

Dyslexia

There are two notions prevalent regarding the reading disorder dyslexia: it is very common and it is commonly misunderstood. People with dyslexia have a normal capacity of intelligence and possess a normal desire to learn but have a difficult time with reading, reading comprehension, pronouncing words and writing words. According to Susan Barton (2014), in many cases, students with difficulties in these areas will develop anxiety about participation, homework and test-taking. These factors impact their ability to learn. According to The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity (2015), there are many common misconceptions about dyslexia. One is that dyslexia is simply where a person sees letters or words backwards. This may be true in some cases, but there are several different characteristics of this reading disorder.

My teaching position is somewhat uncommon in that I teach all age students. I teach K-5 Physical Education, 3-5 Health and High School Studio Art classes. In my current teaching position I do not have a student that has been officially diagnosed with dyslexia. I do know however, that many of cases of this disorder go unconfirmed. It is important for me even as a Physical Education teacher to look for and recognize even slight signs of dyslexia in my students because even though there is less reading or writing in my classes compared to their other classes, students with the condition could have trouble following simple directions. Instructions that pertain to the students left or right, ones that follow a sequence or a pattern and ones that require students to process information quickly could all pose a threatening environment for students that have even a slight form of dyslexia.

When I was a sophomore in High School, I was diagnosed with slight dyslexia. I have a first hand understanding of the struggles and stress someone feels trying to learn with the condition. What I want to learn from my research are ways to accommodate students with dyslexia that I may encounter throughout my career so that I can provide an environment where they can express themselves and learn.

The most commonly diagnosed learning disability, dyslexia is identified most often in males. However, researchers such as Susan Barton (2014) believe that dyslexia affects males and females equally. Furthermore, we can find cases of dyslexia in all corners of the world. Dyslexia is believed to be caused through genetics and usually begins at an early age. However, it can occur later in life usually as a result of a brain condition or affliction such as a stroke, traumatic brain injury, dementia or anything that would cause the brain to have problems processing a language.

Like many diseases or disorders, early diagnosis is important. The earlier learners are found to have this problem, the easier it will be for them to learn as they get older. Early signs that a student has dyslexia can include difficulties remembering letters of the alphabet trouble remembering their own name or mispronouncing familiar words. As a person gets older, signals could include starting a math problem from the wrong way or problems remembering basic sequences of patterns (Yale Center, 2015). A diagnosis is made through a series of tests of a learner's memory, spelling, ability to see, and reading skills (Reading From Scratch). The analysis of the results need to be handled carefully because if a student scored poorly in any of these areas it would need to be determined that it is not the result of hearing or vision issues or simply poor instruction. Those cases would point to an entirely different issue aside from dyslexia.

In nearly all cases the symptoms cannot be cured. Learners with dyslexia are treated by adjustments or accommodations developed by a support team to fit the needs of the student. Poor spelling, reading and handwriting skills all hinder a student's ability to learn and suppress their individual expression. Their lack of a grasp of these skills that are a result of dyslexia can be supported in very specific accommodating ways. Barton (2014) suggests that if an instructor uses lecture as part of their instruction, pauses or breaks inserted into a lecture to allow the students time to process the information presented can help immensely. Teachers should always be conscious of putting students with dyslexia in situations where they are uncomfortable. Reading out loud in class, spelling bees, writing on a board that can be seen by everyone in the classroom, letting other students correct their work, and calling on them in class without their permission are all situations that can cause extreme anxiety with these students and should be avoided. Barton (2014) also advises that a teacher creates an environment where students feel unafraid to make mistakes. This will go a long way in easing the anxiety of all students, especially those with dyslexia. Dyslexic students that read slowly can work with reading specialists and in the meantime be accommodated by being allowed to listen to books or other readings on audio tapes during lessons where the content of the reading takes precedence over the skill of reading. Spelling issues should be handled by teachers that are trained to teach spelling in different ways because while teaching it through memorization does not work with dyslexic students, teaching these students to sound out the words is the best practice (Barton, 2014). It is recommended that when the student is working with a specialist the normal classroom teacher should not grade his or her spelling. Teachers could also shorten the length or alter the format of homework

assignments and exams for dyslexic students they take longer than most students working on an assignment. Oral testing and extended time taking exams are also options. A teacher should also consider accommodating to the strengths of the students. Barton (2014) also recommends allowing them to express or show their learning in areas that they excel. For example, a student who is strong in art may be given an option to create a poster for an assignment instead of writing a report. A teacher that creates songs, acronyms, or some other sort of visual form helps dyslexic students with their memorization. Staying away from open-ended questions that can seem like endless choices for answers also helps. Questions with two or three possibilities will aid in their memory.

If accommodations are not made, the stress caused by fear can make it impossible for the student to succeed and they often develop anxiety disorders. A student that is chronically under distress simply wants to survive in the classroom without being humiliated, and a student with that mindset cannot and will not learn. However, if the correct accommodations are made based on supporters understanding the condition, a student with dyslexia can thrive in the classroom.