

Dyslexia

I chose to do my paper on dyslexia because although it is common among children and people, I had no idea what it really was. The term dyslexia is not easy to characterize. As well, there has been significant debate over the meaning of this word. Bender (2004) states, "*dyslexia is a term that indicates an inability to read. Generally, the term is most frequently utilized by theorists who assume that an inability to read is associated with brain-based abnormalities.*" (p. 181).

Dyslexia was first recognised in 1896 by a British school physician named James Kerr. Dr. Kerr found that specific children had very good eyesight but they could not read words. The conclusion for this became known as word blindness. Countries like England and the Scandinavian countries still call it that. Soon after, a German named Karl Kussman coined the disability, *dyslexia* from the Greek root *dys* meaning "difficulty with" and *lexis* meaning "word" or "language." (Cronin, 1994 pg 12)

In the past, hardly any educators tried to aid people diagnosed with dyslexia. However in the mid-1920's someone named Dr. Samuel T. Orton, a neuropathologist and psychiatrist, became challenged by a sixteen-year old who scored very high in the adult range on nonverbal tests but he could not read. Dr. Orton later developed a "three-pathway approach" using visual, auditory and tactile skills for helping people with dyslexia master language problems. Shortly after Dr. Orton teamed up with a psychologist named Anna Gillingham and a

teacher named Bessie Stillman and created the Orton-Gillingham approach which is still being used today for teachers without medical back ground so they can easily understand and use it. (Cronin1994)

At first, dyslexia meant that there was a particular breakdown in a certain area of the brain or central nervous system. This caused an uncertainty in perception of letters and words. Researchers believed that the uncertainties led to reading difficulties. So the term dyslexia became known to be linked with the visual-perceptual viewpoint on learning disabilities. (Bender 2004).

Other sources say that dyslexia can be defined as a dysfunction of the part of the brain that processes non-linear information. A person with dyslexia can be defined as a person who has a damaged ability for acquiring adeptness in reading, writing, spelling and math. Academically, a person with dyslexia has trouble associating sounds with graphic symbols and tremendous difficulty mastering the order or sequence of both written and spoken language. When someone who is dyslexic tries to put together bits of information the ideas get misplaced. This shows up as the inability to read well, spell right and do math problems. Non-academically, dyslexia affects the ability to understand anything requiring linear thought such as TV news, recipes, shopping lists, banking information and daily living aspects. It is difficult for a person to carry out directions. (Cronin 1994)

Some of the major symptoms of dyslexia include difficulties such as: learning to speak, reading and writing at grade level, organizing written and spoken language, learning letters and their sounds, learning number facts, spelling,

learning a foreign language, and correctly doing math problems. According to the Dyslexia Online Magazine, there are two types of tests for dyslexia. One is a screening test and one is a comprehensive test. Screening tests are intended to test a large number of children to narrow down the group to certain individuals who may need additional testing for probable dyslexia. These tests help researchers focus on children who may appear to be having difficulties with their learning and who might be dyslexic.

The comprehensive tests take a look at the total child and study the origin of any learning difficulty a child may have. The tests observe which brain functions are interfering with the child's achievement of regular school learning. They test the child's reading, spelling, drawing, and math and also give visual and sequencing tests. When the testers have the results they are compiled into a report on the child. This outlines all the facts for the conclusions reached about the child.

For a child in a regular classroom teachers and EAs could use what are called, Multi-Sensory Teaching Methods. This means helping the child learn through using more than one of his senses. A lot of learning that goes on in school is usually centered around either sight or hearing. A dyslexic child may experience difficulties with one or both of these senses. When the child's other senses become involved such as touch and movement it gives his brain tangible and kinetic memories to store as well as visual and auditory. An example is something like having letters made of sandpaper in the classroom so the children

can run their fingers over letters. This will provide them a strong tactile recollection. Most children with dyslexia get the letters “b” and “d” mixed up. Another example of a way to teach them the distinction is to show them the word ‘bed’ on a card. If the teacher draws a bed over the letters the upright part of the ‘b’ will become the head of the bed and the upright part of the ‘d’ will become the foot of the bed. The teacher or the EA can then draw a person lying on the bed to complete the picture. This will give the child a strong optical memory for the child to use each time he has to use these letters. (Bender 2004)

There are many particular considerations and teaching strategies for a child with dyslexia. To help develop reading fluency a student may read with an adult. The adult will read the text first to model to the student and then the child will read until he becomes confident. Some other strategies include things like: choral reading, tape assisted reading and partner reading. Other approaches for improving comprehension are tactics like visual imagery. Students would be asked to close their eyes and think of what they had read or heard in a story. They would then be asked to create an image in their mind. When it comes to math, students can work with flashcards, listen to math facts on a tape recorder or give students answer cards and have the students respond to the flashcards by holding up the correct answer card. Prizes can then be given out appropriately. (Bender 2004)

The role to be played by the Educational Assistant who is working with a child with dyslexia, who would be me, would be firstly to be one of the child’s

advocates. As an EA I would stand up for the rights of the child and promote that he is firstly a person. I would give support in as many areas as I could and endorse the fact that his disability comes second. My major role would be to first build a strong rapport with the student and then form a good foundation of trust between us. I would also promote a positive attitude within myself in hopes of it rubbing off on the student. My role would also to keep educated on the latest research on dyslexia and any new information coming out in terms of teaching strategies and ways to aid the child in the classroom. I would also try and network with other teachers as much as possible and attend workshops on learning disabilities/dyslexia whenever they were available. The most important aspect of my role however with a child with dyslexia would to focus on the relationship between us. If that trust and rapport is missing then it would even more of a challenge to keep that child's interest in me and my teaching. I look forward to starting my journey as an EA and being there for so many children who need us.

References

Bender N. William. (2004). *Learning Disabilities. Characteristics, Identification, and Teaching Strategies*

Cronin M. Eileen (1994). *Helping Your Dyslexic Child. A Guide to Improving Your Child's Reading, Writing, Spelling, Comprehension, and Self-Esteem.*

Dyslexia Online Magazine. Retrieved March 29, 2007, from <http://www.dyslexia-parent.com/magazine.html>

Reflection

I chose to do this assignment because for one I was not informed about any learning disability. I had only heard of a lot of them but had no education or knowledge on any. Dyslexia seems to be a very widespread learning disability and I wanted to learn more about it. It is also one that is highly debateable. Its meaning has changed frequently and people are still finding it hard to clearly define. By doing the research I have learned that it is more common than I thought it was. I will apply what I've learned by being sensitive to children and adults who may have been diagnosed with dyslexia. I will not treat all people that have been identified as having dyslexia the same and I will continue to do research.