

Delightfully Different

Educators Rising Research Learning Challenges Competition

Dyslexia is an extremely common learning disability that affects a person's ability to read, write, spell, and sometimes even speak. Specifically, those with dyslexia have trouble putting together the letters and sounds that make up words. It is not that people with dyslexia write backwards or mix letters up; it is that there is an error in processing information when reading, speaking, and writing (Kelly). According to the Dyslexia Center of Utah, "70-80% of people with poor reading skills, are likely dyslexic" ("Statistics"). Similarly, one out of every five people in America have dyslexia ("Statistics"). The majority of people with dyslexia begin noticing symptoms around age seven or eight; however, most are never diagnosed. Every child's diagnosis and care is different based on the severity of their case; therefore, their needs should be addressed without comparing to others - especially when it comes to education. This means that school systems play one of the biggest roles in improving the lives of students that have dyslexia. Nonetheless, schools may not know how to properly approach this disability. Schools should advocate and support students with dyslexia by spreading awareness, educating teachers, and providing effective accommodations in order to help them be successful.

Lao Tzu, an ancient Chinese philosopher, once said, "The key to growth is the introduction of higher dimensions of consciousness into our awareness." In other words, people all around the world have dyslexia, but many have a hard time getting diagnosed because very few professionals are educated about the condition. In an interview with Mrs. Lisa Walborn, a French teacher at Tallwood High School, she expressed how difficult the process was to get her son tested for dyslexia soon after he began showing symptoms. In her family's town, no one knew what dyslexia was; therefore, they had to travel to other non-local doctors just to get him tested. When he was tested and eventually diagnosed, the family realized that the schools system

simply did not know how to approach this learning disability. It was at that moment that Mrs. Walborn and her husband became very passionate about dyslexia. They ended up buying the Wilson Reading System, which was “designed for students who have a language-based learning disability - such as dyslexia” (“Overview”). This is just one of the many programs that offer aid; however, many are expensive and often insurance companies do not see the need to cover their costs. On the other hand, Mrs. Walborn mentioned that “the Masons, a nation-wide fraternity whose purpose is to take on various philanthropic projects, believe in the dyslexic issue and wanted to do something to help the problem; thus, they created 24 centers across the country to work with students in grades K through 12 who are struggling with reading.” The training itself was free of charge to the parents and was very thorough. She added that it was by far the best training she had received on dyslexia and it impacted her own teaching style substantially. There are so many myths and misconceptions when it comes to dyslexia, which makes it extremely crucial to spread awareness.

Additionally, students with dyslexia learn differently from other students and often do not learn effectively in class because not all teachers are equipped to assist them. According to Mrs. Walborn, many teachers in are not given necessary materials or trained properly to teach students that have learning-disabilities in a general education environment. On the other hand, Mrs. Jenna Free, an English teacher at Tallwood High School, explained that “all English teachers in [the Virginia Beach City Public School system] had to do an online module about dyslexia this year as part of our licensure.” All schools systems should require teachers and staff to complete training like this every couple of years. While teachers are required to take some Special Education courses when working on their degree, there are constantly new discoveries about

dyslexia as time goes on. Schools should also offer training on visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile teaching techniques (VAKT) and specific methods that are effective. This should be done annually, at the very least, to ensure that education is innovative. In order for teachers to know what learning styles work best for their students, they should be intentional in getting to know them. In typical lesson plans, students take notes on material that they have read, which is a visual learning activity. To change this into a more auditory activity, a group of students could listen to the teacher and read the material, while taking notes. Changing this into a kinesthetic learning activity is as simple as having the students create projects or teach the class about a specific topic, which reflects mastery as well. Making this task tactile can be done by turning the note sheet into a cut and paste term activity. Mrs. Free agrees by stating, “I have seen teachers give [students with dyslexia] a copy of the notes, but all cut up, and the students [had to] put the pieces in the right order.” Not only are these techniques beneficial to students with dyslexia, but also to any students. All of these methods teach the material in an effective way, but allow the students to choose the style that works best for them.

Furthermore, students with dyslexia should have the same opportunities as everyone else in the classroom; therefore, special accommodations are needed. While teachers may not decide all of the accommodations that are needed, their job is to follow through with the ones set and help the students learn in an efficient way. Students are given instructional materials throughout each school day and a majority of those worksheets and handouts contain written instructions. Simplifying the directions and highlighting important words can be very helpful for students with dyslexia (“Dyslexia in the Classroom”). There are also audio recording devices that can be used to record the lessons. This allows the students to go back and listen to them as needed to

help further their understanding of the given concept. Moreover, students with dyslexia often struggle to follow instructions (Walborn). One solution to this is to have the students repeat the instructions in their own words back to the teacher or a peer. Daily routines also contribute to keeping the learning environment organized to help the students know exactly what they are doing and what is expected of them. To improve student performance, the use of graphic organizers should be encouraged because they keep all the information in one place, but within subcategories to help separate the information (“Dyslexia in the Classroom”). Also, planners work well for students since they serve as a reminder of what and when certain assignments are due. Since students with dyslexia usually have a hard time with reading, they should be allowed extra time to complete assignments. To ensure there are clear expectations, consistency, and accountability, all accommodations should continue to be communicated between the Special Education Committee (SEC) for an Individualized Education Program or the Section 504 Committee for an 504 Plan. Ultimately, students with dyslexia need to be provided with effective accommodations in the classroom in order for them to be successful and overcome their disability.

While there is no cure for dyslexia, through spreading awareness, providing more training on dyslexia for teachers, and implementing effective accommodations, school systems can provide a better education for them. There are so many people in the world that have dyslexia, but are unaware of it. As people become more aware of dyslexia though, students will be able to recognize the signs and get tested. The goal should be to educate teachers, fellow students, parents, and people with dyslexia alike about this learning disability. This will also prepare teachers to know how to help students with dyslexia, or other similar learning disabilities, in the

classroom. Bringing in the school system to assist in answering this cry for help would be a huge step in going the right direction. A cure is in reach and all that is needed now is the motivation and endurance to find it.

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