Pennsylvania Branch
The International Dyslexia Association

39th Conference
on
Literacy and Learning Disabilities

Monday, October 9, 2017
Columbus Day
8:00 am to 3:00 pm
St. Joseph's University, Maguire Campus
Philadelphia, PA

Keynote Speaker: Nancy Mather, Ph.D.
Afternoon Speaker: David Kilpatrick, Ph.D.

ACT 48 * APA * ASHA* Available
Registration and Information at pbida.org
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Although a universally accepted definition of dyslexia does not yet exist, researchers and scientists from around the world have reached a consensus regarding the major characteristics and symptoms of this disorder, as well as how dyslexia affects reading and spelling development. General agreement exists that dyslexia is neurobiological in nature and that specific cognitive and linguistic processes can affect the development of both word reading and spelling, particularly the acquisition and mastery of sound-symbol relationships and the subsequent development of automaticity.

**IDA Definition of Dyslexia**

The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) definition describes dyslexia as follows: “Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge (Adopted by the IDA Board, November 2002). The National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development also use this definition (NICHD, 2002). Lyon, Shaywitz, and Shaywitz (2003) clearly explain the components and underlying rationale for this widely accepted definition.

More recently, the IDA 2010 Professional Standards described dyslexia as follows: “Dyslexia is a language-based disorder of learning to read and write originating from a core or basic problem with phonological processing intrinsic to the individual. Its primary symptoms are inaccurate and/or slow printed word recognition and poor spelling – problems that in turn affect reading fluency and comprehension and written expression. Other types of reading disabilities include specific difficulties with reading comprehension and/or speed of processing (reading fluency). These problems may exist in relative isolation or may overlap extensively in individuals with reading difficulties (p. 3) (Moats, Carreker, Davis, Meisel, Spear-Swerling, & Wilson, 2010).

Both of these definitions present a single-deficit viewpoint, that is, that the root cause of dyslexia is a problem in phonological processing. Clearly poor phonological processing is involved in numerous cases of dyslexia but the phonological deficit view that has dominated the field for years is truly inadequate for explaining all cases (Peterson & Pennington, 2012; Snowling & Hulme, 2012). Thus, if an evaluator assesses only phonological awareness, such as the student’s ability to blend and segment speech sounds, students with dyslexia may be overlooked or misdiagnosed.

In contrast to the United States, other countries have provided definitions that include several possible underlying processes that are causes or correlates of dyslexia. These definitions acknowledge that multiple cognitive abilities (e.g., working memory, rapid automatized naming, processing speed) can also impact the development of reading skills. The following two examples illustrate more encompassing definitions that go beyond phonological processing.

**Definitions of the British and Ireland Dyslexia Associations**

In October of 2007, the British Dyslexia Association Management Board approved the following definition: “Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills. It is likely to be present at birth and to be life-long in its effects. It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities. It tends to be resistant to conventional teaching methods, but its effect can be mitigated by appropriately specific intervention, including the application of information technology and supportive counseling.”

Similarly, the Report of the Task Force on Dyslexia (2001) of the Dyslexia Association of Ireland suggested the following definition: “Dyslexia is manifested in a continuum of specific learning difficulties related to the acquisition of basic skills in reading, spelling and/or writing, such difficulties being unexplained in relation to an individual’s other abilities and educational experiences. Dyslexia can be described at the neurological, cognitive and behavioural levels. It is typically characterised by inefficient information processing, including difficulties in phonological processing, working memory, rapid naming and the automaticity of basic skills. Difficulties in organisation, sequencing and motor skills may also be present” (p.31).
An Expanded Definition

The time has come to consider expanding current definitions of dyslexia to take into account additional underlying cognitive processes that can contribute to reading failure. Although both phonological processing and rapid automatized naming (RAN) can be impaired in people with dyslexia, they “…should be considered distinct constructs rather than subcomponents of a single construct” (Norton & Wolf, 2012, p. 448). In addition to phonological processing and RAN, other cognitive and linguistic factors can contribute to reading failure, including: (a) working memory, (b) processing speed, and (c) orthographic mapping (the associations between sounds and the letters, letter strings, spelling patterns, and whole words that represent these sounds).

If all cases of inadequate reading skill are attributed to poor phonological processing, the selection of interventions will also be inappropriate. For example, a student with slow RAN scores, but adequate phonological processing, will likely require an intervention that focuses on recalling orthographic patterns and increasing reading fluency, rather than a structured phonics-based program. As Monroe (1935) advised over seven decades ago, “In all remedial work, the teacher should start first with the child and then find the appropriate method. Fit the method to the child, not the child to the method” (p. 227). In order to accomplish this, one has to understand the specific cognitive and linguistic factors that are affecting reading and spelling development. It’s more than just phonological processing and it seems that the time has come to revise or expand our current definitions.

References

The Quaker School is home...to a compassionate community of students, teachers, and support staff. We believe children with complex challenges need social and behavioral stability before learning can begin. Our Quaker philosophy inspires mutual respect and patience in every aspect of school life, to nurture emotional safety and academic growth.

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It is with great pleasure that The Pennsylvania Branch of the International Dyslexia Association presents the 2017 Janet L. Hoopes Award to Curtis Kossman, founding Board President of the Provident Charter School. This prestigious award was established in 1993 in memory of Dr. Janet L. Hoopes, a dedicated Board member and Professor Emeritus at Bryn Mawr College. It is presented to an individual or individuals in Pennsylvania or Delaware who have made a significant contribution to the education of those with learning differences.

Curtis Kossman
To Receive 2017 JANET L. HOOPES AWARD
at October 9th, 2017 Conference

Curtis personally led the initiative in Western Pennsylvania to open a charter school “dedicated to serving the needs of students with dyslexia and other language-based learning differences.” It is has been his vision and tireless effort to establish a charter school so that students with dyslexia can receive Orton-Gillingham based instruction in a charter school during the school day, tuition-free. This is the first school of it’s kind in the state.

Curtis himself struggled in school as a child with dyslexia. Like many students, he labored through hours of private tutoring and learned to work longer and harder than his peers. He went on to graduate from Carnegie Mellon University and has been a successful real estate developer with Kossman Development Company. Both of Curtis’s children also have dyslexia, and once again Curtis labored through hours of private tutoring, only this time with his children. Curtis knows that he was fortunate to be able to provide his children with the tutoring and schooling they needed, and he recognizes that most families do not have the resources or the time for the after school evidence based instruction that his family has benefited from. With his daughter now in college, and his son soon to graduate high school, Curtis could have taken up another cause, or simply returned his focus to his professional life and enjoying his family. Instead, Curtis has devoted countless hours and resources to the opening of Provident Charter School.

In pursuing the charter for Provident, Curtis has been relentless. Momentum for a charter school began during a 2009 conference sponsored by the Pittsburgh Regional Group of the Pennsylvania Branch of the International Dyslexia Association. In 2010, Curtis used his personal skills and resources and “brought together an advisory working group, legal team and a curriculum team to draft bylaws, admission policies and design the curriculum.” When the school was denied the charter in one district and lost the option on a building because of the time delay, Curtis persisted and found another building in a different district and personally defrayed the cost. When the charter was again denied, he didn’t quit. Instead, Curtis led the appeal. After 6 years, the charter was finally granted in the spring of 2016. Without delay, Provident Charter School opened in August 2016 with 59 students enrolled in grades 3 and 4 and ended the year with 80 students. At the ribbon cutting ceremony, Curtis said it is his sincere hope that the faculty and staff are able to help the students “explore all that education can provide them” and “guide them in discovering their passions to become successful.” Provident will open the 2017-2018 school year with 135 students in grades 3, 4 and 5 and the school will add a grade each year through grade 8. Just this summer, the Kossman Foundation donated $50,000 to Provident Charter School for implementation of an assistive technology program.

In addition to Curtis’ vision and his personal and financial contributions to the school, he brought the issue of dyslexia to some of the region’s most influential people. In his pursuit of making this dream a reality, advocates and individuals struggling with dyslexia gained an invaluable ally in Curtis Kossman. As members of the Pennsylvania Branch of the International Dyslexia Association, we are honored to have Curtis Kossman accept this award in memory of Dr. Janet Hoopes. Dr. Hoopes would have been delighted to honor this exceptional man for his outstanding work as the driving force in opening the Provident Charter School: the first school for children with dyslexia in all of western Pennsylvania, and the very first public charter school “dedicated to serving the needs of students with dyslexia and other language-based learning differences” in the entire state of Pennsylvania.
Provident Charter School – Celebrating a Successful First Year!

On June 9, Provident Charter School in Pittsburgh – the state’s only tuition-free school designed for children with dyslexia – closed the books on a successful first year!

At Provident, we believe children with dyslexia flourish in a learning environment where their success is the driver of every decision. Our specialized, multi-sensory curriculum and small class size allows our teachers to ensure academic success for all students. As a result, children at Provident Charter School thrive academically, personally, and socially.

Some highlights of our first year:

- Grants totaling over $100,000 for teacher training, technology and curriculum.
- Eight of our teachers attained Wilson Level I Certification.
- Our administration hosted a “Lunch and Learn” event with Drs. Lisa Goldstein and Monica McHale-Small attended by over 30 local educators, psychologists and education law attorneys.
- Held a Dyslexia Simulation for parents and professionals in conjunction with the Pittsburgh Branch of the PBIDA.
- Hosted a local Tae Kwon Do tournament featuring our students performing a pattern they learned in class.

Scheduled for the 2017 – 2018 school year:

- Welcoming over 120 students from 28 school districts.
- Adding fifth grade classrooms.
- Five more teachers working towards Wilson Level I Certification.
- Collaborating with the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh to open a MakerSpace for our students.
- Incorporating assistive technology into our curriculum with the purchase of iPads.
- Launching a school-wide technology program.
- Hosting a fundraiser and gala on October 13 to celebrate a successful first year and honor Taylor Washington from the Pittsburgh Riverhounds for his contribution towards dyslexia awareness in the Pittsburgh area.

As we look to the future, we know there are many more good things to come in 2018 for our staff and students.

We’d like to thank everyone who helped make this dream a reality. After six years of hard work, Pittsburgh finally has a school designed for dyslexic students!
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AIM Institute for Learning & Research

AIM Institute for Learning & Research on the AIM Academy campus provides teachers, professionals and parents access to leading literacy experts, specialized training and informational workshops through both in-person and online programming options. Our annual professional development series reflects the latest research in cognitive science, knowledge of best practices for students who learn differently, and deep understanding of evidence-based instruction for the classroom. We are committed to quickly translating laboratory research into effective interventions and educational practices for all students.

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Reading Proficiency:
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Eva Cárdenas-Hogan, Ed.D.
Mark S. Seidenberg, Ph.D.
Julie Washington, Ph.D.

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Dyslexia Parents Connection

The Pittsburgh Regional Group continues outreach efforts through Dyslexia Parents Connection meetings. These gatherings are an opportunity for parents to build community, share resources, participate in discussions, and learn strategies to support themselves and their children. Together parents can share their children’s successes and struggles in school and beyond. We have three groups which currently meet in the South Hills, North Hills, and in the East End of Pittsburgh. Occasionally we host guest speakers to inspire or inform. This past year Taylor Washington, a professional soccer player for the Pittsburgh Riverhounds and PBIDA Youth Ambassador, inspired parents and children as he shared his struggles with dyslexia. Collin Diedrich, a scientist with multiple learning disabilities shared how he succeeded in school while encouraging students to pursue their STEM-related dreams. Provident Charter School’s Rachel Owens, Director of Special Education, and Judi Krysa, Director of Enrollment & Community Outreach, provided updates on what is happening at PCS. We also had Amy Jackson provide TeamQuest updates. If you are interested in joining or forming a parent group please email Pittsburgh.dyslexia@pbida.org.

Experience Dyslexia, A Simulation

As part of our outreach, The Pittsburgh Regional Group is presenting the simulation “Walk in the Shoes of a Person with Dyslexia” at locations throughout Western Pennsylvania. The simulation was presented on April 26, 2017, at the Riverview Intermediate Unit #6 in Clarion – 38 people attended. On September 14, the Dyslexia Simulation is scheduled at the Scottish Rite Cathedral in New Castle. The HBO documentary “The Big Picture” will be shown in addition to the simulated activities. A third simulation is scheduled for October 2, at the Allegheny Intermediate Unit in Homestead, as part of our Dyslexia Awareness Month activities. Additional simulations are currently being scheduled. If you are interested in a simulation in your area, email dyslexia@pbida.org.

Dyslexia Town Hall

A free event for parents and professionals attracted more than 100 people who gathered at the Children’s Dyslexia Center of Pittsburgh on March 30. Pittsburgh Regional Group hosted Dr. Lisa Goldstein and Saucon Valley Superintendent, Dr. Monica McHale-Small. Dr. Goldstein talked about the emotional and learning needs of students and how they are intertwined. Dr. McHale-Small discussed dyslexia and public education in Pennsylvania. Pittsburgh Riverhound, Taylor Washington, later joined PBIDA Board members Diane Reott and Carrie Gardener in a panel discussion as they answered audience questions.
Pennsylvania Runs for TeamQuest—Until Everyone Can Read!

The Pittsburgh Regional Group is proud to have two local runners represent Pennsylvania while raising awareness and funds for TeamQuest. On May 21, 2017, Margarita Hornung ran the 13.1 mile half marathon in her hometown in Ohio’s Rite Aid Cleveland Marathon. Margarita raised more than $4,550 to be used to promote continuing education and training for teachers who need scholarships for reading certification. She joined TeamQuest for her son Noah, a student at Provident Charter School (PCS) in Pittsburgh, and is inspired by him and other students who struggle to learn to read. PCS is designed for children with dyslexia and other language based learning differences.

Amy Jackson, the Dyslexia Program Coordinator for Laughlin Children’s Center in Sewickley, PA, raised over $3,500 when she participated in the San Diego Rock ‘n’ Roll in 2016. She is currently raising funds and training to run in the Arizona Rock ‘n’ Roll Marathon on January 14, 2018. She hopes to raise $4,000. Laughlin Children’s Center is a non-profit, privately funded organization which provides individual tutoring in language arts, math, study skills, and Orton-Gillingham instruction for students with dyslexia.

Both Margarita and Amy are passionate about raising dyslexia awareness and run because they know reading changes lives! Amy and her family along with PCS Director of Enrollment & Community Outreach Judi Krysa and son, Jake, volunteered at the Cleveland race while supporting Margarita. Teamquest is an endurance training and fundraising program of the International Dyslexia Association. To support TeamQuest and Amy Jackson’s next race contact www.teamquestdyslexia.org.

Margarita Hornung and family

Amy Jackson and family, with race volunteer, Judi Krysa and son, Jake Mulzet (far right) – accompanies TeamQuest
Gow is a college preparatory boarding and day school, grades 7-12, for students with dyslexia and related language-based learning disabilities. Gow provides the right environment and the right tools for dyslexic students to rethink the learning process and reinvent themselves.

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The Pittsburgh Regional Group strives to strengthen and foster greater understanding and support for all people with dyslexia and language-based differences by offering workshops for educators, supporting families, and enlightening the community. On May 13, 2017, we hosted Marilyn Zecher for an outstanding multisensory math workshop offered in the Pittsburgh area for the first time. “Strategies for Helping All Students Master Essential Concepts” was presented by Marilyn Zecher, M.A., CALT. She is a nationally certified Academic Language Therapist specializing in applying Orton-Gillingham-based strategies to a variety of content areas. She trains nationally for The Multisensory Training Institute of the Atlantic Seaboard Dyslexia Education Center in Rockville, Maryland, and is a part-time instructor at Loyola University in Baltimore. Zecher encouraged over 70 attendees to approach math with the same kind of thoughtful and targeted strategies as are applied to language-based instruction.

This one-day workshop offered hands-on, evidence-based strategies for meeting the needs of all students in critical skill areas. She uses the neuropsychology evidence described by Stanislas Dehaene for the emphasis on numeracy as a core deficit combined with evidence-based strategies for math as recommended by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. Beginning with basic numeracy and quantity awareness, there are specific conceptual horizons which all students must master if they are to succeed in higher math. Place value, multiplication/division and fractions are historically important content milestones where significant numbers of students struggle. Most math programs today utilize manipulatives in the early grades, but multiple representations of concepts are essential through fraction and algebraic procedures. Students who use manipulatives retain information longer and apply it more accurately even on follow-up testing as well as on state and standardized testing.

Participants left the workshop with ideas for teaching a whole class, a small group, or an individual learner. The audience was a combination of teachers, structured literacy tutors, and parents from across Pennsylvania and Ohio. An Orton-Gillingham tutor remarked, “I like how the instructor weaved in using the instructional progression of concrete-representational-abstract, while stressing the importance of subitizing as a fundamental skill in the development of numeracy. All these were combined with the evidence that strongly suggests multisensory and multiple representation is superior when teaching math with the same specificity and strategies that are applied to language-based instruction.”

As a result of the overwhelming enthusiasm generated at this workshop, Pittsburgh Regional Group has secured Zecher to return in June of 2018 to present her one week course “Multisensory Math I Strategies for Teaching All Kinds of Learners.” Zecher is also presenting a pre-conference symposia on math at the National IDA conference this November.
Save the Dates!
2018 Pittsburgh Region Events

Saturday, April 14, 2018
Dyslexia Today 2018: Learning and Living with Dyslexia Conference

Keynote Address by Timothy Odegard, Ph.D., CALP
Professor of Psychology at Middle Tennessee State University
Chair of Excellence in Dyslexic Studies

SESSION TOPICS
Improving Literacy Instruction* LD and Anxiety *Assistive Technology *Education Law
*Auditory Processing Disorders *Fluency Strategies *Number and Fraction Sense *Behavior
*Fostering Parent-Teacher Relationships

Details coming at pbida.org

June 25 – 29, 2018
Pittsburgh Region Workshop

Multisensory Math I Strategies for Teaching All Kinds of Learners
Presented by Marilyn Zecher, MA, CALT

Based on the Orton-Gillingham philosophy of teaching, Multisensory Mathematics combines the research-based Concrete-Representation-Abstract (CRA) approach to teaching mathematics with recommendations from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the What Works Clearinghouse, the National Math Panel and Universal Design for Learning. Participants learn to apply this methodology in guiding students from foundation skills and numeracy to place value, basic operations, fractions and decimals. Participants learn to use manipulatives effectively to reinforce concepts, aid memory, and enhance performance for all students. The approach balances conceptual understanding with procedural fluency and incorporates strategies for helping students learn and retrieve math facts. This approach is especially effective with students who learn differently, inclusion classes and ESL learners. The approach is effective for initial instruction as well as remedial work at all levels and is compatible with all curricula and programs.

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Experience Dyslexia®, A Simulation
The Impact of Betsy Boston’s Passion Upon her Retirement

Betsy Boston, our dedicated Simulation Coordinator behind the program since 2010, has recently retired from PBIDA. As she and her husband retire to the great state of Texas to spend quality time with their family, she leaves Pennsylvania and Delaware with a wonderful legacy of over 50 successful simulations involving more than 2,200 participants in the last 7 years!

For those of you who may not know about Experience Dyslexia®, A Simulation, let’s start with a quick overview. The program is designed to take participants (parents, teachers, school administrators, grandparents) for a walk in the shoes of a person with dyslexia in order to gain an understanding of the unique challenges they may face every day. The simulation begins with a brief presentation about dyslexia, including the neurological basis for the disorder, prevalence, warning signs, and the research based interventions that have been shown to have a positive impact.

Participants then take part in six simulated activities that mimic the experiences and processing of those with learning disabilities:

- Learn to Read simulates a beginning reading problem
- Listen to Me simulates an auditory figure-ground problem
- Write with Mirrors simulates a visual-motor and writing problem
- Name That Letter simulates a letter-word identification problem
- Write or Left simulates a copying and writing problem
- Hear and Spell simulates an auditory discrimination problem

Following the simulation experience, participants have the opportunity to ask questions and engage in discussion with a panel of professionals, parents and individuals with dyslexia. The feedback PBIDA has received about these programs has been overwhelmingly positive and the simulation is one of the most effective resources PBIDA has to impact the community directly.

Betsy Boston has been at the center of this outreach program since becoming the Simulation Coordinator for PBIDA in 2010. She initially became aware of the program at an IDA conference in 2001 as a parent seeking to better understand the needs of her daughter, a student with dyslexia. Jeff Adams and Mary Ellen Trent, founding members of PBIDA’s western Pennsylvania regional group, had sponsored simulations multiple times in that area. Upon their relocation to the Delaware Valley, they began holding simulations to promote dyslexia awareness there. Jeff solicited sponsors and ran a 5K to raise the necessary funds to purchase the license from the northern California IDA.

Beginning in the early 2000’s, Betsy was on a journey to become a true advocate for her daughter and the entire dyslexia community. Her first simulation played an important role in that endeavor and that experience remained close to her heart and inspired her to share what she had learned with others. When her daughter was newly diagnosed with dyslexia, Betsy, like most parents, didn’t have a clear understanding of what her daughter was dealing with and how she could most effectively support her learning. After Betsy participated in the Experience Dyslexia® A Simulation, she had a much better understanding of the impact dyslexia has on working memory, something she was not able to appreciate prior to personally going through the simulation.

Betsy continues to carry this passion and awareness with her today. Her focus has been not only to create awareness but also to empower action through the simulations. “It takes a village to raise a child” teaches an eternal truth that is believed to have its origin from an ancient African proverb. In that spirit, Betsy has consistently given credit to the many volunteers who are trained to deliver the simulation workshops. She praises their dedication to making each of the simulations a success. As she often says, without trained volunteers there is no program. One of the evolutions of the program was to have a Question & Answer panel of volunteer experts close the simulation. This often includes students with dyslexia who share pieces of their personal journey. This impressive group of student ambassadors project confidence while also being vulnerable, a true life skill! Betsy’s daughter, Becca Boston, has often served as a student ambassador on these panels. She has also lent her photography skills to many of the simulations. Becca has provided PBIDA with terrific photos that capture participants and volunteers deeply engaged in the workshops.

Betsy has been committed to raising dyslexia awareness through the simulation but she also understands the need for awareness to eventually lead to action or change. She shared a powerful story that is the perfect bow on her Simulation Coordinator legacy. A teacher participated in a simulation not really knowing what to expect but she kept an open mind. Upon going through the program, she recognized a gap in her own approach to students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities. When she returned to her classroom, she made a commitment to use her new insights when writing comments on her student’s papers. This is just one example of the impact the Experience Dyslexia® A Simulation can have on simulation participants and in turn, the students they serve.

This is what Betsy believed in from the beginning and this is what the program will continue to deliver. Our most heartfelt thank you goes out to Betsy Boston for all of her contributions to PBIDA and her tireless efforts in coordinating over fifty successful simulations that positively influenced so many people in the dyslexia community.
Experience Dyslexia®
A Simulation

The Pennsylvania Branch of the International Dyslexia Association (PBIDA) has reached over twelve hundred people in the community since 2010 through Experience Dyslexia, A Simulation. This lively and thought-provoking activity has been presented to teachers in both public and private schools, to students in an education course at a liberal arts college, to preschool staff, to multiple community groups, and to the professional staff of Intermediate Units.

What is the Simulation?
The Simulation often begins with a brief discussion of dyslexia, including the neurological basis, the demographics, the warning signs, and the interventions which have been shown, through solid research, to have positive impact.

Participants then take part in six simulated activities which mimic the experiences and processing of those with dyslexia.
- Learn to Read simulates a beginning reading problem
- Listen to Me simulates an auditory figure-ground problem
- Write with Mirrors simulates a visual-motor and writing problem
- Name That Letter simulates a letter-word identification problem
- Write or Left simulates a copying and writing problem
- Hear and Spell simulates an auditory discrimination problem

Finally, participants ask questions of an experienced panel. The program is approximately 2 1/2 hours in length.

PBIDA is able to tailor the simulation to the size and background of your audience and to the physical facilities of your meeting location.

Our Simulation volunteers have included psychologists, physicians, educators, school administrators, reading specialists, multisensory tutors, individuals (teenagers and adults) with dyslexia, and parents of children with learning disabilities.

Experience Dyslexia® is available through PBIDA in Pennsylvania and Delaware.

COMMUNITY GROUPS
$15 per person for a minimum of 20 people

IN-SERVICE PROGRAMS
$400 for 40 people
$500 for up to 90 people

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
contact PBIDA at (610) 527-1548 or dyslexia@pbida.org.
For nearly 60 years, The Pilot School has been helping students with language-based learning differences develop the skills and confidence they need to succeed in a traditional academic environment.

In November 2016, we opened our doors to our new 50 acre school, thoughtfully designed to provide a calm-yet-stimulating educational environment both inside our building and throughout the woodlands surrounding it.

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As I write this article, many schools are in the midst of Winter Break and for some students like mine, just a few short months away from the end of Senior year and the start of his last summer before college. A time when every student (and parent) is filled with excitement, fear, anxiety and a wide range of other emotions. For some, it is the satisfaction of knowing that all of the effort and hard work has paid off and your child has “succeeded” and finally made it through high school and into college. Something the parents of students with learning differences often fear may never happen, including myself.

Have we done enough?

After getting so far, you begin to question whether you have completed all the forms, paid all the down payments, filed the right documents for testing, assessment, advocacy, etc. and suddenly it hits you, have we really done everything we were supposed to do to prepare our son or daughter for college, or more importantly, for life?

This question is not without warrant. Preparing your child to leave your close observation and care after so many years and venture out on his or her own is a challenge for every parent. However, for the parents of a child with a learning difference, it can be downright frightening. My goal for this article was to draw a framework for parents, teachers and professionals to help reduce some of the angst by beginning to prepare students early for the transition from home/high school to college and beyond.

The three tools of success

While there are many factors that influence a student’s preparation for life after high school, I am going to focus my discussion on hardware, software and processes. These are three ‘tools’ that every modern student with a learning difference should master and have at their disposal. For students entering college in the Fall of 2017 and beyond, the time to make it happen is now, not next summer. For others, I recommend that your student begins to learn about these tools as early as possible, including lower and middle school to help him/her to recognize the value and need for specific technology and processes when and where appropriate and to use technology as an adaptive tool, rather than a crutch.

In my role, I have the opportunity to interact with students and parents from a variety of schools and to build lasting relationships with them as they grow and evolve through lower, middle and high school. As a result, every summer I am asked by several parents (often just weeks before college begins) to recommend a laptop they should purchase for their child and what software their child should have to support their learning difference? This is indeed an important consideration, since a computer often becomes a lifeline for every student. It relates not only to their education, but also to their personal and professional communication. In the case of a student with a language-based learning difference like dyslexia, it will be the primary piece of technology in their life that many other software and peripheral devices will communicate with every day. However it is not a question to consider just weeks before college is set to begin. You should start the discovery process now to get a real sense of what your child will need.

I often recommend that they select a laptop and software that is flexible by design and will provide the widest range of features and capabilities that your child needs. I recommend that they research their child’s needs with their child to see which platform, model, memory, etc. will suit their needs when they begin college and also 3-5 years down the road. Speak to the college and to your child’s high school teachers to see what they have used and what their own research has shown. Take time to talk to your child about what they are using now in school and what they have tried to use in terms of hardware and software. Many schools provide students with a variety of assistive hardware and software products if it is part of their educational profile and they demonstrate a need for it, but no two students are alike. I have seen a variety of products work very well for one student, but do not produce the same positive effect on another student. For example, voice to text dictation software like Dragon Dictate, or the built-in dictation feature on the Mac work very well for many students, while some students simply cannot develop the skills, or the desire to master its use. The key is to start early and find the solutions (hardware, software, processes) that will effectively accommodate their needs. Do not wait until they are ready to leave for college to initiate this discussion. They need to have these skills as second nature by the time they enter college to have any real impact.

Beware of the ‘digital natives’ fairytale

Often, parents see the use of technology and technical skills as inherent in every young person, including their child. After all, they are ‘digital natives’ right? They seem to know how to use the ‘system’ to their advantage and can easily
adapt to any situation through the use of technology. Access to technology should not be confused with a person’s ability to use it effectively. Research has shown that young people who are tech-savvy, or have an interest to learn more about technology are not typical. Research also shows that students have a tendency to significantly overestimate their skills in many areas, including technology. For example, a study completed by the University of Wollongong in Australia found that only 15% of their students are actually advanced users of ICT (information and communications technology), while 45% of the students tested would be described as rudimentary digital technology users. Similarly, a survey carried out in Austria indicates that only 7% of 15-29 year olds have very good computer skills.

In 2001, the term ‘digital native’ was first used by author and educational technology specialist Marc Prensky. In his article “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants” Prensky described ‘digital natives’ as people who have grown up surrounded by and using computers, video games, the internet, cell phones and many other digital tools. Prensky asserted that this digital immersion significantly changes how young people think and how they process information making them much more apt to use technology more effectively and efficiently than others who were not raised in this environment. He even went so far as to propose that it might even change their brain structure.

In opposition to ‘digital natives’ Prensky described all others who were born prior to the ‘digital age’ (often referring to anyone born before 1980) as ‘digital immigrants.’ In short, everyone who used more traditional ‘analog’ methods for daily tasks at school and work and were forced to adopt technology at some point later in life. Prensky’s theories were met with mixed emotions and criticism, especially within the academic community. Many professionals, including myself disagreed with this theory and cited a lack of real data to support these claims. However, the phrase took on a life of its own worldwide and spread like wildfire within the K-12 community. Suddenly the need to explain technology to students of any age was seen as a moot point and many schools began a slow internal change. Either purposefully as a school, or through individual choice, teachers just assumed that students could readily learn and use any technology efficiently and without extended instruction.

A few years later, Prensky amended his philosophy on ‘digital natives’ and developed a concept he referred to as ‘digital wisdom.’ A ‘digitally wise’ person, he inferred could have a capacity to select and adapt to technology more efficiently. While subtle in its differentiation, this new approach was much more appropriate and in tune with what many teachers and professionals were seeing in the classroom. Prensky acknowledged that his research and feedback from the academic community helped him understand that in order to use digital technologies effectively, young people must acquire digital skills, not simply inherit them based on their birth date, or environment.

**Processes as a tool for success**

The final “tool” I described earlier was processes. With regard to processes, I am referring to the day-to-day methodology any person builds up over time to manage everything they do. For many people these physical and mental processes occur naturally and often without premeditated thought. They are learned through personal experience and modeling from parents, teachers and others. For students with ADD/ADHD, process acquisition typically requires a deep commitment of effort and external assistance to develop skills over time and adhere to them for life. It can be a very frustrating approach and often does not provide the kind of instant gratification seen with the use of hardware, or software. Yet, in my experience it is the most important and powerful tool a student must garner and simply cannot be overlooked. Based on my personal and professional experience, I believe self-advocacy and executive function are the greatest influence on processes. In the college environment, they are two of the most critical skills a student with a learning difference can possess. I would like to share my own condensed, “blended” definition of self-advocacy and executive function drawn from a number of different resources over the years.

“Understanding and accepting your own personal needs and expressing them clearly to yourself and then to the right audience, while developing a realistic set of expectations, skills and collection of tools to meet those needs”. In the case of a student with learning differences heading to college, that “collection of tools” often refers to both physical products like computers, software, etc., as well as personal skills and mental processes that impact comprehension and foster lifelong learning. Skills developed over time at home and school.

For those of you about to watch your child graduate, you have been an amazing example to your child for as long as they can remember. They have witnessed everything that you have done for them to support their daily lives and to provide them with an effective education. By the time they graduate from high school, they often recognize for the first time how much you actually did behind the scenes all those years. What they need now are the tools to become what you have been all these years, an advocate for their education. More so, they need to be able to self-advocate for all of their needs.
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and regulate those needs using their executive function skills. Now is the time to share with them the tactics and processes that you have developed and the tools that you have used so effectively and transfer the ownership of these skills to them so they can begin to take on this new role as a self-advocate for their own needs. Even tasks that seem simple that you have managed for so long like medication and meals. All of it needs to be shared with them and passed to them.

**It all leads up to this moment**

For as long as you can remember, you have taken on every battle that has been placed before you and your child. You have always been there to fight on their behalf when they were not getting the instructional support they needed from your school district in elementary school. You were there every night during middle school when they were struggling with getting organized and remembering their homework assignment from that day, all while continuing to battle with your school district on what seemed like a daily basis just to get the services and support your child needed and should have had without question. Finally, throughout high school you have helped them find the right tutor to pass their courses, understand their real needs and eventually prepare for the SAT/ACT exams so they could get into the right college. Then, you filled out even more forms, worked to find grants, scholarships, anything you could find to help reduce the costs of a college education. There is nothing you wouldn't do to make everything happen for them. Both you and your child have worked so hard all these years and now, your child faces the next stage in his, or her quest, starting college and independent life. So what do I suggest you do next? Pass the torch and watch them run!

*Robert Sager, M.Ed., is the President and Founder of Edu-Tech Academic Solutions, a leading provider of educational consulting and technology support and classroom integration solutions specifically designed for independent schools.*

References and helpful content links:
National Center for Education Research (NCER)
https://ies.ed.gov/ncer/pubs/20172000/
Understood.org
https://www.understood.org/en
The NeuroAssessment and Development Center
http://www.neurodevelop.com/apps

*(Letting Go, continued from page 24)*
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