Dyslexia: Different Thinking for Different Thinkers

By Joan Esposito & Cheri Rae: Joan Esposito is co-founder and program director of the Dyslexia Awareness Resource Center. Cheri Rae is director of Dyslexia Project.

The end of summer vacation and a return to the classroom is upon us, and kids everywhere are counting the days until their freedom ends and they return to the traditional classroom.

Almost all kids grumble about back-to-school, but for those who think differently, process differently and exhibit a different set of strengths than most, it’s a return to a stress-filled environment where they just don’t fit in at all. And they fail miserably, invisibly, their learning differences completely misunderstood by teachers, classmates, even family and friends.

These are the right-brained thinkers who are plenty smart, but for whom spelling, reading — and particularly reading aloud — writing legibly, taking notes in a lecture and copying from the board are never-ending struggles. They’re wrongly accused of not caring, of not working up to their potential, of not focusing on their work.

These kids may show great strength and aptitude in sports, music, art, and a whole array of other hands-on, project and performance-based activities—but increasingly in our schools today, only academics matter.

A vast amount of impressive research proves these kids are typically very bright, but their brains are literally different than most. About 20 percent of the population are right-brained, visual learners who typically excel when they are taught and assessed in the way they learn. But they’re often not properly identified and diagnosed before they fail in the typical classroom, and they’re not generally provided with the differentiated teaching methods they require to reach their full potential.

The lucky ones receive timely assessments and the typical diagnosis of “Specific Learning Disability,” an umbrella term that covers a wide array of learning differences, including dyslexia, auditory, visual and memory processing issues.

Nationally, those who are diagnosed with SLD make up more than 60 percent of the students enrolled in special education. But for far too long, these students — even when enrolled in special education — have not received the specific kind of help they need.
Dyslexia is a neurological issue, not a character flaw. The National Institutes of Health goes, “Dyslexia is a neurological issue, not a character flaw.” As the saying wrongly blames students for their biologically based learning differences. As the saying collaboratively to implement the necessary changes in today’s education system that so politicians must join together to increase awareness, develop understanding and work our community of administrators, teachers, parents, community leaders and even others in the community as well.

But this issue of properly educating those who think outside the box is not an individual issue to be solved one student, one family at a time. Our community of administrators, teachers, parents, community leaders and even politicians must join together to increase awareness, develop understanding and work collaboratively to implement the necessary changes in today’s education system that so wrongly blames students for their biologically based learning differences. As the saying goes, “Dyslexia is a neurological issue, not a character flaw.”

It doesn’t have to be this way.

We are mothers of bright, motivated, successful sons with dyslexia — one 42, one just 15 — both of whom have experienced far too many struggles in school. They, like so many others, would not have gotten on their pathways to success had it not been for countless exhausting hours we have spent educating ourselves and others, advocating on their behalf, and spending more time than we ever thought possible in meeting after meeting, trying to get it right. And our work has led us to work on behalf of others in the community as well.

Those individual students who have managed to succeed in school invariably have the support of an educated mentor, a committed advocate or a determined parent. Often it is the parent who takes on all of these roles. Sometimes they spend a fortune on tutors, who may range from $75 to $125 an hour or more. Others end up engaging the services of an attorney to force public schools to provide the free, appropriate public education to which they are entitled — a move that is costly for all parties.

Those who do not get the help they need — and there are far too many — are typically on a path where they will never reach their full potential, and many head for a life of truancy, high-risk behavior, self-medication and a downward spiral with predictable consequences, even prison and suicide.

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3 Responses to Dyslexia: Different Thinking for Different Thinkers

KDEF August 27, 2012 at 10:14 pm #

It would be helpful if View could post some web sites where viewers can obtain more information and sources of qualified evaluators. Dyslexia is not a phase. The sooner a child can be professionally tested and evaluated the better.

John Hayes August 28, 2012 at 9:16 am #

"A vast amount of impressive research proves these kids are typically very bright"
That is simply not true. Research does not support that statement. Research finds that the % of dyslexies does not vary in any IQ group, below, average or above average. Every study on that subject shows that dyslexia and IQ are unrelated.

It is really just a feel good statement that could easily be ignored if not for the fact that research has also shown that lower IQ dyslexics benefit from intervention as much as higher IQ dyslexics. The popularization of the brighter than average dyslexic idea results in the failure to even consider lower IQ children as dyslexic causing them to have a much lower chance of being identified and helped. That is wrong.

If you must have a feel good statement how about "the fact that brighter dyslexics are easier to identify and diagnose results in the false appearance that dyslexics generally have a average to above average IQ."

Is that really the proper goal? Spread the popular misinformation that leads to having lower IQ dyslexics ignored with no chance of being helped.

It really is a case of comparing apples and oranges. The best way to describe where the belief came into being is by analogy. Dyslexies are usually average or above average in IQ only in the way that adults are of average or above average height.

Consider the unfairness of the true statement that adults are of above average height. Of course they are because while all short children have been eliminated from the group the implication is that we are talking about all people.

At some low IQ (usually about 60) it is next to impossible to determine whether dyslexia or low intelligence is responsible for reading difficulties so those people are excluded from consideration of dyslexia by most definitions. So since the group of dyslexics has no very low IQ people included it raises the average. The implication is that the comparison is between all people and all dyslexics but that is not the case.
Redefining the comparison groups properly would show that any random adult has an equal chance of being below, average or above average height when compared against a group of all adults and a dyslexic has an equal chance of having below average, average or above average IQ when compared against everyone with an IQ above 60.

**Dyslexia symptoms in Adults** August 29, 2012 at 6:11 am #

Dyslexia is becoming an eye opener now because people are more aware of the condition they have and willing to subject themselves to adult and be aware for diagnosis and treatment.

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