

THE DYSLLEXIA REVOLUTION

Quarterly Newsletter from The Dyslexia Initiative



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A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER

We had an intro written. It's usually the first thing we write for each newsletter, but this time, this section is one of the last things written. We don't go into this message with a plan, but what's happening in the moment drives what is written here.

And, that's exactly what's happened...this moment is what is driving this text; so, with that being said...

This issue is dedicated to our children.
This issue is dedicated to the adults.
This issue is dedicated to my child.
But, more importantly...

This issue is dedicated to those we've lost.
This issue is dedicated to
Timmy
and all the precious souls like him.
May they rest in peace.



HERE'S THE THING...

BY: ASHLEY ROBERTS

As we march head first into Dyslexia Awareness Month, let's take a moment to pause and consider....

I'm going to try to say this right, but inherently I'm going to get it wrong, and I'm going to get it wrong because I'm not dyslexic, I'm just the parent of a dyslexic child, and in being such I can only speak from my perspective, not his, and certainly not for any dyslexic person.

When I started my public advocacy journey four years ago I was a non-dyslexic parent trying to navigate the school system with little to no knowledge in order to help my child. My first year was quite a learning experience, but I don't want to focus on that because I want to get to year two, because that's when I had a conversation that shaped the way I advocate. Even saying those words doesn't define it right so let me try again. I had a conversation that shaped the way I wanted to advocate, and the kind of advocacy that I wanted to foster in others. This conversation was with someone I deeply admire and consider a friend. She is an adult dyslexic who is a survivor of the educational establishment's refusal to teach dyslexic children.

Survivor is the right word choice, and it's the right choice because of the trauma that was created for millions of dyslexic children across the decades.

She said something profound in that conversation which was that the dyslexia advocacy movement was driven by almost all non-dyslexic parents who mean well, but the collective voice of the adult dyslexic is entirely ignored; their pain, their trauma, their everything is ignored in favor of the voice of the non-dyslexic parent who in their desire to march forth on behalf of their children, has forgotten they aren't dyslexic and unwittingly create harm for the adult dyslexic population through the myopia of their actions. She told me she would only support me if I remembered that I'm not dyslexic, and that I honor the adult dyslexic voice and never forget their experience, because other than our children, theirs is the voice, the story, the truth that matters.

She told me she would only support me if I remembered that I'm not dyslexic, and that I honor the adult dyslexic voice and never forget their experience, because other than our children, theirs is the voice, the story, the truth that matters.

I try to always remember this, to keep these words as my guiding star.

So, an event occurred this week that has left me pondering many things over the last few days, and me being me, I have to get it out of my head by writing to make sense of it all. So to that end, let us begin with some definitions:

Definition of **sympathy**: Feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else's misfortune.

Definition of **empathy**: The ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

I think empathy can only be achieved when one has lived the same experience. No matter what the situation is, we all desire to give and have empathy, but the truth is that unless you can walk in that person's shoes through shared experience, empathy isn't possible. Feel free to disagree with me on this point, but that's what my almost five decades has taught me about the human condition and our emotional capability.



Recently I shared this quote from Brené Brown:

"In order to empathize with someone's experience you must be willing to believe them as they see it, and not how you imagine their experience to be."

I then went on to say the following:

"Empathy is a difficult emotion to manage. We want to believe we have empathy, but unless you can truly understand what the other person is saying and experiencing, and layer your own similar experience on top of it and / or fully envision that happening to you as well, without altering the details to make it more "tolerable," and experience the emotions they are conveying, then what you have is either sympathy, because you feel for them, or apathy, because you think it's ridiculous and you could care less."

As a non-dyslexic I can have sympathy, and to a slight extent empathy for the trauma of the dyslexic individual, but I cannot have true empathy because the trauma that a dyslexic child experiences inside of school isn't something I can relate to. I want to, I try to, and I have profound respect for that trauma, but I cannot empathize because I've not walked in those shoes and cannot layer my own similar experience on top of it because I do not have a similar experience. That is my truth and one I must own. It would be shameful for me to state or act otherwise.

The problem with not being able to fully empathize is that one cannot always see all sides because you can't necessarily see what you've not experienced. It's not for a lack of desire to understand, it's simply a bridge that someone who has not walked in those shoes cannot cross. As an inadvertent consequence, because you lack this experience, you may have a certain myopic view, which isn't intentional, but it does exist, does happen.

Now, the act of being myopic isn't evil when it's not by choice, quite the opposite, but what it does mean is that we need to be cognizant of those who lived the experience, otherwise we are not valuing the truth, the issue, the person /people we claim to want to protect / honor / respect / help.

A meme circulated this week, that when seen through the myopic lens of only focusing on reading instruction, was liked, loved, and shared by many. I am, admittedly, one of those people. I loved the meme, but I did not share it. I had meant to, but I got busy and never got around to it. When I saw the meme, I didn't see the image beneath the words, or the words that were crossed out, or what was trying to be conveyed, or how it was being conveyed. What I saw was the "corrected" text and I agreed with the statement. The problem was I did not look at the whole thing, did not consider the full context, did not consider the manner in which the message was being communicated. It is also important to add too that I do not think the creator of the image meant to insult or trigger anyone. I think this was an innocently meant message that had deeper meaning than could be realized at the time of its creation, because again, unless you walk in the shoes of the people who live this experience, your capacity to see all angles is limited.

If we deconstruct the words, the intended message, from the image, the message is simple, and one in which can all agree:

"The simplest way to make sure that we raise literate children is...to teach them to read with evidence informed instruction so they can lift the words from the page without guessing. Then they can find books they enjoy and read them."

This is accurate regarding reading instruction, and again we all agree that this holds true.

As dyslexia advocates, we all fight for Structured Literacy. There are none of us that do not, dyslexic or non-dyslexic. The angst about the image that was shared has nothing to do with whether or not we should be providing Structured Literacy, and it is important that this is clear.

"In order to empathize with someone's experience you must be willing to believe them as they see it, and not how you imagine their experience to be."

Brené Brown



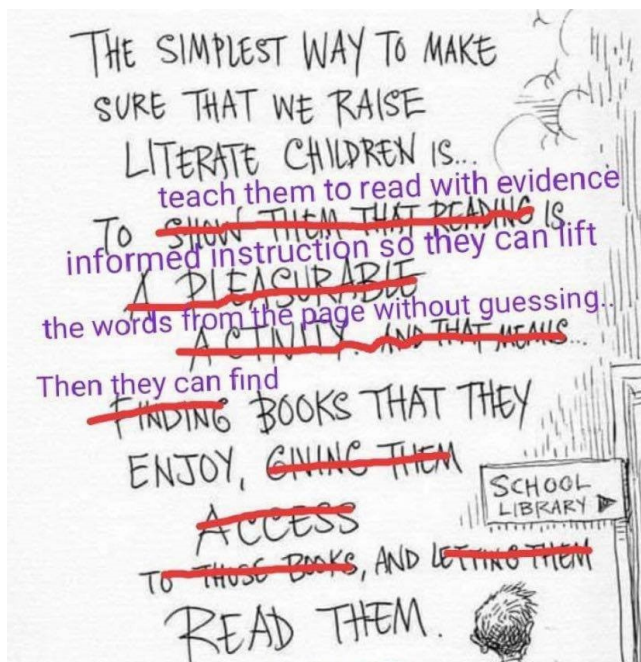
For dyslexia advocates who do not understand the angst, which is difficult to understand if you, like me are not dyslexic, know that it has nothing to do with the words themselves, it is the method and medium of delivery, and if we are to be dyslexia advocates then we must be cognizant of all aspects of dyslexia, not just instructional methods, because the truth is if we are not willing to be cognizant, then we fail to understand that the trauma people are sharing about this image is the trauma our own children will share, because while we fight like demons, we have not eradicated balanced literacy, and our children are still in schools where the damage that was caused to the adult dyslexic population will, can and is happening to our children right now.

I know we all fear this trauma, at least I do. I have friends already confronting real trauma with their own children who are still in school. My husband and I for many years could not discuss certain educational "realities" for pure fear of what it may mean for our child. We've both walked away from each other with tears in our eyes, choking on our words, saying, "I can't talk about this." We all do this I think, but while we fear what the present is doing, what the future may hold, what the cost may be, because there will be a cost so long as poor instructional methods reign supreme, we are still staring into a future of possibility and what if.

And just so it is said, balanced literacy fails all children. It is a failed pedagogy that has a chokehold on education, and more than just our dyslexic children are suffering under its deeply misguided principles, 64% of our children per NAEP, and that's just in the US. What we do not know about the remaining 36% is how well their written expression is, to what grade level above 8th did they reach, to what careers are they capable of achieving, knowing they can read above an 8th grade level. 36% are not guaranteed success, all they're guaranteed is that they can read above an 8th grade level.

"...our children and our grandchildren are less literate and less numerate than we are. They are less able to navigate the world, to understand it to solve problems. They can be more easily lied to and misled, will be less able to change the world in which they find themselves, be less employable. All of these things."

– Neil Gaiman



So recognizing that reading instructional failure does exist, let us instead focus on what it was about the image that was triggering for the dyslexic adults within our community.

You're a school aged child. You're dyslexic. Despite how long it took, you did the work. It wasn't easy. It took more effort than the kid next to you who did it over lunch three days ago, but no, for you it took much longer than that. You struggled understanding the words, so you struggled understanding what you had to do. It took more concentration, more effort, than anyone knows. You maybe even cried about it; punched your pillow; screamed into it to get the frustration out of your soul. Maybe you even didn't do those things...yet...that assignment you worked so hard on is handed back to you and it's red all over. Maybe you're even met with comments like:

"We talked about this for weeks!"

Or

"Try harder!"

Or

"I don't understand where the breakdown is here!"

Or

"Go back and do it again!"



The red cross-outs, the color of blood telling a struggling child how wrong they were in their work output, how their hard effort was for naught because they still needed to be corrected, still maybe failed, still weren't good enough...

The choice of edit on the image, without, I am sure, intending to do so, mirrored the experience of too many dyslexic children who are now adults, and their trauma was triggered.

And this is what we, as non-dyslexic dyslexia advocates must understand...once trauma from our own community is exposed, if we are not sensitive to that trauma, if we fail to acknowledge it, if we fail to own it, then we are not advocating for dyslexia.

And that may be a bitter pill for some, which I can't and won't try to assuage, because in the end, we seek to improve literacy to end the trauma. We do not seek to change literacy for the sake of simply crowning a new pedagogy in the endless cycle of educational pedagogies. We seek to change literacy in order to save our own children, and their children, and their children. We seek to save all children, everywhere, for all time. Therefore, if this is what we seek, then we must acknowledge the existing trauma of those who have already suffered.

To be clear, I am certain the creator of the image didn't mean the outcome, and so I will not share the name of the person who created it, and do not seek to shame them with this post. I seek to remind us all why we must be cognizant of the survivors of the issue for which we claim to fight.

And for the record, Neil Gaiman's quote was from a lecture he gave in 2013 where the header was "Why our future depends on libraries, reading and daydreaming. A lecture explaining why using our imaginations, and providing for others to use theirs, is an obligation for all citizens."

To the right is the original, unedited image:

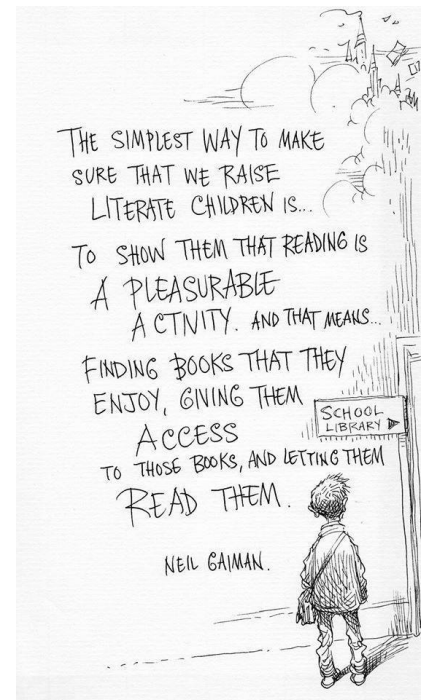
Neil's speech is profound and beautiful. It does not decry literacy, instead it demands it. He does not side with any reading philosophy within the speech, he simply demands that all people be given literacy. We as dyslexia advocates know what that pathway is, and so we are aligned, because the reality is unbearable if we don't.

"I was once in New York, and I listened to a talk about the building of private prisons – a huge growth industry in America. The prison industry needs to plan its future growth – how many cells are they going to need? How many prisoners are there going to be, 15 years from now? And they found they could predict it very easily, using a pretty simple algorithm, based on asking what percentage of 10 and 11-year-olds couldn't read. And certainly couldn't read for pleasure."

-Neil Gaiman

Now, allegedly this algorithm isn't true, but is that to calm people's fears through a lie?

The truth is I won't pretend to know one way or another. The fact is it's late, and I'm tired, but I needed to get these words out of my heart and onto the page. I need to remind us all that we must speak for all, be cognizant of all, and that means honoring the trauma of those who have already survived the system, because survival also doesn't mean they're whole.



Definition of survival: The state or fact of continuing to live or exist, typically in spite of an accident, ordeal, or difficult circumstances.

So, let us continue to fight for Structured Literacy; let us continue to fight for all children to have the right to read, but let us never forget why we are fighting.

And with that, I want to leave you with one additional quote by Neil Gaiman, and a series of Chris Riddell's images from this speech. I hope you find them as beautiful as I do.

"Another way to destroy a child's love of reading, of course, is to make sure there are no books of any kind around. And to give them nowhere to read those books. I was lucky. I had an excellent local library growing up. I had the kind of parents who could be persuaded to drop me off in the library on their way to work in summer holidays, and the kind of librarians who did not mind a small, unaccompanied boy heading back into the children's library every morning and working his way through the card catalogue, looking for books with ghosts or magic or rockets in them, looking for vampires or detectives or witches or wonders. And when I had finished reading the children's' library I began on the adult books."



IT IS OBVIOUSLY IN MY INTEREST FOR PEOPLE TO READ, FOR THEM TO READ FICTION, FOR LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS TO EXIST AND HELP FOSTER A LOVE OF READING AND PLACES IN WHICH READING CAN OCCUR SO I'M BIASED AS A WRITER.

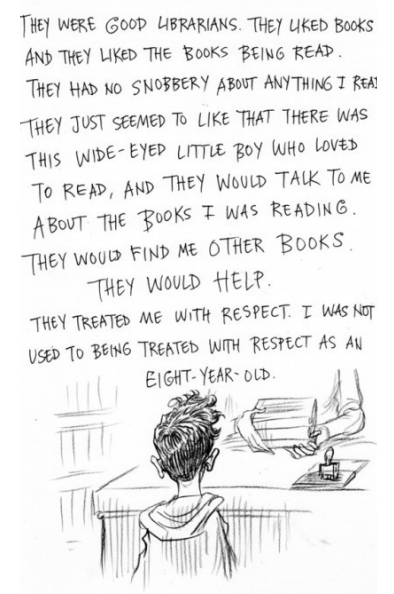
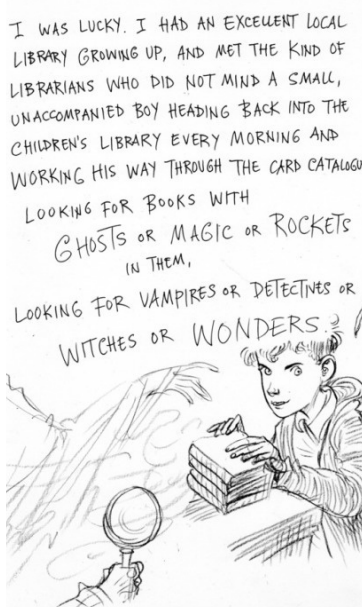
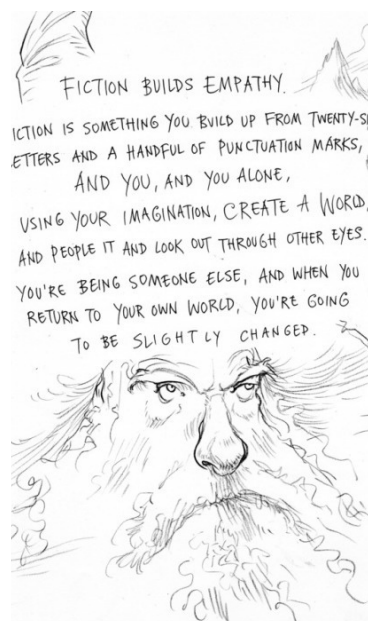
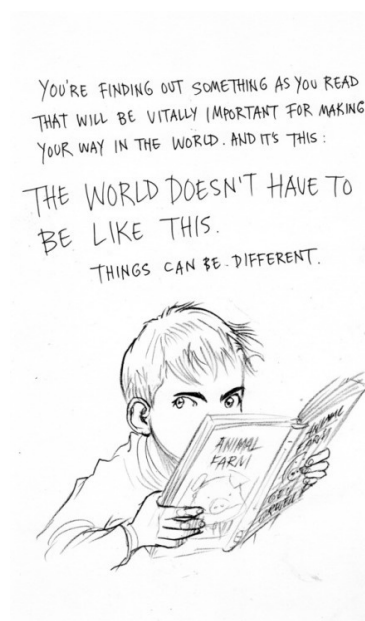
BUT I AM MUCH, MUCH MORE BIASED AS A READER.

EVERYTHING CHANGES WHEN WE READ.

PEOPLE WHO CANNOT UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER CANNOT EXCHANGE IDEAS, CANNOT COMMUNICATE. THE SIMPLEST WAY TO MAKE SURE THAT WE RAISE LITERATE CHILDREN IS TO TEACH THEM TO READ, AND TO SHOW THEM THAT READING IS A PLEASURABLE ACTIVITY.

I DON'T THINK THERE IS SUCH A THING AS A 'BAD BOOK' FOR CHILDREN.

IT'S TOSH. IT'S SNOBBERY AND IT'S FOOLISH WE NEED OUR CHILDREN TO GET ONTO THE READING LADDER: ANYTHING THAT THEY ENJOY READING WILL MOVE THEM UP, RUNG BY RUNG INTO LITERACY.



A LETTER FROM A DEEPLY CONCERNED BUT REFORMED EDUCATOR

BY: SHERRI LUCAS HALL

I entered graduate school in the summer of 2008, at the age of 44 years old. My goal was to become a certified educator for the State of Georgia. My desire to be a teacher began much earlier, but I had avoided making the choice for years, mostly because I knew that teachers didn't make any money, as far as I was concerned. But at 44, I decided that what I wanted more than anything was to teach. I had a provisional certificate and had been working as both a paraprofessional and after-school teacher at the same school for 4 years. I had recently accepted a teaching position with the agreement to obtain a certified teaching license. No problem. At this point, I understood why teachers were offended when anyone would criticize teaching. My four years at the same Title One school had given me an opportunity to see how hard educators work.

I had begun working at the school when my youngest daughter started pre-K there. I had another daughter already at the same school. So, I was elated when the principal walked up behind me one day, at the start of one of my many volunteer days and said "You're here enough that you might as well work here." I laughed it off until she said, "I'm serious."

But back to my entrance into graduate school. I had been working two positions at the school for 4 years, often substituting in various grade levels. I saw first-hand what it was like to teach, particularly in a Title One school in an area that was primarily African American. I saw the financial and human shortage of resources. I saw how minority students, that look like me and others struggled to learn for various reasons. I saw behavior issues and learning issues on a regular basis. I wasn't sure what caused either issue, but I knew the issues existed. I wanted to help the students we served. I wanted to improve what I knew about teaching so that I could be a stronger educator. So, I spent 2 years pursuing that Master of Arts in Teaching and in August 2010 I was granted my degree. I was proud and eager to begin to serve students better than I had before the degree.

I became an official kindergarten teacher, although I had been given the position provisionally two years prior. I spent one of those years in first grade and it was a difficult year. There was SO MUCH that I did NOT know, and I just figured that once I had the master's degree I'd know much more. So, with my new master's degree in hand, I began another new year in kindergarten, excited to be able to make a real difference in the education of those students. I spent 7 years in kindergarten learning what it's like to teach these early learners. I saw more of what I had seen at the school as both a paraprofessional and after-school teacher. There were LOTS of behavior issues, particularly because kindergarten is often some students' first school experience. There were learning issues for the same reason. But I felt that as the educator, it was my responsibility to discover the why of those behavior issues and learning issues. It wasn't enough for me to just say a child couldn't learn because I always believed that EVERY child could learn. If there was a behavior concern, I believed that it could be addressed somehow.

I spent those 7 years trying to discover the why behind every student struggle. I had my own educator struggles as well. I had determined that something was missed in my graduate training. I wasn't sure exactly what, but I knew I was missing some educator tools. I was struggling to teach some students how to read no matter how much extra effort I put into preparing and teaching lessons. I had begun to research teaching resources in order to improve what I knew and could already do in my classroom. I found websites like Florida Center for Reading Research that helped me to understand some missing elements in my teacher training. The resources there helped me to make some instructional changes to better meet the needs of struggling students.



One of my questions was what skills did I need to ensure my Kindergarten students had that would adequately prepare them for first grade? I had spent a year in first grade early in my short teaching career and it hadn't gone well at all. But it did give me an idea of the skills students needed when they moved on to first grade. My thoughts were that given the time I had spent in kindergarten, I wanted to see how the skills taught transferred to the next grade level. I began to request a move to teach first grade. At the end of my 7 years, I was finally granted permission to loop with my class. I was more than excited.

I began teaching first grade with some of the knowledge I had obtained through my research of effective teaching skills. Three years in first grade proved that there was still some element of teaching that I lacked. I LOVED teaching. There wasn't anything I didn't like other than the money I often had to spend to make sure that my students had what they needed in terms of classroom resources. This was a Title One school though, and I felt the expense was worth it for my students. The goal was learning. Meeting that goal wasn't always easy. I still had moments of struggle, particularly my last year of teaching at the school during the 2018-2019 school year.

What I had learned in my quest to make sure students were effectively taught was that some of the tools/skills/resources that I was using, provided by my district, weren't effectively helping students learn to read. I didn't understand. Why would we be using instructional tools that weren't effective for teaching? I didn't believe it was intentional though. I figured it was because the district/school just didn't know. I had spent 4 of my 10 teaching years trying to learn what was best for students. What did I need to do to ENSURE that students were learning? In that 4-year period, I had made some huge discoveries. I knew that my teacher training had been ineffective. I was missing some vital skills and understandings that I needed to help my students learn to read. I also began to understand the criticism that teachers were receiving.

Students were failing and students had BEEN failing for a while. Yet schools weren't making any big changes in what was being done in reading instruction. The criticism may have been justified. But how could I, as an educator, justify the criticism of my profession? I had discovered a podcast by Emily Hanford at the beginning of the 2018 school year, which would ultimately be the end of my time at that school. Emily spoke about the failure of reading instruction. I had been studying and asking questions specifically about reading instruction long enough to know that she was telling the truth about the failure. I had criticisms of my own about my profession at this point.

Emily's podcast referenced the Science of Reading. Dyslexia was slightly familiar to me at this point. I had made the discovery during the last couple of years as a kindergarten teacher. I didn't have a strong understanding of it, but I knew it existed and it affected the learning of students. There had been a glaze over discussion of the struggle in graduate school but only enough to mention it as a possibility in special cases. That was it. The way it was mentioned in grad school, one would think that cases were few and far between. But I had enough experience by this time to know that there was something deeper that I needed to know if I was going to serve students better.

That school year there was an incident in my classroom that would prove to me that the possibility of dyslexia having an effect on student learning was greater than I had been led to believe and that real change was necessary in order to help students that struggled with dyslexia. Ultimately, I lost my teaching position at that school, but I was led to a journey into the science of reading that would deepen my understanding of dyslexia, reading struggles and the teaching of reading. I've since spent the last almost 3 years learning about dyslexia and how the brain processes the English language.

Dyslexia affects 1 in 5 students. There have been many days when I wish that I had known this in the beginning of my teaching career. There are so many faces of students that I still see that I believe MAY have been experiencing the struggles of dyslexia, but because I didn't have the skills or knowledge about the struggle, I was unable to support those students well. They moved on to struggle with this challenge, much like many students are still doing to date.



After 3 years of studying the science of reading, obtaining an Educator's OG certificate and beginning LETrS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading & Spelling) training I understand how essential it is that educators AND administrators become knowledgeable about the brain science and how the brain processes the English Language. It is truly the ONLY way to begin to better serve our struggling students. Those that don't struggle can also benefit when educators possess the knowledge about the science of reading. What I know for certain is that we cannot continue to do what has been done for students in reading because it just isn't enough to support the learning for far too many students. So, it's not a criticism of my profession that educators/administrators need to learn more about the reading brain. It's a fact that is necessary if we are going to better serve the youngest citizens of this country.

Signed,
A Deeply Concerned But Reformed Educator
Sherri Lucas-Hall



Sherri Lucas-Hall is an educator and a student of the #ScienceOfReading via LETrS.

ARE YOU AN EDUCATOR AND WOULD LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SCIENCE OF READING?

The role of educator is not an easy one. It is collectively recognized that the colleges across the country are not providing instruction in either dyslexia or the science of reading via structured literacy instruction. There are some yes, a small list really, but the vast majority are not sharing this information. What that means is to learn about the science of reading, meaning how the brain actually learns to read, requires personal time and sometimes personal investment.

We would like to help by creating constructive conversations and providing the resources that can help guide you and your teams to #SoR via Structured Literacy.

On our website we have a dedicated page purely for educators. Like all content the page will always remain under construction meaning that it will constantly evolve as more resources become available. We encourage you to check out what is there now, and come back often to see new resources as they are posted. If you have any suggestions to share with us too, we'd love to hear.

All of our children deserve the right to literacy. This is a community effort.

You've dedicated your life to children. We thank you for your commitment and dedication. Now, let us help you find a way to ensure all children learn to read.

<https://www.thedyslexiainitiative.org/for-educators>



A FORMER TEACHER'S STORY ON HOW BALANCED LITERACY FAILED MY SON

BY: MISSY PURCELL

Sometimes the only way we can change the way we think is to actually see the need for change with our very own eyes . . .

I will never forget sitting in Matthew's kindergarten parent/teacher conference. I knew my youngest was struggling to learn to read, and I wanted to know why. His teacher reminded he had a summer birthday, encouraged me that he would catch up, and challenged me to just keep reading with him.

Even though she was the sweetest teacher, I remember her advice was chilling and unsettling. Because I had given that same advice to parents of struggling readers over and over when I taught 5th grade years ago.

See, I was a fifth grade teacher in the early 2000s, and YES - I had kids every year that stepped into my classroom that could not read, spell, or write on grade level.

To be honest, I was just as confident as Matthew's teacher was during that conference with my own students. But hearing her advice made me remember all the kids I had taught in fifth grade who could not read the words.

Often, I would commiserate with my fellow colleagues in the hall . . . we all wondered what the early elementary teachers were (or were NOT) doing to create so many kids that were not proficient in these foundational skills.



Ignorance Isn't Bliss

Oddly, back then, I didn't even know what to call the actual problem. But I knew something was wrong with a fifth grader not being able to read the words fluently, not being able to spell basic words consistently, and even sometimes not being able to write a simple narrative or informational piece.

Even more disturbing, I thought I had the solution then.

You see, I was programmed by both my college and district during my formative teaching years to believe this myth:

If I could just get kids to love reading, spelling and writing, then they would be able to master it.



This myth fueled my creation of a reading and writing workshop environment that was filled with fun, engaging, creative mini-lessons, conferences, guiding reading, word work, and independent reading and writing. If you walked into my room, there was no doubt that I was a balanced literacy expert. Except, I didn't know that term or any of the controversy surrounding it. I just thought I was using the gold standard of best practices for teaching kids to read.

The hard reality of it all is that the same kids that couldn't read, spell, and write at the beginning of the year, **still** couldn't at the end of the year.

Sure, they made progress. But not enough to close a gap that was not just doubling, but sometimes tripling in size. What's worse, I told these parents that they could help close this widening gap if they would get their kids to read and write more!

And yet, year after year, no matter how much I differentiated, leveled, conferred, modeled, guided, and responded to each individual student, I had kids that could still not read the words. They entered and exited my classroom unchanged, and it bothered me that my methods only seemed to benefit some kids and leave others years behind their peers.

And now, I personally had my very own kid that could not read . . . and the advice I was given over and over? It grew hollow year after year as teacher after teacher told me to wait and keep reading more. Keep trying harder. Keep encouraging him to read. I was determined not to let him become one of the students I had failed.

But little did I know, we had started on a journey to failure that would lead to my very own son being a fifth grader that could not read the words.

Good News Gone Bad

First grade balanced literacy produced a new trick for us to try and help our son read the words. It was called Reading Recovery.

Reading Recovery had been around since the dark ages of my early teaching career, but I had no idea that at its core, it was simply more of the exact same method Matthew has been already receiving. The only difference is this instruction was delivered in smaller settings with a side dish of analytic phonics. Sadly after twenty wasted weeks, he made no measurable progress

By this point, my sweet little boy was becoming a shell of himself. In just two short years, he had already learned to hate school, defined himself as stupid, and developed mysterious illnesses that had me checking him out of school quite too often. It was also the year that despite struggles with reading, the school began to focus on his behavior. My seven-year-old son was given four action plans that year and called "violent" by his intervention teacher. I was terrified that my son was going to be labeled with words I could not control. More than anything, I wanted to find the label that accurately defined this little boy that I could see was struggling to read, screaming out with behaviors that begged for someone to help him.

By second grade, my son was granted an IEP for a specific learning disability that everyone hinted was dyslexia, but no one would say it. I remember so naively celebrating.

Now we knew what the problem was! Now we could get the correct instruction to help him read the words!



With this "good news," I was told Matthew would be receiving a very effective program designed for kids like him called LLI, Leveled Literacy Instruction by Fountas & Pinnell. Praying for improvement, Matthew walked into his second grade year on an F&P BAS level E. After a year of instruction with the LLI, he ended that year on a level E. Worst of all, he ended second grade absolutely hating school more than any kid I had ever met. He would do anything to avoid reading or writing.

How could such an effective program yield such poor outcomes? More importantly, I was starting to wonder if anyone cared that I was watching a system destroy my sweet little boy.

The Science of Reading and a Ray of Hope

In my desperation to help Matthew, I did what all mommas that want to help their kids would do. I researched. Frantically, I began researching anything and everything that could help struggling readers. Hours upon hours were spent finding what methods of instruction were best.

Much to my own surprise, I began to find books, blogs, mountains of research that revealed another way to teach reading: Structured Literacy that followed the Science of Reading.

And in every single way possible, I discovered Structured Literacy was both the antonym and antidote for kids like Matthew and my former students that were being failed by balanced literacy in classrooms all over the country.

I discovered that reading was not just thinking.

My former students and Matthew could not read words because they could not decode. In fact, reading comprehension is the product of decoding and listening comprehension. If a student can't do one of those things well, it derails the overall reading comprehension for a child.

In my research, I discovered a whole world of teachers on a Facebook page called The Science of Reading, What I Should have Learned in College. I spent hours scrolling through teacher after teacher who were just like me. Since college, we had been programmed to embrace and implement a program riddled with flawed methodology and a community of leaders that consistently deterred leaders from embracing methods of instruction that were actually backed by science.

Unlike balanced literacy, I learned Structured Literacy is explicit, systematic teaching that focuses on phonological awareness, word recognition, phonics and decoding, spelling, and syntax at sentence and paragraph levels.

In all transparency, I didn't even know what half of those words meant or what they looked like in a classroom. But I knew Matthew wasn't getting them. Simply put, phonics, decoding, and spelling are not emphasized and rarely taught systematically in a balanced literacy classroom. I knew this as a former balanced teacher, but as I watched Matthew struggle year after year, I now knew it personally.



The Matthew Effect

Like any good momma, I took my new knowledge to the school with the assumption that they would embrace it just like it did. I was excited to help them see this entire body of scientific evidence, so they could help not just my son, but all the other kids waiting for someone to teach them to read the words.

My astonishment at their response shouldn't have been shocking. But it was. The school politely took my articles, books, and blogs and kindly let me know they would use Orton Gillingham for phonics and stick with LLI for comprehension. They thought blending the two methods was the best approach.

Time was of essence to help Matthew learn to read. And after hearing the school's response to structured literacy, I feared that all hope was lost. On top of that, I had also learned about an idea in reading called the Matthew Effect, a term that hit a little too close to home for me. It means that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Sociologist Daniel Rigney, who has written a book called *The Matthew Effect: How Advantage Begets Further Advantage*, adds, "Educational psychologists find that children who like to read tend to read more. Reading more helps to make them better readers, further enhancing their enjoyment of reading."

My Matthew was supposed to be reading to learn now, but he was actually still learning to decode. Clearly, if we didn't make changes, he was going to be just like my former students for whom the gap had widened exponentially, and no one even knew why.

I wish I could say this story has a happy ending, but it doesn't. The school continued to implement failed literacy practices. As a result, my son continued to lag behind and struggle academically. More alarmingly, he began to struggle emotionally.

By fourth grade, Matthew's biggest dream in life was to learn to read. My amazingly talented little baseball player who hated school - his biggest dream was not to play ball. It wasn't to become a major leaguer. It was to learn to read.

After over five years of balanced literacy, he was now a fourth grader who could not read. Five years of wasted time on an experimental practice that has zero scientific evidence showing its effectiveness.

Like my former students, his light had officially burned out. He was now as broken as the system that failed him.

Hope for a Future Change in Reading Instruction

Over time, the agony of waiting for change leaves a person thinking about what one would do differently if going back in time was possible. For one thing, I'd tell myself that putting a band-aid on a deeply flawed system is not enough to change it.

In the here and now, I would offer a challenge to all balanced literacy teachers to do what I did. Read the books. Join the Facebook world. Learn what science has to say about how kids learn to read the words.

But most importantly, remember Matthew. A little boy whose dreams were limited because balanced literacy failed to teach him to read the words.

When we lay down our weapons and choose to see the kids who have the most loss in this fight over balanced versus structured literacy, it changes how we see everything. Because what's true is that our children are the casualties of adults who hold on to methods that science tells us fail many and help few.

May we all be willing to loosen our grip on a method we weren't fully educated on, and begin our own journey toward using evidence-based instructional methods that help all and harm none.

Maybe then we can create a new Matthew effect. One where all the Matthews can reach their potential because their teachers use a method of reading instruction that makes learning to read possible for all kids.



Missy Purcell is a former teacher, a wife and mother. She is a convert from balanced literacy and now works to encourage educators across the country to embrace the #ScienceOfReading.

WHY THE KIDS CAN'T WAIT

BY: LAUREN TAYLOR

I've spent the last three weeks attempting to process the loss of someone I mourned fifteen years ago. I have never had the courage to speak on this. Out of shame I felt that I would be judged for my past. In doing that I now realize that I created that shame, I created that judgement. My best friend, like my son and so many of my other friends was Dyslexic. While my advocating for my son afforded him the ability to be seen as a child who could overcome almost anything, my friends were not afforded anything that resembled empathy. I have seen far too many articles regarding the statistics attached to our children, yet no one speaks on the tragedy that is their life until they are no longer here. For far too many of my adult dyslexic friends, this is not something they ever want to willingly place out into the universe. Their trauma is real. They knew nothing other than that fight that almost broke them. Then there are the ones that didn't make it to tell their story.

I will never be able to tell their story in full. I will only be able to tell you what I witnessed through their eyes. Their pain was palpable and on display our entire lives. They were never afforded normal. They never got to bring home a piece of graded classwork that wasn't shredded to pieces with a red pen. A teacher knowingly or unknowingly shaming them for

something they had no control over. I grew up in the most affluent school district in the state of Georgia. In the 80's our school district was the best in the country. And for the normal kids it was. I was one of those kids. I was afforded every single luxury they had to offer. Too many of my friends were not. They excelled in sports and detention. My best friend routinely had the school resource officers show up to his home for off campus behavior. This didn't just happen to him, it happened to an entire district full of children who could not read. They started their life in juvenile detention at the age of 12 and the cycle never stopped. This was accepted as the status quo, and furthermore we were taught that they were where they needed to be. Their families were shamed by an entire community. When they'd return home longing for that embrace from their parents, they were met with their bags packed and told to go somewhere else. THEY WERE CHILDREN.

My mother opened our home to these children. We don't speak on this because we protected these kids. They were our adopted siblings. We protected them as if they were our own. My mother took them in and offered them a sense of normalcy they did not receive anywhere else. This open-door policy started when I was only 12 years old. My mother was trying to stop what she knew could happen one day. She knew they were children that just needed to be accepted for who they were. They were not broken. There was nothing to fix. She saw how they solved problems outside of the box. She was able to see past the behavior. We'd been watching this play out with my own sister, so it made sense to us. Unfortunately, this was never explained to their parents. We tried. I remember when I tried to explain to my best friend's mother he was not broken. He was not worthless. He was perfect just the way he was. I was told repeatedly he was a lost cause by his own mother. I don't care if she reads this either. If she reads this maybe just maybe, she'll understand his "why". Maybe the entire family will understand his why.

This is the reason kids can't wait to be diagnosed. Children have been thrown away or considered less than my entire life. All because they had an undiagnosed learning disorder. It was extremely hard for me to stomach this as their reality while I was in the thick of it. I didn't come to terms with their "why" until my own son was diagnosed. The day I realized my son was Dyslexic was the day that my heart jumped to my throat and remained there. I realized in that moment I had a monumental task in front of me and I only got one chance at this. I had until the age of 12 to make sure my son didn't become one of them.



I want to normalize that. I want to normalize WHY we fight to make sure our kids don't become one of them. On that note, can we PLEASE stop referring to children as THEM? They were children just like the rest of us. I loved my best friend. For all his flaws and faults, for better or worse, I loved him and there was nothing anyone could say to make me regret ever falling in love with this broken boy I met when I was 12 years old. I spent more than half of my life attempting to fix someone who didn't need to be fixed. He was beautiful just the way he was. His eyes told a story he'd only share with a few. I knew his secrets. I knew the things he thought about in the dark. I knew his fears, and I knew his dreams. He could have been a professional baseball player. That too was stolen from him when our school district decided he was a behavior problem. He rarely held his head high. He didn't think he had anything in his life worthy of being proud about. I knew there were SO many reasons for him to be proud, but in the chaos that was his life, he never stepped back to see just how much he was loved. The chaos, my god the chaos. Constantly triaging that chaos drained the life out of me. I kept my door open and my phone on just because I knew he needed somewhere to sleep. He needed a shower. He needed clean clothes. He needed to feel safe.

Trying to explain what these statistics look like in real life breaks my heart. In fact, my heart was so broken by his death that I could not bring myself to attend his "celebration of life" I was a bag of mixed emotions. I had to tell his 21-year-old son something I'd sworn to relay to him in the event his dad wasn't able to say it himself. Think about that, my best friend KNEW he probably wouldn't be able to say this himself. He KNEW he'd be gone before he could repair a relationship he longed for. The day that I relayed that message to his estranged son I fell to pieces. It didn't have to be this way. All my best friend wanted was to be a father. He wanted a life that literally all of us that made it out alive had. It was THAT simple. He just wanted to be a good dad. He wanted to show his children a love he wasn't shown. Even THAT was stolen from him. I had to explain to his son that his father had never stopped loving him. They had to make a decision when he was a toddler that no mother ever wants to make. We knew his son needed stability and my best friend could not give him that. Not then. His son truly believed his father didn't want him. I had to explain to him that his father literally gave everything up because he loved him that much. I told him that I was there the day he was born. I told him I had purchased his first pair of VANS. All the things his son never knew about his dad came to light. THIS is our reality. This was MY reality. This IS everyone's reality who slipped through the cracks. The pain and suffering bestowed upon their families and their loved one's cuts deeper than their passing. At least we know they aren't in pain anymore when they pass. Grappling with what happens to him now has haunted me since the day I found out he was gone. I had to call TWO of my friends and ask them if he would be judged or if he would be given grace.

I cried for the first time in probably two years on the day they held his service. I broke down and cried harder than I've ever cried. My tears came on so quickly they physically hurt. My husband finally saw it. He finally saw what I'd been attempting to shield him from. I learned years ago there was nothing I could do to prevent what I knew would happen. I had become numb to losing my friends. I cannot even keep count of how many of my friends I've lost due to the same underlying theme. They were all kids with parents who were told to wait and see. The absolute cruel irony in ALL of this is they were all intelligent. They were not stupid. When it was my best friends time, there was nothing numb about it. In fact, I longed for that numbness. I didn't want to have these emotions. I had to remind myself to breathe every single time I came across another photo of him and I as children. I could not let his family see me this way. I had gone through this before six years ago. Sadly, my childhood best friend from kindergarten up until the day she took her life was also Dyslexic. Her son attends the same school my son now attends. I didn't allow myself to cry until they walked her ashes past me. I saw her children and my heart was shattered. To this day I still have moments where I want to tell her children how amazing their mother was. The emotions towards this broken system are deep and often do not come out in any other way than anger. In the moments I break, I truly do break. It takes months if not years to move on. The unfortunate reality for my children and husband would be that they've been robbed of ever seeing their mother and wife show her true emotions. My wall went up and never came down. This doesn't make me a bad partner or parent. This is how I survive. If I allowed myself to mourn all the ones that I've lost I'd never be able to recover. I am probably one of the biggest empath's that you'll ever meet. My heart is constantly broken. My faith in humanity is always ripped to shreds. I use those emotions that I suppress to fuel my ability to continue this fight.





I remember being taught in school that children and adults that could not read were stupid. We made fun of "them", and it was considered ACCEPTABLE. WE contributed to their pain because society considered CHILDREN less than. I advocate for CHILDREN because I couldn't save my friends. I remember thinking out loud while also posting it online, maybe just maybe if I catch the kids BEFORE it happens, I can save them. THAT is why I advocate for children. I do not do this for any other reason. I do this to save children's lives. I do this to stop the pain. I do this to prevent another family from losing their child. I spent years self-medicating because I could not save my friends. I was a functional alcoholic. They were addicts. We all had a disease. I was able to overcome my disease, they were not. Their demons would prove to be too much. The temptation to repeat the generational curse of dyslexia was too much for them. I know my style of advocating isn't the same as others and that's fine. I don't have time to explain my why. I am literally racing against a clock that only gives me 12 years. I am racing to save children before the statistics kick in. Parents and children cannot continue to wait. My friends should not have learned to read in jail. They were afforded more of an education in jail than they were ever afforded in the traditional brick and mortar walls where it should occur. We need to normalize their pain and acknowledge their why. We need to normalize

that it is not okay to consider illiterate adults unintelligent. Their parents were told to wait and see, wait, and see if they get better. Their parents were failed, and because of that they lost their children to statistics that will forever keep me up at night. So many children have lost their parents to the same statistics. Their children will never understand why.

"I'm on the road again
 To find some peace
 Some old gravel road
 God only knows
 There's nothing for me
 And there ain't nothing left for me in Tennessee
 Because I know you're not awake thinking of me
 And there's something 'bout just laying down and taking all that pain
 I'd rather drive all night if it's all the same"

Lauren Taylor is a mother and advocate, fighting for more than just the right to FAPE for her own children, but all children in multiple states. You can follow her on "Our Dyslexic Journey" on Facebook.



DYSLEXIA MYTHS & URBAN LEGENDS

Myth:

Dyslexia cannot be diagnosed until the child is in 3rd grade.

Fact:

Professionals with extensive training can accurately diagnose dyslexia as early as age 5.

The sooner a diagnosis is made, the quicker your child can get help, and the greater chance you have of closing the educational gap. Be aware of the signs for dyslexia before 3rd grade. A combination of a family history of dyslexia and symptoms of difficulties in spoken language can help identify a vulnerable child even before he/she begins formal schooling.



Myth:

The child can't be dyslexic. They've made it through the lower grades just fine. Now they're just being defiant and refusing to do the work.

Fact:

Dyslexic children are excellent compensators. They will use clues, memorize as much as they can, guess at context using the habits of poor readers like using picture clues and more, but in the higher grades when picture cues go away and they are required to read to learn, not learn to read, the tools they use to compensate will not help them any longer. Additionally, holes that exist in their understanding of the alphabetic code or issues with fluency will impact their comprehension of text and they will begin to struggle. A child or adults age is irrelevant in the diagnosis of dyslexia. Starting as young as 5, children can be diagnosed, and unidentified children and adults can be diagnosed at any age.



Myth:

More boys than girls have dyslexia.

Fact:

Boys' reading disabilities are indeed identified more often than girls', but studies indicate that such identification is biased. The actual prevalence of the disorder is nearly identical in the two sexes. So why are more boys sent for testing than girls? It's because of their behavior. It seems when boys in first, second, or third grade can't do classroom assignments or homework, they get frustrated and act out their frustration. Parents and teachers notice that behavior and then try to figure out why they are behaving that way -- by sending them for testing. But often, when girls in first, second, or third grade can't do the work, they tend to get quiet, move to the back of the room, and try to become invisible. So they don't get noticed as early.



Myth:

Dyslexic children will never read well, so it's best to teach them to compensate.

Fact:

Individuals with dyslexia can become terrific readers with the proper instruction. It is important to identify a child early in his/her school career in order to discover any problems and engage in proper instruction / remediation as young as possible.



**Myth:**

Retaining a child (i.e., holding them back a grade) will improve their academic struggles.

Fact:

According to several institutions (i.e., The U.S. Department of Education, The American Federation of Teachers and The National Association of School Psychologists) and their extensive research, there is no benefit to retention because it has never improved a student's academic struggles. This is especially true if the method of instruction, e.g. the use of balanced literacy, doesn't change. Repeating the same unhelpful curriculum will simply harm the child's self esteem.

Myth:

We acquire a majority of our phonological awareness from language rich environments.

Fact:

Regardless of how language and literacy rich your environment may be, phonological awareness must be explicitly taught. Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize and manipulate the spoken parts of sentences and words. Examples include being able to identify words that rhyme, recognizing alliteration, segmenting a sentence into words, identifying the syllables in a word, and blending and segmenting onset-rimes. The National Reading Panel report states that explicit phonological awareness instruction is highly effective for developing phonological awareness in children, which in turn prepares them to read words and comprehend text.

**Myth:**

Accommodations are a crutch, and the child for whom they are made will become lazy.

Fact:

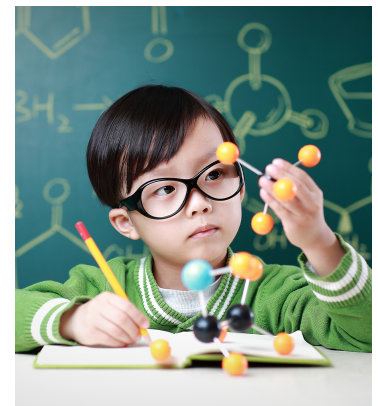
Accommodations are not an advantage; it is an attempt to level the playing field whether it is a standardized test, class work, or homework assignments, however accommodations should NOT replace high quality, explicit instruction based on the scientific data for both reading and writing, otherwise it's just a thing given to a child to enable a school to claim they're helping, when in reality they're not.

Myth:

Children with dyslexia are just lazy. They should try harder.

Fact:

Research has shown, via fMRIs that those with dyslexia use a different part of their brain when reading and working with language. Dyslexic people show a different pattern of brain function when reading: underactivity in some regions, overactivity in others which, according to researchers, accounts for the difficulty they have in extracting meaning from the printed word. The findings provide evidence that people with dyslexia do not lack intelligence and are not lazy or stupid. Their brains just work differently. Lack of awareness about this disorder has often resulted in the child being branded as 'lazy.' If students with dyslexia do not receive the right type of intervention they often struggle in school -- despite being bright, motivated, and spending hours on homework assignments both academically and emotionally.



Myth:

Smart people cannot be dyslexic or have a learning disability.

Fact:

Dyslexia and intelligence are NOT connected. Many dyslexic individuals are very bright and creative who will accomplish amazing things as adults.

**Myth:**

Balanced Literacy curriculums like Units of Study and Fountas & Pinnell are appropriate curricula to teach a child how to read.

Fact:

The empirical evidence is clear that "Balanced Literacy" curricula are wholly inadequate and only teach children the habits of poor readers. Children who arrive at school already reading or primed to read may appear to do well under these curriculums, but only compromise 36% of the total student population. The remaining 64% however will need additional practice opportunities in various and specific areas of reading and language development. The failure of these curricula is most severe for children who do not come to school already possessing what they need to know to make sense of written and academic English. These students are not likely to get what they need to read, write, speak and listen at grade level.

**Myth:**

Gifted children cannot be dyslexic or have a learning disability.

Fact:

Dyslexia has no correlation with intelligence. Many dyslexics have very high IQs and have gone on to accomplish outstanding things in their lives. Many famous authors, researchers, lawyers, politicians, financial giants, and others from all different professions are dyslexic.

**Myth:**

A child's fluency in reading isn't as important as their comprehension.

Fact:

A child's fluency in reading is key to the child's ability to properly comprehend the text and to become a highly skilled reader. Fluency is a key part of Scarborough's Reading Rope, but more importantly fluency is not simply how fast a child can read text. Fluency must be obtained at each strand of the rope in order to progress forward and ultimately achieve overall text fluency. Without achieving text fluency, the child will be a more labored, slower reader than necessary, requiring more critical thinking to comprehend text. When we ignore the importance of fluency, we deny the child all of the developmental skills necessary to achieve true reading skills. Again, this is not how QUICKLY a child can read text. Speed is not fluency. Instead fluency is when a text reader can take all of the strands of the rope and effortlessly pull them all together to read and understand text.



THE SACRED ART OF WORDS

BY: ASHLEY ROBERTS

When did we lose sight of language?

Some will see my question and say we didn't lose sight of language, but the truth is we have. In the educational paradigm shift to Balanced Literacy over 40 years ago, we lost sight of the beauty, the power, of language. Now, to be clear, some still possess the power of language, but generationally speaking, fewer and fewer do.

It is in the power of language that we can create, tear down, sway opinion, alter history, make people believe a lie, make people believe a truth, create fantasy, fly on dragons, whisper spells to change the tides, be hypnotized by Sirens, make love, murder, create devils and destroy gods. Language is the power on which humans ebb and flow.

People will argue it is in the might of the fist which drives our history, but if you read history, behind every fist was a skillful orator to either instill fear or convince the masses, because truth be told both good and evil require language to sway opinion and to dominate others.

Words are the key to all things. Words shape the world.

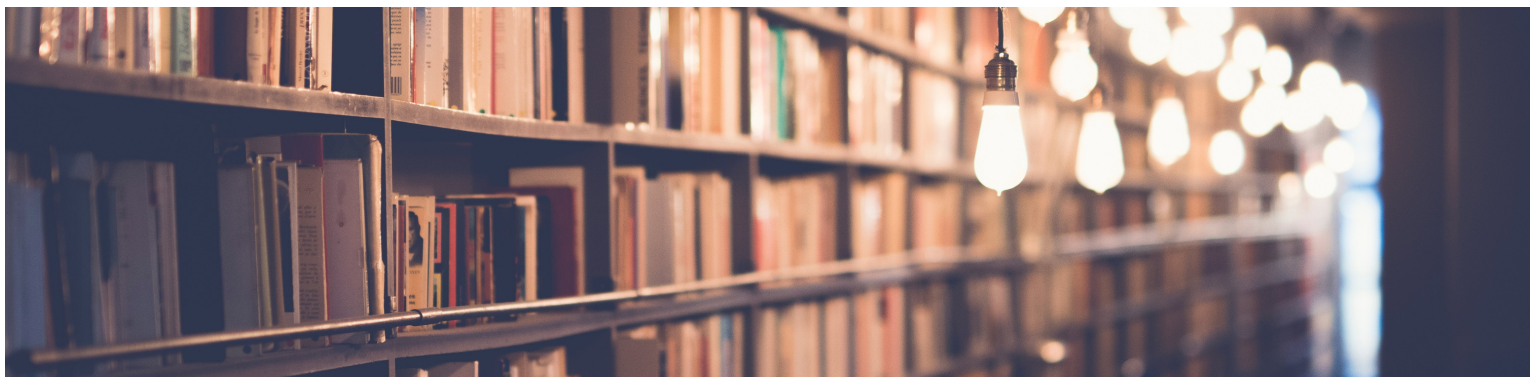
It is delusional, misguided, egotistical to not believe in the art of words. No one is immune to their power, for even the most jaded of us melt at the expression of love by those we love in return, or to the heart felt apology from the one who hurt us the most.

Personally speaking, I have withstood abuse, held back arguments, manipulated, condescended, picked fights both eloquently and brutishly, pushed buttons, made people cry, made them laugh, restored faith, given solace, provided companionship, forged friendships and more; but I have a well-developed sense of language through years of study not just in literature itself, but in how to shape language on the page. I was taught grammar and syntax, how to shape arguments, how to write stories. From my earliest memories I was given lessons on and encouragement in writing. Truth be told, the written word is the only medium in which I can truly express myself.

Yet, in our classrooms we do not teach the art of language. The educational establishment assumes that it is natural, an innate part of the brain, and has wrongly preached the belief that within each mind lies the ability to create the lyricism of Shakespeare's words at will, yet it is not natural or innate. Written language, like spoken language, must be explicitly taught.

It is unjustly misguided to think that access to language is as simple as merely putting pen to paper, when in fact it takes far more ingenuity, knowledge, and skill than can be provided by simply providing a pen to a student. In the words of Nadine Gaab, when describing the osmosis that is teaching reading through Balanced Literacy stated, "it's like playing Mozart for years for someone then placing them in front of a piano and expecting them to play Mozart."

When we deny the access to literature, to the ability and skill to write one's own story, one's own truth, we create a myopic history. Across time it is words that have created and destroyed empires and nations, sparked philosophical and political ideas, and birthed religious beliefs. Societies that have denied and censored language have all fallen to new, and restored ideals which oddly enough all usually center on the freedom of thought, access to education, and the ability to define one's own destiny. Yet, it is in our own country, in our own time, that we claim and pretend that we value education, value our children, value our future, when the truth is we do not. We pretend to provide education to the masses, but the truth is we do not. We provide the show of an education because that's all we know to do, but in misguided pedagogies, we shame those who don't fit inside the tiny box where only a few can learn well enough to access the words necessary to educate oneself, to expand one's mind, to create ideas, to challenge authority, and make changes, both good and bad, for not just ourselves, but our families and our society at large.





We are in a time where we are claiming to be enlightened, yet we are willingly creating and fostering illiteracy. We are willingly denying the sacred art of words to millions of children each year, and we can do little more than pretend this isn't the truth of things. In the denial of this truth, the failure to achieve literacy is laid at the feet of the family, while the educational bureaucracy marches forward damning child after child to the curse of illiteracy, generation after generation.

The irony is it is through the art of words that this denial is blamed on the family instead of the establishment, is the fault of the parent instead of the failure of a pedagogy. Words spin the lies that would keep a choke hold on our families, our children, while illiteracy continues to be assured year after year while parents fight a multi-billion-dollar establishment refusing to change. It is through words that they label us crazy, misguided, "that" parent, ill informed, sad, pathetic, wrong, while they manipulate the powers that be to keep themselves in charge through the endless PR machines that spin the words, constantly changing the label to stay ahead of the rage that bites at their heels.

**O, for my sake do you (with) Fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide
Than public means which public manners breed.**

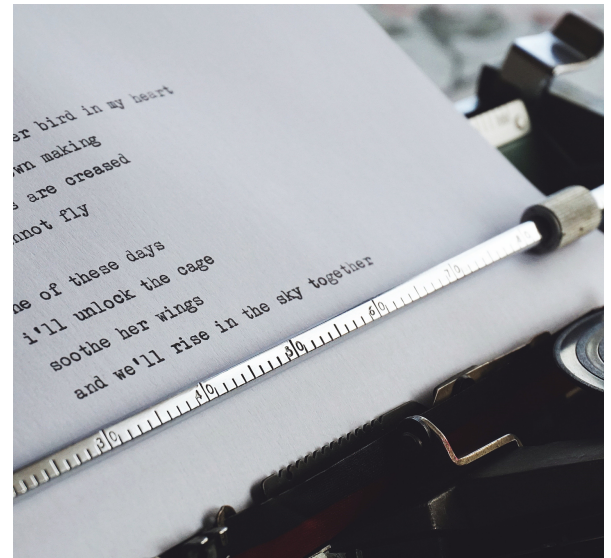
-Shakespeare, Sonnet 111, lines 1-4

No, the sacred art of words will not die here, nor die for centuries to come. Eventually the masses will revolt loud enough to tear down the hypocrisy of our educational system pretending to provide literacy.

The sad thing is that until then the words and skill of the masters of language will remain unread, misunderstood, and unmet in their challenge to rise to their beauty and create words to rival their own. To ring this point home, I will end here, but leave you with the words of Pablo Neruda:

"Then one day the boy returned the books to the Englishman. "Did you learn anything?" the Englishman asked, eager to hear what it might be. He needed someone to talk to so as to avoid thinking about the possibility of war.

"I learned that the world has a soul, and that whoever understands that soul can also understand the language of things."



THE BECKLEY WILSON BILL, A STUDY IN OPPOSING THEORIES ON DYSLEXIA IDENTIFICATION AND REMEDIATION & HOW THAT PLAYED OUT IN THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE

BY: ASHLEY ROBERTS

The Texas State Legislature meets for approximately five months every two years. Beginning in January and ending in May, both the House and Senate convene and hear all issues, all bills proposed that can be heard in their limited window, and unless a special session is called, Texas residents must wait another year and a half before the process starts all over again.

A "trick" to navigating the legislature is to get your proposed bills written, sponsors lined up and then submitted early, leading into the new session. Statistically speaking, the lower numbered bills usually make it through, unless they are so controversial, they just don't get the necessary votes to pass. It is hard to come into the session late, but some do make it through...sometimes.

Shortly after the legislative session began some phone calls started happening to rally the various dyslexia groups and advocates across the state to "pull on one rope" together and back a new bill. This bill would have altered how dyslexia is evaluated across the state by the local education agencies, i.e., the school districts, by aligning to IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Now, to clarify, dyslexia is not currently evaluated, as a first line of defense, in any school district in the state of Texas under IDEA, but instead under Section 504. To explain why requires a small history lesson.

The History of IDEA, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – Part 1

- Congress enacted the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142), also known as the EHA, in 1975 to support states and localities in protecting the rights of, meeting the individual needs of, and improving the results for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities and their families. This landmark law's name changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, in a 1990 reauthorization. The law was last reauthorized in 2004, and the department has periodically issued new or revised regulations to address the implementation and interpretation of the IDEA.
- The 1986 reauthorization (Public Law 99-457) addressed early intervention and mandated that individual states provide services to families of children born with disabilities from the time they are born. Previously, these services were not available until a child reached the age of three.

(Source: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/IDEA-History>)

The Birth of Texlexia

Texas first began creating policies regarding dyslexia requirements and guidelines in public education for grades K–12 in 1986. At that time, the 69th Legislature passed bill HB 157, which defined dyslexia and related disorders and mandated screening and treatment by local school districts.



HB 157 reads as follows:

Section 1, Subchapter Z, Chapter 21, Education Code is amended by adding Section 21.924 to read as follows:

HB 157 is a bill for the screening and treatment for dyslexia and related disorders. (a) 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 socio-cultural opportunity.
- "Related disorders" includes disorders similar to or related to dyslexia such as developmental auditory imperception, dysphasia, specific developmental dyslexia, developmental dysgraphia, and developmental spelling disability.

(b) The SBOE (State Board of Education) shall approve from time to time review a program under which students enrolling in public schools in this state are tested for dyslexia and related disorders at appropriate times.

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

(d) The SBOE shall adopt any rules and standards necessary to administer this section.

Section 2.

(a) The SBOE shall approve methods for screening for dyslexia and related disorders and techniques for treating dyslexia and related disorders not later than January 1, 1986.

(b) The board of trustees of a school district shall implement a program for screening for and treating dyslexia and related disorders as provided by this Act not later than the beginning of the 1986-1987 school year.

Section 3.

The importance of this legislation and the crowded condition of the calendars in both houses create an emergency and an imperative public necessity that the constitutional rule requiring bills to be read on three several days in each house be suspended, and this rule is hereby suspended and this Act take effect and be in force from and after it's passage, and it is so enacted.

With this law, the concept of "Texlexia" was born.

Now bear in mind what the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was in 1986. SpEd was a place, not a service. Many of us here at The Dyslexia Initiative are old enough to remember that the children in Special Education were removed from the General Education population, were wholly self-contained, and we did not intermingle. To be classified as Special Education as a dyslexic child, regardless of what state you lived in, meant that you were excluded from the General Education population, and your classes were in a Resource Room with children with a variety of special needs.

Special Education was not, therefore, the most beneficial design for a dyslexic child, and so the creation of Texlexia was a benefit to the dyslexic children within the state. As with all things however, this was not a perfect solution, and it is not a solution that stayed up to date with the evolution of IDEA over the subsequent decades.

Before we review how IDEA changed, let's review how the Texas legislative code changed for dyslexic children.

Additional legislation passed in the subsequent decade that continued to shape dyslexia policy and practices in Texas.

- In 1991, HB 1314 passed that allowed instructional accommodations for students with dyslexia. In addition, the first state dyslexia coordinator position was created in Education Service Center 10 to assist with implementation of dyslexia procedures.
- During the 1993 - 1994 legislative session, SB 7 passed, requiring accommodations for testing students with dyslexia.
- In 1995, as part of Governor Bush's Texas Reading Initiative and a focus on reading proficiency by 3rd grade, the Texas legislature mandated that the entire public-school education code be rewritten. However, advocates worked to have previous dyslexia laws preserved so that they would not be lost in the transition. The Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) updated all reading curriculum to include a stronger, explicit, scientifically researched phonics-based curriculum.

- In 1997, the legislature passed the Student Success Initiative (TEC §28.006), which resulted in the implementation of reading diagnosis procedures for early identification of reading difficulties, such as dyslexia and related disorders. In addition, informal screening was developed for early identification of reading difficulties and funding for dyslexia coordinators was approved for all 20 regional education service centers.
- In 2003, TEC §7.028(b) delegated responsibility for school compliance to the local school board. Therefore, monitoring of school compliance for serving students with dyslexia and related disorders fell under the purview of the local school board.
- In 2004, TEA (Texas Education Agency) conducted a longitudinal study on assessments that resulted in the use of bundled accommodations (oral reading of item stems/answer options; extended time; and proper nouns lists) for students with dyslexia when taking state assessments. After this change, state test proficiency rates increased from 9% to 41% for students with dyslexia in elementary through middle school.
- In 2009, Occupations Code, Ch. 403 passed that mandated the specific educational and experience requirements for licensed dyslexia practitioners and licensed dyslexia therapists. In the summer of 2010, the need arose for an updated version of the Dyslexia Handbook to reflect new legislation and additional research.
- In 2011, several new laws pertaining to dyslexia and related disorders were passed or updated. One piece of legislation required integrating technology into the classroom to help accommodate students with dyslexia (TEC §38.0031 was updated to reflect the changes). New legislation regarding the retesting of students for dyslexia stated that, unless otherwise provided by law, an institution of higher education (defined by Section 61.003), may not reassess a student determined to have dyslexia for the purpose of assessing the student's need for accommodations until the institution of higher education reevaluates the information obtained from previous assessments of the student. TEC §51.9701 and TEC §38.003(b-1) were updated to reflect the new mandate. Texas Occupations Code §54.003 was updated to reflect the new requirements. Educator preparation and continuing education requirements for dyslexia were enacted and outlined in the amendments made to TEC §21.044 and §21.054.
- In 2013, TEC §42.006(a-1) was amended to require reporting in PEIMS the number of students identified with dyslexia.
- In 2015, legislation regarding the requirements for licensed dyslexia practitioners and licensed dyslexia therapists was amended (Occupations Code, Ch. 403). The screening and treatment for dyslexia and related disorders was amended in 2017 (TEC §38.003).
- In 2017, the Texas legislature passed HB 1886 which introduced requirements for the screening of all students enrolling in Texas public schools for dyslexia or related disorders.

(Source: <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/DyslexiaIDReportStudyReport-508Compliant.pdf> - Chapter 3.2 - History of Dyslexia in Texas)

Now bearing all the above in mind, it is important to review how IDEA changed as well.

But First, A Few Quick Call Outs...

There is no such thing as developmental dyslexia, developmental dysgraphia, or developmental spelling disability.

Texas is obsessed with the idea of "developmental" dyslexia. A child does not "develop" dyslexia or dysgraphia or a spelling disability unless the child has a stroke or brain injury. Dyslexia and dysgraphia are both genetic and neurobiological in origin. Spelling issues are directly related to dyslexia and dysgraphia both.

When my child was privately diagnosed in 2016, I was told he had developmental dyslexia and developmental dysgraphia. It was a while before I learned that phrasing it that way aligned back to the 1986 law and was a wholly inaccurate classification.

Leave it to Texas to need to do something differently from the rest of the country, and I'm a native Texan so I get to make that call out.

Also, "socio-cultural opportunity?" Really? Oh, they're wealthy enough they should be able to read, and we'll just give a pass to poor people. (Insert angry emoji here!) Granted this was 1986 but come on! This stings of the whole balanced literacy notion of "literacy rich homes" engendering more success in reading is rife in this statement, but I'll let Dr. Seidenberg straighten that one out.

"Our culture's emphasis on the importance of reading to children creates the impression that it plays the same role in learning to read as speaking to children plays in their learning to talk. That's not correct. Whereas talking with children guarantees that they will learn to speak (in the absence of pathological interference), reading to children does not guarantee that they will learn to read. In short, reading to children is not the same as teaching children to read. I emphasize this point because the mantra about reading to children makes it seem that this is all that is required. A child who has difficulty learning to read therefore has not been read to enough. Among the first questions that will be asked of the parents of a child who is struggling is whether they read to the child and if there are books in the home. Reading to children is important but not sufficient; children benefit from it, some quite a lot, but it neither obviates the role of instruction nor vaccinates against dyslexia. Children who are read to until the cow jumps over the moon can still have difficulty becoming readers."

-Mark Seidenberg, *Language at the Speed of Sight*

Now, back to our regularly scheduled article....

The History of IDEA, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – Part 2

- The 1990 reauthorization (Public Law 110-476) changed the law's name from EHA to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA. It also added traumatic brain injury and autism as new disability categories. Additionally, Congress mandated that as a part of a student's individualized education program (IEP), an individual transition plan (ITP) must be developed to help the student transition to post-secondary life.
- The 1997 (Public Law 105-17) reauthorization articulated a new challenge to improve results for children with disabilities and their families. **This included an emphasis on access to the general curriculum.** Additionally, states were given the authority to expand the "developmental delay" definition to also include students up to age nine. The law also required parents be provided an opportunity to attempt to resolve disputes with schools and local educational agencies (LEAs) through mediation and provided a process for doing so.
- **In 2004, the IDEA reauthorization aligned the IDEA with the No Child Left Behind Act requirements. The reauthorization called for:**
 - **Early intervening services for children not currently identified as needing special education but who need additional academic and behavioral support to succeed in a general education environment,**
 - **Greater accountability and improved educational outcomes, and**
 - **Raised standards for instructors who teach special education classes.**
- In August 2006, the department issued regulations necessitated by the 2004 reauthorization. **The 2006 IDEA regulations required schools to use research-based interventions in the process of assisting students with learning difficulties or determining eligibility for special education.** The 2006 regulations also addressed other new requirements included in the 2004 reauthorization, such as:
 - The resolution process required when a parent files a due process complaint, and
 - Shifting the responsibility to provide equitable services for parentally-placed private school children with disabilities to the local educational agency (LEA) in which the private school is located.
- In 2008, the department issued regulations it determined were needed to clarify and strengthen effective implementation and administration of IDEA programs. These IDEA regulations addressed:
 - **Parental consent for continued special education and related services;**
 - Non-attorney representation in due process hearings;
 - State monitoring, technical assistance, and enforcement;
 - Allocation of funds; and
 - Positive efforts to employ and advance in employment individuals with disabilities.
- Both 2011 and 2013 regulations included clarifications or revisions to the IDEA for infants and toddlers with disabilities programs. Additionally, **the 2013 regulations revised the parental consent requirements related to a child's or parent's public benefits and ensured parent of children with disabilities are specifically informed of all their legal protections when public agencies seek access to public benefits or insurance to pay for services required under the IDEA.**
- The 2015 revisions revised regulations governing the requirement that LEAs maintain fiscal effort; removed the authority for states to define modified academic achievement standards and develop alternate assessments based in those modified academic achievement standards or eligible students with disabilities.
- Notably, a 2017 revision reflected changes made to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act by Rosa's Law, which replaces references to "mental retardation" in Federal law with "intellectual disability" or "intellectual disabilities." Other 2017 revisions removed and revised IDEA definitions based on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA).

- In March 2017, the Supreme Court ruled on a landmark case that defines the scope of FAPE requirements under IDEA. In *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District Re-1*, the Supreme Court determined that "[t]o meet its substantive obligation under the IDEA, a school must offer an IEP reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances." The Court additionally emphasized the requirement that "every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives."

(Source: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/IDEA-History>)

Busted

What is not included in this list is that the Texas State Legislature passed a cap on special education limiting it to 8.5%. This encompasses all special needs categories, not just SLD.

To be clear, the 13 qualifications are:

1. **Specific Learning Disability (SLD)** - The "specific learning disability" (SLD) category covers a specific group of learning challenges. These conditions affect a child's ability to read, write, listen, speak, reason, or do math. SLD is the most common category under IDEA. In the 2018–19 school year, around 33 percent of students who qualified did so under this category.
2. **Other Health Impairment (OHI)** - The "other health impairment" category covers conditions that limit a child's strength, energy, or alertness. One example is ADHD, which impacts attention and executive function.
3. **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** - ASD is a developmental disability. It involves a wide range of symptoms, but it mainly affects a child's social and communication skills. It can also impact behavior.
4. **Emotional Disturbance** - Various mental health issues can fall under the "emotional disturbance" category. They may include anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and depression. (Some of these may also be covered under "other health impairment.")
5. **Speech or Language Impairment** - This category covers difficulties with speech or language. A common example is stuttering. Other examples are trouble pronouncing words or making sounds with the voice. It also covers language problems that make it hard for kids to understand words or express themselves.
6. **Visual Impairment, Including Blindness** - A child who has eyesight problems is considered to have a visual impairment. This category includes both partial sight and blindness. If eyewear can correct a vision problem, then it doesn't qualify.
7. **Deafness** - Kids with a diagnosis of deafness fall under this category. These are kids who can't hear most or all sounds, even with a hearing aid.
8. **Hearing Impairment** - The term "hearing impairment" refers to a hearing loss not covered by the definition of deafness. This type of loss can change over time. Being hard of hearing is not the same thing as having trouble with auditory or language processing.
9. **Deaf-Blindness** - Kids with a diagnosis of deaf-blindness have both severe hearing and vision loss. Their communication and other needs are so unique that programs for just the deaf or blind can't meet them.
10. **Orthopedic Impairment** - An orthopedic impairment is when kids lack function or ability in their bodies. An example is cerebral palsy.
11. **Intellectual Disability** - Kids with this type of disability have below-average intellectual ability. They may also have poor communication, self-care, and social skills. Down syndrome is one example of a condition that involves an intellectual disability.
12. **Traumatic Brain Injury** - This is a brain injury caused by an accident or some kind of physical force.
13. **Multiple Disabilities** - A child with multiple disabilities has more than one condition covered by IDEA. Having multiple issues creates educational needs that can't be met in a program designed for any one disability.

(Source: <https://www.understood.org/articles/en/conditions-covered-under-idea>)

Then, in 2018 - things changed.

These "efforts, which started in 2004 but have never been publicly announced or explained, have saved the Texas Education Agency billions of dollars but denied vital supports to children with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia, epilepsy, mental illnesses, speech impediments, traumatic brain injuries, even blindness and deafness, a Houston Chronicle investigation has found.

More than a dozen teachers and administrators from across the state told the Chronicle they have delayed or denied special education to disabled students in order to stay below the 8.5% benchmark. They revealed a variety of methods, from putting kids into a cheaper alternative program known as "Section 504" to persuading parents to pull their children out of public school altogether.

"We were basically told in a staff meeting that we needed to lower the number of kids in special ed. at all costs," said Jamie Womack Williams, who taught in the Tyler Independent School District until 2010. "It was all a numbers game."

Texas is the only state that has ever set a target for special education enrollment, records show."

(Source: <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/denied/1/> - The Houston Chronicle Denied Series, published September 10, 2016, by Brian M. Rosenthal)

The 2016 Houston Chronicle expose on the denial of Special Education in Texas brought unwanted attention to the way things were; so in 2017 Texas repealed the Special Education cap, but with 13 years of enforcement, the damage was significant.

Also, footnote I can't avoid – is it a coincidence that the greatest overhaul of IDEA occurs in the same year that Texas places a cap on Special Education? Bear in mind this is when Special Education is officially no longer a place, BUT A SERVICE. Hmmm.

The Houston Chronicle series also led to the largest investigation in the Federal Department of Education's history of any state educational agency, and a substantial censure, issued in January 2018. The censure was fourteen pages long and one disability was called out more than any other, in fact it was named on every page – dyslexia.

Then, in 2018 following the censure, TEA issued a letter to administrators and local education agencies with the intent to provide guidance and clarification regarding the provision of supports and interventions for a student identified with, or suspected of having, dyslexia or a related disorder. The letter reiterated and clarified that the Child Find mandate under the IDEA applies to students with, or suspected of having, dyslexia or a related disorder.

Except The Problem Is...

Except the problem is Texlexia is engrained in Texas' way of thinking about dyslexia. To be honest, at this point it is educational pedagogy. Because Texas provided for dyslexia under Section 504, once IDEA was overhauled in 2004, converting SpEd from a place to a service, this was irrelevant to the state's way of doing things. They were eighteen years in at this point with Texlexia and weren't going to shift gears just because IDEA changed.

So, since 1986, dyslexia has been evaluated with a trimmed down evaluation tool which looks at a few reading markers and not at any additional SLD's or comorbid conditions. This therefore assumes that a child with dyslexia is mild to lower moderate on the spectrum, and with some additional reading help the child will be successful in a General Education setting. The dyslexia remediation classes almost always exist under the General Education organizational structure, not Special Education, and the teachers are General Education teachers with some reading remediation training. Under this structure certifications and licensure in dyslexia are not required of the dyslexia teachers, their supervisors, or their department heads, nor is it a requirement of state law.

This is the epitome of a GenEd child, with a slight reading struggle, being a square peg that fits into a predetermined square hole, and voila! Remediation!

The whole child is never evaluated, and this is the equivalent of assuming that dyslexia is just reading and nothing else and a few additional sessions will cure the child's issues with reading.

Additionally, program mastery checks, and teacher's notes are the only means of progress monitoring. Evaluations like the GORT and KTEA are never performed that would give insight into a child's rate, accuracy, fluency or comprehension, much less their written expression. This means that the program's mastery checks are essentially the main tool used to state if a child has successfully completed a remediation program. This means that when the pre-set, pre-determined program is complete, via lesson plans already laid out, the child is dismissed from services without any real assurance that the child is a successful reader. Accommodations may continue, but dyslexia remediation is terminated.

And I won't even mention the one district I know of who has their own MADE-UP ASSESSMENT tool that is proprietary to the district which only requires a 60% score to state the child's remediation is complete. Yes, you read that correctly – 60%.

Last time I checked 60% was an F.

Oh, and none of the dyslexia department heads for that district have a single dyslexia certification between them, not one, and these are the people telling you that your child's remediation is complete, and the child can be dismissed with an F on their proprietary assessment.

Yup, nothing to see here folks.

Bear in mind that Texas tends to follow one of three primary programs for remediation – Take Flight via Scottish Rite, Neuhaus, and Reading by Design (RBD), formerly known as DIP (Dyslexia Intervention Program) until it was overhauled. Note that of the above RBD was created by Region 4, and therefore is a state created and fostered remediation program.

Note, Neuhaus and Scottish Rite are on the IDA list of programs, but RBD has no research or evidence behind it, yet it's been rolled out to a significant number of districts across the state. Yes, it's built on programs that have research and evidence, but research and evidence to support RBD itself is lacking.

Also note: By listing the above programs this is in no way a recommendation or criticism of these programs. The Dyslexia Initiative recommends following IDA's direction on programs they support; we are otherwise neutral on the subject.

While districts can make their own curriculum decisions, and districts do invest in a variety of "programs" to "teach" dyslexic students, the guidelines for what those programs had to be prior to the 2018 Texas Dyslexia Handbook revision was vague at best. Sadly, with the 2018 revision, both the terms evidence-based and research-based exist for what programs should be used. The only real win was the inclusion that fidelity must be adhered to, and while that's a huge stride forward, that too has some issues with it for the children who fall onto the more moderate portion of the spectrum, or have additional SLD's or comorbid conditions, or both, and therefore possess a more complicated educational equation.

In short, the 2018 Handbook did not do much to resolve anything it was supposed to resolve. The core issue was that both 504s and IEPs were provided for, but a very convoluted flow chart with no actual guidance for making a distinction between the two was laid out. What this meant was that local education agencies (ISD's) were left on their own to decide if a child did or did not qualify for any services and if they did, under which umbrella.

Now, layer in the thirty-five years of history of Texlexia, and you have a very engrained pedagogy on how dyslexia should be evaluated and managed.

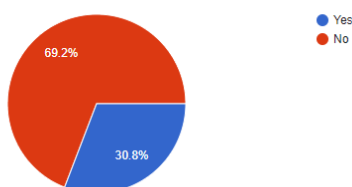
Let's also not forget one tiny tidbit...dyslexia is NAMED inside of IDEA. §1401 (30) Specific Learning Disability – includes "dyslexia," but, no, let's continue on pretending like dyslexia doesn't need protection under IDEA.

The Price

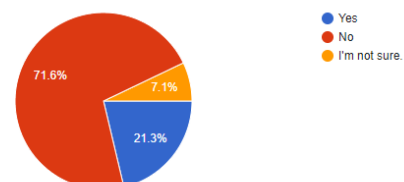
The fall out of this is children are still significantly under identified, under evaluated, if evaluated still denied, and if evaluations are granted parents are pushed to the 504 solution, not the IEP protections under IDEA.

Parents are not informed of their rights under IDEA, not informed there is an alternative evaluation process, and not informed of what IDEA is at all. These are not grand statements either. This is the state of education across Texas. The idea of driving parents to 504's or out of the schools altogether is very much alive and well in 2021 in every district in the state.

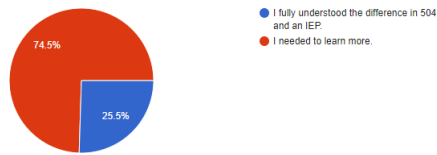
When you initially started the dyslexia journey with your child, did you know the difference between a 504 and an IEP (Individualized Education Plan)?



If you did not know the difference between 504 and an IEP (Individualized Education Plan), was it explained to you by the school adequately enough for you to properly understand the differences and yours and your child's rights under the two options?



After the explanation, if one was given, were you satisfied you understood the full extent of the differences between 504 and an IEP (Individualized Education Plan), or did you feel that more knowledge was necessary?



The Texas 85th Legislative Session, January to May 2021

It's taken a long time to get here, but the background was necessary, and honestly the history shown here is still inadequate. There's more I could share, but for now let's move on.

What I've tried to stress is that Texlexia is a pedagogy, that it is not aligned to IDEA, is a GenEd solution, warehoused in GenEd, staffed by GenEd teachers, and is meant to be a plug and play program for dyslexic children.

So, a group of parents in the Highland Park area of Dallas gathered together and called themselves The Kitchen Table group. Together they authored an astounding paper, a treatise really, that summarizes the legislative history of Texas for dyslexia, cites case law, and makes a solid argument for why our school districts should be leading with the IDEA evaluation, which again we in Texas call an FIE.

The argument was simple and factual. The probability of dyslexia existing with another SLD or comorbid condition is greater than 60%. Per one study, "ADHD was present in 33%, Anxiety Disorder in 28.8%, Developmental Coordination Disorder in 17.8%, Language Disorder in 11% and Mood Disorder in 9.4% of patients."

(Source: August 23, 2013, by Margari, L., Buttiglione, M., Craig, F. et al. Neuropsychopathological comorbidities in learning disorders. BMC Neurol 13, 198 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2377-13-198>)

It is the women of The Kitchen Table group that reached out to the various dyslexia groups and advocates across the state and asked if we could all work together, "pulling on one rope" to try to turn the tides for our dyslexic children.

Each advocate had their own personal reasons for being involved, and for most of us it was because of a child that calls us mom or dad. We united together because the paper was concise and accurate, each of us have long wanted Texas to turn the tide for our dyslexic children and finally get in line with what the Fed DOE has been demanding of Texas and follow IDEA, and because it was the right and necessary thing to do.

The facts are quite simple – Texas, despite a laughable rewrite of the Texas Dyslexia Handbook, and some pretty PowerPoint presentations issued by the TEA, has not moved the marker for our dyslexic children. They are still denied, still in 504, still not reading on grade level, still being passed over for "normative" peers.

So, if the TEA wouldn't do the job, then parents were happy to legislate the necessary changes.

The bill was simple – lead with the FIE, not with the watered down "dyslexia evaluation" which only looks at a few reading markers. Once the FIE was completed the parents would then be fully informed of their child's whole educational equation and be empowered to make the best educational decisions for their children right out of the gate, not years later after a 504 solution did nothing to change their child's struggles in school.

Oh, and here is an important footnote – IDEA does not mandate WHO can teach your child. Just because the child has an FIE does not mean they have to be in a SpEd classroom with a SpEd teacher. If that's the right solution then hey, go for it! But again, the WHO is not specified. IDEA is meant to serve as a guide with enough ambiguity built in to allow for the proper individualization. Now, I know of an advocate who is going to scream, "IDEA IS NOT AMBIGUOUS!", but the truth is it is in some areas to allow for the necessary program development for the child. I'm not a lawyer (even though I pretend to be one on TV – joking!), but this is what Peter Wright says about IDEA, and he's the legal guru I listen to on all things IDEA.

So, bearing in mind that you'd lead with the FIE, thereby informing the parents of their child's whole educational equation up front, empowering the parents to make the best and right decisions for their children, and IDEA does not mandate WHO can or will instruct your child, the resistance that came forward for this bill was confusing at best, and while some of the group had run the legislative gauntlet before and knew what to expect, for many, that was not the case, and was a hefty learning curve. The resistance

was steeper, and far more ruthless than anyone expected.

That resistance came from a single source. Whether or not they directed the actions of what went down in the Capitol hasn't been owned, and never will be. Things were said and done that were not professional, courteous, or in service of any dyslexic child.

To clarify, this group is not made up of parents. Yes, of course many if not most are parents, but not all of them are dyslexia parents. They are a group that speaks for the educational side of things. They are stand alone, not ISD affiliated, but their people work within various ISD's across the state. In Texas they have the greatest membership out of any other state by far. To be a member requires enormous personal sacrifice of both the time and funds necessary to obtain the licensure necessary for membership. To seek this licensure is not for the faint of heart and not a whole lot of people make it through because of the investment.

So, to be clear the people championing the bill are parents and the people opposed to the bill are educators. Also, the mouth piece for the resistance chose to say that this was parents being anti-this particular licensure. Nothing was further from the truth, but that's one of the wholly wrong and misguided statements that was part of the propaganda against the bill.

While the fight in the House was a unanimous win for the parents who had banned together, the defeat in the Senate was a lesson in politics, and the engendering of fear.

From the very beginning the story that played out was that our dyslexic children would be relegated to a Resource Room, with children of various needs, not to be taught how to read and write, not remediated, but left in a black hole to wither and eventually graduate, illiterate and traumatized by the experience.

Many were appalled at this argument and the fear mongering it engendered about Special Education, yet despite numerous challenges, including from House Representatives who knew better, it happened none the less.

Lies were told, with no data to back it up ever presented, that 75% of Texas families WANTED 504 services for their children. I pushed back on this argument and was told that while they didn't have data to support the 75% claim, I didn't have data to say that they didn't. Well, that statement is a solid dismantling of their lie and an attempt to spin me into not disavowing their lie which didn't work.

While the parents who had banned together worked the House hard, the resistance were working the Senate. The Senate sponsor was not interested in supporting the bill, but only interested in ensuring the bill did not pass. Working in unison with the Lt. Governor, another individual invested in ensuring the bill died, they turned it from an eighteen-page bill to a two-page study, gutting the entirety of what would have made a difference for our children, and let the Senate vote on his version instead, which is what passed the Senate.

When the House passes one version of a bill, but the Senate passes another, the two must meet in committee to hammer out the differences and come to a single resolution. Racing against the clock of the end of the term, the whole bill had been a race to beat deadlines, and now with the final deadline looming, the House immediately assigned the House bill's sponsor to the committee, but in the Senate, the Lt. Governor intentionally let the clock run out without assigning a Senator to the committee, thereby killing the bill.

Silently...

With finality for this legislative session...

Learnings

But no one has given up.

The next legislative session is fourteen months away and we will run the gauntlet again.

We won't underestimate the Senate, or the voices of dissension.

We are all prepared for the SpEd black hole argument.

Personally, I thank those who taught the lessons. They definitely went into this with a superior attitude, but they underestimated their opponents. It was a valuable learning. I can speak for myself at least when I say, I won't be outplayed again.

Final Thoughts

I'm going to stop writing here. I know this is incredibly long, but the story of parents versus the Texas Dyslexia Establishment is far from over, and before I sign off I want to leave you with a couple of images to solidify the issues in Texas, and state that it's not the sunshine and roses many would lead you to believe.

Changes are happening to the Texas Dyslexia Handbook, some of which look promising, but I will withhold my thoughts until I see the final published version. Sorry, been there, done that, and will never celebrate again until after it has left the printers office.

Our children are failing. They cannot read on grade level. What we're doing inside of our schools is not working for the majority of our dyslexic children.

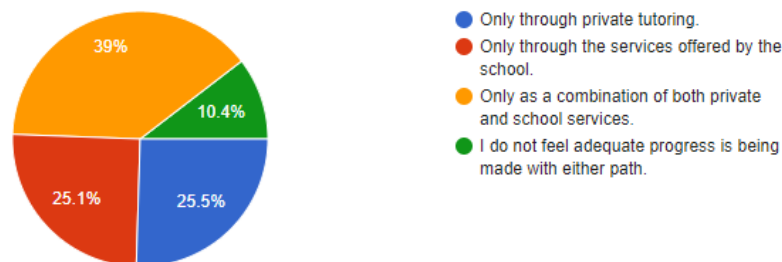
This is the truth of things, and sometimes the truth is a bitter pill.

We must change education if we have any hope of saving our dyslexic children, every single one of them.

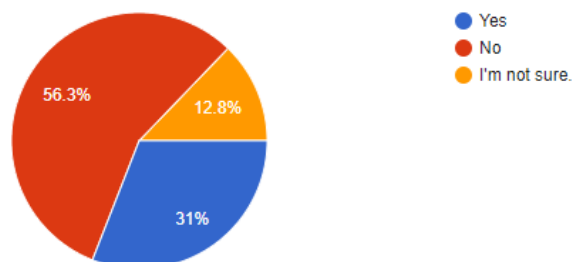
Footnote: Texas has paid one fine of \$277 million to the Fed for the failure in Special Education, and another \$33 million has recently been levied for the 2012 year. That's \$310 million to date. If they fine \$33MM per year for each of those 9 years that's \$297MM, so that would be \$574MM in fines. Do we really want to continue to ignore our educational responsibilities under IDEA?

Read more here: <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Students-denied-special-education-failing-schools-14831755.php>

Do you feel as though your child has had more success in learning to read with outside services, or through what the school has offered, or through the combination of both?



Is your child reading at grade level?



DYSLEXIA COFFEE TALK - SEASON 3



Season 3 of Dyslexia Coffee Talk has begun and, like always, we are working hard at getting a great slate of guests lined up to talk all things dyslexia. We already have the first half of the season booked and are finalizing the second half now, we're just still working out the final details.

The plan is that each season from here on out will consist of 20 episodes each. Yes, we might have more depending on current events, and we might have less depending on the hectic pace of life. After all, we are parents first and advocates second. But, rest assured, the plan is 20 each season.

The slate for the first half of the season is scheduled and our guests include:

Dr. Jan Hasbrouck, author of *Conquering Dyslexia*, and she will be discussing fluency with us and we are very excited to get to chat about that very critical topic.

Elizabeth Hamblet will be joining us to discuss the transition from high school to college and share from her vast experience advocating for families navigating through that process.

Liz Miele is a comedienne and an adult dyslexic. She will be sharing her journey with us.

The Dads Take Over is a special event where I will literally be handing over the keys to DCT to four very special dads and they will discuss raising dyslexic children and the challenges they face from the father's perspective.

Sherri Lucas-Hall is a guest author within this newsletter, and in her own words a reformed educator who has embraced the #ScienceOfReading. She will be sharing her journey as an educator and how she came to discover and embrace #SoR.

Dr. Shawn Robinson & Tony Cina will be joining us to discuss a program they have created on word analysis for adult learners!

Dr. Kymyona Burk is the K-12 State Literacy Director for the Mississippi Dept. of Ed and will be discussing state-level implementation of the Literacy-Based Promotion Act and how Mississippi is making strides forward in education for all students.

Mads Johan Øgaard is an artist and adult dyslexic. He will be sharing his journey with us.

Don Winn is an author of *Raising a Child with Dyslexia, What Every Parent Needs to Know*, as well as a blog and will be sharing his insights with us.

Ayelet Schwartz is an educator, an adult dyslexic, and mother to *The Dyslexic Renegade*. She is a fierce parent advocate who will be sharing her story with us.

And the second half of our season is gearing up to be powerful too! Guests so far include:

Natalie Wexler is the author of *The Knowledge Gap*, co-author of *The Writing Revolution* and the author of many articles on literacy.

Joshua Clark is the head of school for The Schenck School in Atlanta, Georgia, on the IDA board of directors, and a passionate educator.

THE DYSLEXIA INFORMATION SERIES

We have created a three-part information series on all things dyslexia and related subjects. We initially launched these as a class, but the chosen platforms were not working sufficiently, so we decided to revert to what we know best. We've recorded the first session and placed the presentation on our website. You can find the information on the link below. Sessions 2 and 3 will be recorded very soon and stored in the same location on our website.

Part 1: An introductory session to dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, SLD's, comorbidity, a quick intro to the #ScienceOfReading, accommodations versus modifications, assistive technology, several legal terms applicable to the public school years,

Part 2: A deeper dive into dyslexia and navigating the educational years.

Part 3: An advanced session which will focus on advocacy and negotiation.

To read more please go to:

<https://www.thedyslexiainitiative.org/dyslexia-information-series>



BE A PART OF THE REVOLUTION

At The Dyslexia Initiative we have some state and regional chapters, and are always looking to expand our community of support and voices for change. Right now there are two ways to join the revolution.

1) Join one of our existing state / regional chapters and be a part of the conversation. Whether you're in Texas and wish to join the Houston, Katy North Texas, or South Texas groups, or you're in Arkansas, Arizona, California, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina or Texas and wish to join, we have groups for you. The groups are meant to discuss state and regional matters, laws, districts, etc. and unite for change. These groups exist for you, everyone out there, to combine your voices, find your allies, and work together to save our children.

2) Is a state you live in not listed already? Are you a dynamic individual, passionate about structured literacy, dyslexia, equity for all children? Would you like to join our corps of volunteers, working together to support change within their respective states? Well then, reach out. We'd love to hear from you!

Be a part of the #DyslexiaRevolution!



Don't forget to subscribe for updates like our newsletter and more on our website,
www.TheDyslexiaInitiative.org.

