Language-based (phonology and orthography)	Language-based (orthography)
Difficulties with spelling (transcription skill)	Can interfere with learning to spell words in writing
Impacts reading comprehension	Impacts written expression
Students with dyslexia may also have handwriting difficulties	Students with dysgraphia only, will not have difficulties with reading

Sources:  
<http://social.dyslexiaida.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2016/07/dysgraphia.pdf>



# MY PENCIL IS COVERED IN SHARP ROSE THORNS

BY: ERIC STAIB



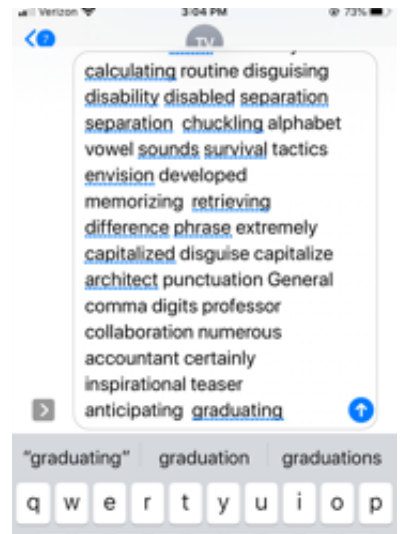
A couple weeks ago I was contacted by Chontae asking if I would be sooooo kind as to submit an article and picture to 'The Dyslexia Initiative'. At first I was like "wow, thank you for thinking of me" and without hesitation, I replied "YES, I would love to!" As I hit the return send, My chest seized up mind yelling "wwwaaaaiittttt, what are you doing, we avoid writing at all opportunities!" I have just thrown myself back into those dreadful K-12/college days of excruciating torture. For me, school days were fun and yet at times full blown anxiety stress. Will today's class involve reading out loud? Will I be called up to the chalkboard to correct a janked-up sentence; 'the eirplang was phyng over the woulds?' "No correction here, all looks good Mrs. Smith" as the class takes great delight pointing while laughing at me. In certain subject classes ENGLISH and HISTORY, I would position myself slouched down angled behind the person in front of me praying the teacher would not notice me repeating over and over in my head "oh God, please don't call on me, please don't call on me". My worst memory is when the teacher would have the entire class sit in a big open circle (aka; Round Robin) taking turns reading a paragraph.

Oh, the anxiety stress was off the charts! I would frantically count the number of peers in front of me calculating my paragraph I was to read. Oh, in my head practicing over and over never truly listening to the readers in front of me and HEAVEN FORBID you would have some crazy speed reader buzz through two paragraphs causing a complete inner meltdown, stomach ache, hot flashes, cottonmouth, tunnel vision out of body moment. Gosh, that was the worst. It's truly as if time itself stopped all the while your classmates are laughing at what it seems to them listening to a 'Peanuts' phone conversation...wa...wa.wa...waaaa.

Ok, so now we're off to the Library, oh goodie, I just love going to a place filled with thousands of books because I just LOVE TO READ. Truly, I kid you not, I would go through the same routine every time. I would pretend to look up books in the card catalog disguising my lack of spelling/reading. I then would go over to the same shelf retrieving the same picture book(s) even though I was sick of them just to blend in hiding my learning disability. Oh, while this comes to mind, I was given at a young age the label: Learning Disabled meaning unable to learn. Yea, please tell me this isn't a form of mental life scaring. So for the longest time, I grew-up with very low self-esteem and low self-worth.

Spelling test, YES! I just loved taking spelling tests. I remember taking these spelling word lists home at the beginning of the week in preparation of a big fun Friday spelling test. Ohhhhhh how my peers would speak over each other asking the teacher if they could grade my test. Let the fun begin with the person chuckling red pen checking as the teacher read down the list. It wasn't until much later in life my mother told me I didn't learn the alphabet till 3rd grade. Gosh, even to this day, I still don't know my vowel sounds. One of my many survival tactics is that for the letter sound a, I photo envision an apple, say the word apple with a long a in order to know the sound. And this is also for e,i,o,u,sometimes y. Present day, my spelling is ok. It's just over the years I have developed a way of memorizing word spellings by retrieving mind photos. Here's one for yea, I do not know the difference between the words were and where. So what I tell myself every time I come across using one of these words, I say the phrase 'where were you?' knowing that the first word has the 'h' in it. Pretty clever right! Also, I have an extremely hard time knowing what is to be capitalized so to disguise I capitalize all my handwriting like an architect. Punctuation I just figure when I pause, that must be a comma. Math, it's a love hate thing. I'm pretty much basic enter level and fractions. I actually at times have a problem with flipping single digits backwards so an E would be a 3 writing down also I'm notorious for saying groups of numbers in a backwards order. I once gave my phone number to a Creative Writing Professor for working on a collaboration. She tried calling the number numerous times then thought, "Eric mentioned he was Dyslexic, I wonder if he gave me his phone number backwards?" Sure enough, I did. Right now you're thinking "I'm pretty sure Eric is NOT an accountant or banker of some sort." You are most certainly correct!

Here's the teaser, I'm an Elementary Art Teacher that has been awarded in Washington D.C. 2006 Inspirational National Art Teacher of the Year, National Broadway Art Teacher of the Year and my life story studied in college textbooks around the U.S.



Spell Checker Image by Eric Staib

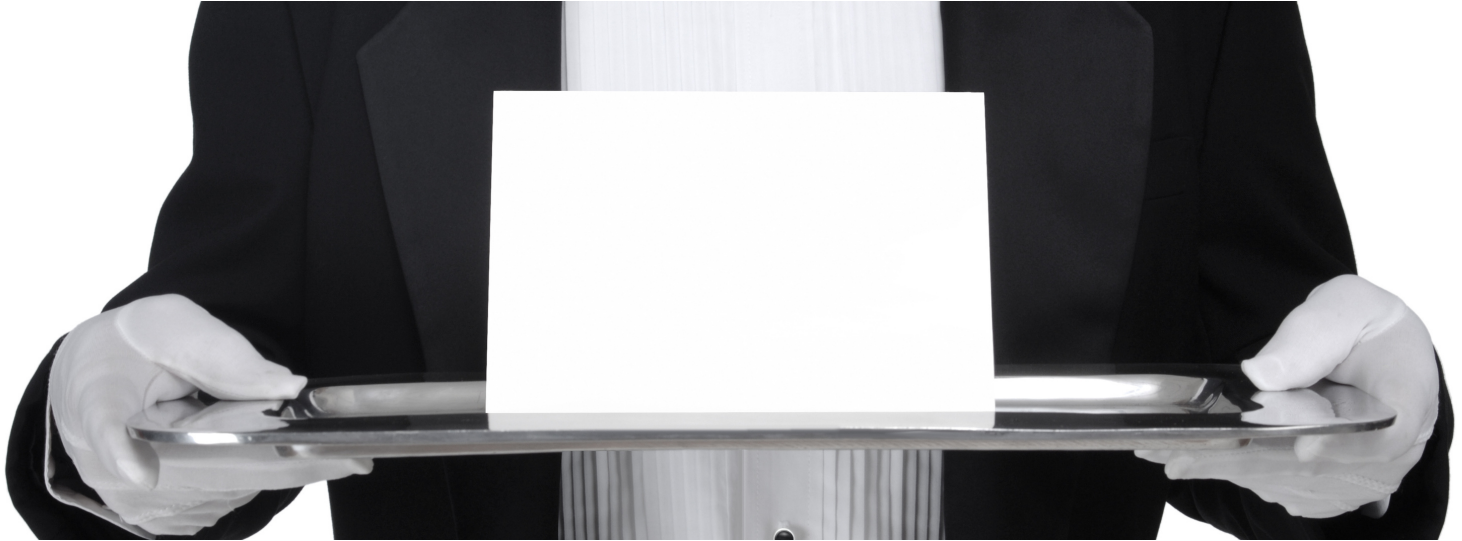
I'm going to stop here anticipating I will be able to share with you in the future my graduating H.S. with a 1.6 D- GPA to my days learning survival skills in order to graduate college.

Always be AMAZING in all you do,  
Eric Staib

# YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED

How REED Charitable Foundation plans to tackle the audacious goal of training EVERY teacher in Orton-Gillingham and YOU are part of the plan

BY: JENNIFER KNOPF



## An Unexpected Call To Action

REED Charitable Foundation (RCF), with a mission to make an immediate and meaningful impact for students with dyslexia, was growing rapidly when a December 2020 social media post for free Orton-Gillingham (OG) training for public school teachers (and very discounted for private pay participants) was met with a tsunami-level response solidifying our belief that training teachers is a desperately needed place to start in improving literacy for not only dyslexic students but for ALL students.

## Who Are We?

REED Charitable Foundation is a public 501(c)(3) based out of Winter Park, Florida, that supports literacy for all students with a focus on students with dyslexia. We were founded in October of 2019 and have grown rapidly due to many factors, not the least of which is the gigantic need for the 20% of families on the dyslexia journey in our community (and beyond) desperately needing support, resources, advice and hope. RCF is fueled by the most intrinsic and powerful motivation I know of and that is a mother's love for her children and the innate instinct to protect them and ensure their survival. RCF is exclusively run by passionate professionals (mostly women) who are committed to improving literacy for all children, not just their own. I have never loved a job more - both the mission of RCF and the people who are a part of it and that we get to meet and serve. It is an incredible honor that I get to do this work every day.

## We Know The Problem, But What's The Solution?

I think one of the most challenging things in starting any charitable foundation is not identifying the "problem" you are trying to solve, but rather, how you are going to solve that problem. And maybe this is true for all foundations but I think that "solving" the problem of the incredible disservice and injustice done to children and families impacted by dyslexia is so multi-faceted that it can be daunting to pick one solid place to start. The desire to "fix" everything immediately is very real but also very unrealistic. One group cannot solve decades worth of mess and destruction immediately - no matter how well-intentioned, well-funded and talented they are.

So, where do we start? We considered legislative advocacy, community education events, scholarships for academic testing, scholarships for tutoring, creating tutoring programs, parent support/advice, mentoring, social-emotional programming, scholarships for due process support or educational advocates - the list goes on and on. All are vitally needed immediately. And to those doing those things and more - you rock!

## Why Do We Train Teachers in OG?

But, how did we decide on training teachers in OG? Well, we have offered support already in many of the areas listed above and the one thing we found that seemed to have the quickest and broadest impact was when we sent teachers to OG training. (For those of you who may not be familiar with OG, the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators (AOGPE) defines OG as a "direct, explicit, multisensory, structured, sequential, diagnostic and prescriptive way to teach literacy when reading writing, and spelling does not come easily to individuals, such as those with dyslexia." The AOGPE goes on to explain that OG is "derived from two sources: first from a body of time-tested knowledge and practice that has been validated over the past 80 years, and second from the scientific evidence about how individuals learn to read and write; why a significant

number have difficulty in doing so; how having dyslexia makes achieving literacy skills more difficult; and which instructional practices are best suited for teaching such individuals to read and write." See [www.ortonacademy.org/resources/what-is-the-orton-gillingham-approach/](http://www.ortonacademy.org/resources/what-is-the-orton-gillingham-approach/).) Why? I'm sure there are many reasons but here are the main three:

(1) Teachers always become our best advocates for sending more teachers to training and advocating to their administration that this knowledge must be implemented to support all students. Indeed, we find that teachers are always stunned by what they learn in OG training - because it is knowledge they have never received and yet it is so clearly vital in knowing how to help all children learn to read. Most teachers are typically moved to tears at some point in training - the length of those tears in direct correlation to how long a teacher has been in education and how many students they can immediately think of who would have benefitted from this knowledge the teacher is just now getting.

(2) We know that a passionate, informed and well-equipped educator can positively impact many students (and other educators) at one time and we really need educators aware of this information and advocating for this change - as they are the ones expected to implement it.

(3) When we did a financial analysis on how our Foundation dollars could make the biggest impact - we determined that the relative cost to send one teacher to training is far more impactful than individual scholarships that only impact one student at a time because so many of those options are so incredibly expensive. For example, not that private tutoring isn't incredibly important, but the current average rate for private tutoring in our area is \$100/hour (I know some regions are twice that). At that cost, RCF could only help a small number of students each year. And when you talk to desperate parents and educators every day who need help for their struggling children or students now, we can't be satisfied to help just a few when we know there are so many who will continue to fall through the cracks if we don't think big. (We are actually working on a scalable solution to the tutoring problem - so maybe I can share that plan another time).

### **OG Teacher Training in 2021 Makes Sense**

So...for us, teacher training made the most sense. And, we are proud to say we are training 80 teachers in OG this month alone and we are currently scheduled to train over 220 in 2021, limited only by Fellow availability at the current time, not teacher interest or available funding through RCF.

### **The Post That Propelled Us Forward**

But if we had any lingering doubts as to whether teacher training was where our focus should lie, on December 19th (appropriately the birthday of our Foundation's namesake), we posted an opportunity on our Facebook page to send 24 educators (free to public school teachers, \$200 for all others) to OG training, on a first come first serve basis, no matter where they are located, as long as they are able to attend at the times indicated virtually. The response? It went viral. As of the exact moment I am writing this, we have reached over 294,902 people. The post has been shared 1,373 times. We have responded to thousands of comments, direct messages and emails from educators on every continent on Earth (except Antarctica) all asking (and many begging) for this opportunity. The need for teacher training is gigantic, global and urgent. If we needed confirmation of our mission - it is sufficiently solidified. Thank you, Universe! And I can tell you, we are committed like never before to TRAIN. EVERY. TEACHER.

### **Our Plan To Train Every Teacher**

In order to train every teacher, we plan to continue to offer free and affordable OG training to teachers, parents and related professionals. We are in the process of hiring a Director of Orton-Gillingham Implementation. This person will eventually be a Fellow in the AOGPE and be able to conduct training for RCF and will also help facilitate implementation for teachers we train in OG. We are working on adding registration software to continue to provide virtual training for those that are not local to us. And maybe most importantly, we are constantly talking to anyone who reaches out to us about how we are making this happen and if there is anything we can do to help others start making this happen in other parts of the country. As much as we enjoy being able to make the impact we are locally, we know that the way we train every teacher is by making enough of an impact in a district that the district takes ownership of this important responsibility - so we can help the next district do the same thing. And, as others are inspired to make this happen in their own community - our audacious goal slowly but surely gets reached.

### **Let's Do This Together**

It is our belief that a big part of how we accomplish this bold goal is to share it with others in this space - like all of you. We genuinely want to collaborate with other groups who are training teachers or doing other work in this space so we can refer people your way if they are in your area/region. Part of how we accomplish our audacious goal is helping others to accomplish their audacious goals too. We are in this together. The reason dyslexia advocacy has not made the progress it absolutely should have made by now is that there are so many smaller groups doing great work but they have never known others exist and/or never joined forces with each other to create a more collective, powerful voice. We all want the same thing at the end of the day. We all want what is promised to our children but isn't actually happening. We all want every child to actually receive the free and appropriate public education they have been promised, right? We actually want "no child left behind" to actually leave no child behind.

### Our Hope of Collaboration

It is our hope that in the coming year and beyond, that all of these amazing groups that are doing important work and working their hearts out to support literacy and students with dyslexia would be able to join together and share the work we are doing and where - so we can actively support each other. We need each other. We need our collective power, expertise and voices to make all of our audacious goals come to fruition - for the sake of all of these incredible kids and ultimately our world. We can all improve how we do things to yield better outcomes. We fail to do so at the peril of our children.

So...with that said...we are REED Charitable Foundation. We are passionately committed to training every teacher in Orton-Gillingham. We know we are going to make that happen and we hope you will join us. #UntilEveryTeacherIsTrained #UntilEveryChildCanRead

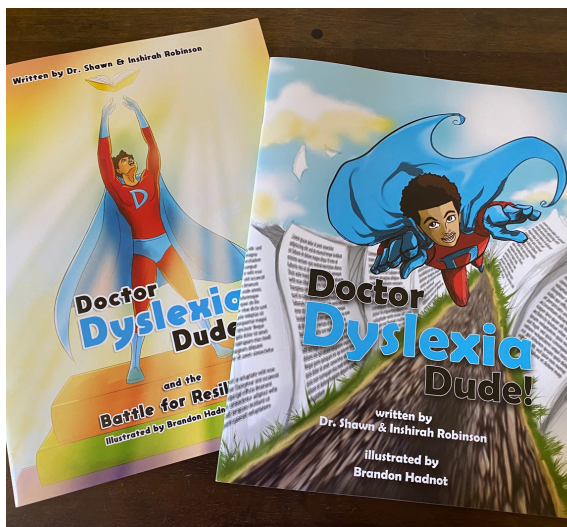
Jennifer Ford Knopf, Esq.  
President | Founding Director

Jen is the Founding Director of REED Charitable Foundation, wife to husband Andrew and mom to two amazing kids - a daughter, Mackenzie, and a son, Reed (who was diagnosed with dyslexia in January of 2018 at seven years old). Of course, her son Reed's story of both struggle and strengths is the inspiration for REED Charitable Foundation ("RCF") but her heart for RCF goes much deeper than that. Jen's background as both a litigation and commercial real estate attorney made her uniquely suited for researching and advocating for her own son's needs - but she quickly learned that their family's battle to find support for her son is a battle at least 20% of the population also faces. Jen also learned that even with personal resources, there is very little legitimate support for dyslexic students - even though we absolutely know how to support them. And, the worse realization of all was the lingering question of "What happens to all of those families and children with no resources at all?" Jen knew the answer to that question was a heartbreaking and also knew it was only a matter of time before she joined with others to create a charitable foundation dedicated to supporting not only the literacy of dyslexic students but literacy for all students.

With a strong legal background, relentless determination and a steadfast belief that literacy is a fundamental human right - Jen is passionately committed to the mission and purpose of this Foundation named after her beloved son.



## FUNDRAISER ALERT



Contribute to a worthy cause for Dyslexia Awareness Month and help make a difference in a child's life.

Purchase a classroom set of Dr. Dyslexia Dude's culturally responsible graphic novels and donate them to a classroom near and dear to your heart. Each set contains a total of 20 books, 10 of the first book and 10 of the second book, and sells for \$90.

Proceeds from the sale of these classroom sets will go to the creation of a scholarship fund created by Drs. Shawn and Inshirah Robinson established with the International Dyslexia Association for the purpose of providing Orton Gillingham tutoring to children in need.

Help us reach the goal of 450 sets to establish this much needed scholarship!

#CulturallyResponsibleGraphicNovels #AHeroJustLikeMe  
#UntilEveryChildCanRead

Purchases can be made at [www.DrDyslexiaDude.com](http://www.DrDyslexiaDude.com)

## THE PARENT SESSIONS



In 2020 we launched a series called The Parent Sessions. In these sessions, which are being led by a powerful, educated and influential group of women who were involved in the Reading First initiative in the state of California, after the National Reading Panel, parents are given information they need to know in order to help educate their own children via the science of reading. If you are a parent, and even if you are an educator who would like to learn more, this is an amazing opportunity to dive into the science of reading instruction.

This is training aimed directly at parents, and that the cost is \$0.00.

You can participate live in the sessions, on a first come, first served basis and registration is required. You can see the signup on our Events section of our Facebook page and our website. The sessions will not air live on Facebook, but will be via Zoom, and are limited to 100 attendees each.

But, don't worry if you miss a session! Each session is recorded and all the related materials and the recording may be found on our website, <https://www.thedyslexiainitiative.org/the-parent-sessions> as well as our YouTube channel, but for the materials discussed you will need to access our web page.

Subscription to our site is not required to access, but we do encourage you to subscribe to website, and of course, subscription is free.

## FEATURED BLOG ARTICLE

### I CAN'T MAKE YOU HAPPY

So, again, can I put it nicer that balanced literacy is a failure? Maybe. Should I? Will that change things? Will that speed up or slow down the efforts of advocates like myself to change the face of education?

I don't think it will. I can nicely share the statistics, frame them in a way that make them less threatening. I could do a lot of things differently, but that's not going to get the message across. The situation we are in needs to disturb us all. It needs to keep us collectively awake at night. Education has to be at the forefront of all policy at this point, or nothing else will matter. This is a non partisan issue.

To read more please go to:  
[www.thedyslexiainitiative.org/post/i-can-t-make-you-happy](http://www.thedyslexiainitiative.org/post/i-can-t-make-you-happy)



## THE DYSLEXIA INITIATIVE YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Did you know that DI is on YouTube? You didn't? What??????

Well, we are. All of our media content is available to stream at any time on YouTube from Dyslexia Coffee Talk sessions, to special interviews we've done, all the way to The Parent Sessions.

We work hard to keep all of our parent friendly content free and so we load as much as we can to YouTube. Go check it out and while you're there, don't forget to subscribe so you are alerted when new content is available.

See you there!

To read more please go to:  
[www.YouTube.com/channel/UCbHMBvY8QurMgcndafBsHJQ](http://www.YouTube.com/channel/UCbHMBvY8QurMgcndafBsHJQ)



Don't forget to subscribe for updates like our newsletter and more on our website,  
[www.TheDyslexiaInitiative.org](http://www.TheDyslexiaInitiative.org).

