

THE DYSLEXIA REVOLUTION

Quarterly Newsletter from The Dyslexia Initiative



IN THIS ISSUE:

A Message From the Founders - 1

Standing for Equity and Justice - 2

Poetry Slam by Rj Wright - 2

The Nefarious Confluence of Race, Schooling, and Dyslexia by Dr. Lauren McClenney-Rosenstein - 3 - 4

The Cost of Refusing to Diagnose Dyslexia by Lauren Taylor - 5

The Road to Decode by Marion Waldman & Dinorah DellaCamera - 6-7

Are Writing Skills Being Taught? by Ashley Roberts - 9

Aflabet Soop by Amy Traynor - 9-10

The Power of Relatability by Jake Sussman - 11-12

Dyslexia Rocks - 13

Voices of Dyslexia - 13

A MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDERS

Well, it's summer time, but I don't see too many people sitting back and chillin'. What I am seeing are many frustrated families, wondering what the new school year will look like, asking if the COVID pandemic is really over, and how this illness will continue to impact our families. Let's not forget one other big realization that came out we supervised e-Learning for our children; we all saw with megawatt clarity, just how much our children were not learning.

Then, right when we thought 2020 couldn't get any crazier, a glaring spotlight (LONG LONG LONG LONG overdue) was placed on the struggles of our Black brother and sisters, and with that came the ability to at long last start to have real conversations about the disparity not just in equity and justice, but in education that has existed for far too long.

I read an article recently that was beautifully written, discussing how the author's grandfather had fought for his civil rights, hiding his attempts to learn to read in the Jim Crow south, and achieving his dreams when he was in his 40's by finally learning to read and gaining his GED. The author then went to point out how it's a tragedy that through Balanced Literacy, 70% of our children are not being taught to read. Who is making the choice in who may learn and who may not? Why is our society intentionally creating a second class citizenry?

We are all faced with profound questions at this point in history. I hope we can all rise to the occasion and be the best version of ourselves. In that as well, I hope we have the courage to unite, not just for racial equity and justice, but for the science of reading in all of our schools, since the science of reading truly levels the playing fields, and gives ALL children, the ability to achieve self determination.

-Ashley, Chontae, and Julie



STANDING FOR EQUITY AND JUSTICE

(Originally published on our Facebook page on June 2, 2020.)



At The Dyslexia Initiative we are an organization dedicated to dyslexia, educational equity, and the right to literacy by all, regardless of race or gender. We believe that literacy is the road to self determination and through self determination anything one can dream is possible. In the words of @Dr.OrtonGillinghamMom (please look up her page on Facebook), "There aren't enough studies out there that can prove how many young black children go undiagnosed with dyslexia or other learning disabilities. But what I CAN tell you is that according to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) in 2013 black males accounted for 37% of the total male prison population. But what's NOT talked about is why this is happening. Black students are viewed differently than their counterparts and this has got to stop. We need to take care of our black students, educate them, teach them they're worthy and CAN be successful."

And we echo what our friends at Eye to Eye said so powerfully, "We recognize within our society the clear intersection of racism and ableism Black Americans face every day. Because of this, we do not remain silent. We stand in solidarity with the voices of those demanding systemic change. We amplify and uplift the communities we serve, standing for equity and justice. We hope that the trauma and pain serve as a catalyst for a world that is more equitable, more just, and more fair."

We as a people, a society, a world, must do better. It is well past time for real and lasting change.

#BlackLivesMatter #DyslexiaRevolution #blackdyslexics #stoppipelinetoprison #weareinthistogether #educationalequity #BecauseAllChildrenDeserveToRead

POETRY SLAM BY RJ WRIGHT

Let us introduce you to Rj Wright. Rj is a spoken word artist who hopes to one day be the inspiration for a whole new generation of poets and writer.

What we are sharing here is a recording from a poetry slam that occurred in Houston, Texas in January of this year. Rj's words speak to the heart of being a black man with dyslexia. In the words of Mr. Wright, "Words are really hard!" This is a not to miss video. It is touching and soul stirring. We hope you are as moved by it as we were.

Note: You will have to access the video through Facebook.

<https://www.facebook.com/wanpoetry/videos/214117679753193/?v=214117679753193>



Somewhere we must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of dedicated individuals.

-Dr. Martin Luther King

THE NEFARIOUS CONFLUENCE OF RACE, SCHOOLING, AND DYSLEXIA

BY: DR. LAUREN MCCLENNEY-ROSENSTEIN



When teachers say they love all students and that they want to teach in urban schools to make a difference, I always wondered, what are they really saying? The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) breaks down the percentage of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools from school years 1999-2000 and 2017-2018. In 1999-2000, 84% of teachers were White and 8% were Black. In the 2017-2018 school year, there were 79% White teachers and 7% Black teachers. Data supports White teachers dominate the education field, and this is problematic in educating Black students.

The United States of America was built through racism and privilege on the backs of countless Black slaves. There is no amendment in the Constitution that protects the right to education, which means historically, those who were educated, were White and privileged. This privileged-based system sets the tone for Modern American education including the pervasive and pernicious achievement gap between Black students and their White counterparts. Frederick Douglass once said, "once you learn to read, you will be free forever." This begs the questions, why are we still trying to literally and metaphorically imprison our Black students and withhold knowledge from them? Eighty

percent of prison inmates in Texas are functionally illiterate and 48% have dyslexia (Prevalence of Dyslexia Among Texas Prison Inmates).

The confluence of race and dyslexia is almost nonexistent in research. In other words, there is a scarce amount of research studies about dyslexia among Black students and its implications. It's easy to believe dyslexia is only prevalent in White people because the American school system clearly value white students. Furthermore, white families may have the cultural and economic capital to pay for tutors or send their children to private school for a specialized approach to teaching dyslexics. Conversely, some families of color disproportionally lack the same levels of cultural and economic capital to seek supports. Most public schools do not know about dyslexia and teachers aren't trained in college or graduate school about the neurodevelopmental disorder. This sets up future educators with sparse knowledge on structured literacy. Robinson cites, "Black males who have dyslexia potentially face a 'triple' burden. They face the mutual problems of other Black students such as prejudice, discrimination, and inadequate resources" (Ladson- Billings, 2012; de Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, Park, 2006; West-Olatuji, Baker & Brooks, 2006).

Why should many Black communities suffer and not have the same access and opportunities that significant numbers of White families can leverage? Reading and writing are civil rights, and everyone should have the opportunity to receive the supports they need to be successful. A Texas study found that students who are disciplined through removal from the classroom (i.e. suspended, expelled, or sent to a behavior program or specialized school for behavior) are more likely to end up in the juvenile justice system and that students who are suspended have a higher rate of repeating a grade or dropping out of school altogether. Black students are suspended or expelled three times more than their White counterparts. According to federal data in the academic 2011-2012 school year, Black children made up 16% of enrollment in public schools yet, they accounted for 31% of all in school arrests (Nelson & Lind, 2015). These statistics are alarming and disheartening.

Nationally, Black males who make it to the 12th grade are performing at least four years behind White males in reading and math. The Black-White achievement gap can be viewed in various ways: teacher quality, academic rigor, high academic expectations, family involvement, and exposure to literacy-enriched environments. All of these components significantly influence students' achievement (Robinson, 2013). The achievement gap between Black and White students is widely recognized as an urgent crisis, but what are we as a society really doing to recognize and actually make a change?

In 2014, a researcher from Columbia University discovered that five-year-old boys whose fathers had been incarcerated were ill prepared for school in comparison to their peers whose fathers were not incarcerated. Consequently, making the Black boys who don't have a father present in the home more likely to be placed in special education for their behavioral disabilities (Lind, 2014). We as educators need to be proactive rather than reactive towards all students but especially to Black students. White teachers, especially those who struggle with unconscious bias and white privilege blindness, tend to be reactive to Black students. Thereupon, this leads to addressing symptoms rather than the root causes for symptoms. Understanding the child's home life needs to be the

number one priority before any decision is made about special education services. All too often academic concerns are treated as behavioral problems creating an adversarial relationship with the students and their families on one side with teachers and administration backed up by the weight of historically racist school systems. Educational Psychologists and special educators need to understand what dyslexia is, recognize the signs, and know how to support students. Moreover, students of color.

In order to make a systemic change within the school district, it has to start from the top. Michael D. Thompson, a co-author of the report generated by Council of State Governments Justice Center and Texas A&M University's Public Policy Research Institute states, "The bottom line is that schools can get different outcomes with very similar student bodies," he adds, "School administrators and school superintendents and teachers can have a dramatic impact." (George, 2011). However, to make this dramatic impact, we need to look at unconscious bias, structural, and systemic racism and its deleterious impact on Black students. Furthermore, we, as stakeholders, must examine with courage, honesty, and sincerity about how microaggressions, teacher bias, and white privilege all coalesce around the teaching and learning of Black students. It is evident that Black students are seen as less than their White counterparts on many levels. Love states, "Teachers who disregard the impact of racism on Black children's schooling experiences, resources, communities, and parent interactions will do harm to children of color. This ignorance, is not just a painful sign of a blatant lack of information—a function of racism is to erase the history and contributions of people of color—it is a dangerous situation as these teachers go on to take jobs in schools filled with Black and Brown children (2019)".

My own schooling experiences give credence to the statistics cited previously in this article. The vast majority of my teachers throughout my K-12 journey were White women. As an educator myself, I remember being the first Black teacher hired in a private school serving students with dyslexia in Atlanta. I didn't feel uncomfortable because I grew up in an affluent middle-class area where I was almost always the minority or one of the few Black students in class or at social gatherings. I learned to assimilate very early in life. I can remember having a Black woman as my 3rd grade teacher and a Black woman as my 8th grade social studies teacher. The Black faces seen throughout most American schools wear the uniform of custodians, coaches, or food service employees. Thinking back to my public-school experiences, I can draw upon a multiplicity of microaggressions, outright oppressive comments, and lower expectations aimed squarely at me. In fact, I recall several White teachers commenting on my fitness for assignment completion or certain college acceptances. White students constantly and consistently see and engage with White role models through their teachers, assignments, administrators, and historical and literary figures in traditional heritage-based history and/or English classes. Conversely, growing up Black, Indigenous, or as a person of color (BIPOC) in American schools deprives these students of role models that look like them, share their experiences, and think like them. Thus, the model to shoot for in American schools is to be like the White people, denying their own cultural heritage and history to assimilate into the dominant White culture. One only needs to read Ruby Payne to get the message: BIPOC students will achieve success when they act White and middle class. Unfortunately, this leads to misdiagnosing and handling of Black dyslexic students. When you grow up Black, Indigenous, People of Color, (BIPOC) and attend school where you don't see positive role models that reflect you, your heritage, or understand your culture, it makes you feel unimportant and less than your White counterparts. This is a racial systemic issue that has got to change today if we want to see a difference in our American schools.

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THE COST OF REFUSING TO DIAGNOSE DYSLEXIA

BY: LAUREN TAYLOR

Editor's Note: The below is an extract from a longer piece which is located on The Dyslexia Initiative blog. The link is below the article. We hope you enjoy Lauren's very powerful piece.

The mental health statistics that come along with our children cost school districts more than they are willing to spend. However, the mental health statistics would be more affordable if public schools were willing to acknowledge their defiance and complicit behavior towards failing our children. Imagine a supportive environment where our children were afforded FAPE. Imagine clinical psychologists on staff to work with our children on their lack of self-esteem. Imagine counselors being afforded to our children whenever they needed them. These are all very attainable and tangible. They are not things out of fairy tales. However, you'll be hard pressed to find a public-school system that willingly hands them over to your child without a fight.

I was asked to write about the emotions that come along with raising a Dyslexic child. There is no short way to describe those emotions. They range from being diagnosed with PTSD by proxy of your own son due to the amount of fighting that takes place for basic rights. To being medicated for high blood pressure stemming from the constant fight or flight mode one finds themselves in when you begin pushing back and refusing to take NO for an answer. My family lost five years we'll never get back. Five years where my son didn't have his "fun" mama. Five years where my husband didn't have access to his wife. At least not the wife he married. He had access to a wife that was constantly fighting for their child.

There have been times where I didn't even recognize who I'd become. During my fight I lost a piece of my soul that I'm trying to get back. I lost the ability to trust anything I was ever told at face value. It will take me years before I'm able to trust teachers again. My son doesn't trust them. My son cannot look teachers in the eyes. He even drills down to the gender of teachers he cannot look in the face. That came out in a CBT session with his therapist. My toddler didn't have her mother fully present in her infant years due to having to fight this broken system for her brother. I wish I could tell families who are just beginning this journey not to expect these things I've just typed out. I wish I didn't have enough for a novel. I wish I still saw hope for our children inside public school. I wish the world knew how amazing Dyslexic children are. I wish they knew how intelligent and empathetic our children are. I wish they'd give them a chance and challenge them to become the best versions of themselves. I wish we as their parents didn't have to spend so much time explaining WHY we have to fight so hard. I wish for so much more. I will continue to fight this fight for children. Regardless of where my child attends school, I will not stop fighting until our children are accepted for who they are. My son like his aunt and so many other beautiful Dyslexics will forever look back at school as something less than stellar. They will carry the mental and sometimes physical scars with them for the rest of their lives. Their mothers, fathers, and siblings will always be on alert for the unexpected because that's the only normal we know. We celebrate our son on a daily basis because we know that's the only acceptance he truly needs and wants anymore. Dyslexia has made our son into who he is now. We wouldn't change that. If you ask our son if he'd change anything, he will proudly tell you he wouldn't want to be any other way. He truly believes being normal is boring.

To read the rest of this powerful article by Lauren, please click on the following link:

<https://www.thedyslexiainitiative.org/post/the-cost-of-refusing-to-diagnose-dyslexia>



TEACH MY KID TO READ: STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY LITERACY INITIATIVES

BY: MARION WALDMAN & DINORAH DELLACAMERA

The Road to Decode

What if public libraries could effect educational change by learning about, then offering evidence-based resources that enable all children to learn to read? In the spring of 2019, Teach My Kid to Read (TMKTR) decided to find out. We launched The Road to Decode to enlist libraries as partners in bridging the gap between school and community. Our goal was to invite fifty libraries in the state of New York to learn about how we learn to read and then act on that knowledge. We asked libraries to display decodable and dyslexia-themed books for the month of October, Dyslexia Awareness Month. The hope was that libraries would create permanent sections of decodable books.

Why focus on libraries? For years we've been discussing whether libraries could stock decodable books, and whether librarians could be resources for families of struggling readers. Then we had an opportunity to participate in a legislative meeting about connecting the dots between schools and the community. (The dots made a stop at the library on the way.) Our final impetus to launch came when board member Faith Borkowsky wrote to a library that had created a dyslexia section. She explained how decodable books help all children learn to read. The library renamed their section "Decodable Books." Someone was listening; would there be more?



To reach more individual libraries, TMKTR worked through New York's library systems. There are twenty-three library systems throughout the state, and each system includes between twenty and fifty libraries. Connecting with youth and children's librarians at the system level was critical to garnering support at the individual libraries in each system so they would get on The Road to Decode. We presented our stories, an overview of the process of how we learn to read, and where the different resources fit. TMKTR created an infographic poster on how The Road to Decode works, we offered an online course on dyslexia through collaborator Glean Education so librarians could learn more about reading issues like dyslexia, and we conducted surveys to gather data from partner libraries.

Parents who learned more about resources that they can use to help their children said that it was life-changing and that they felt they now had options besides tutors they couldn't always afford. Librarians said they were better able to serve their communities. One hundred percent of all libraries that participated in The Road to Decode said they were likely or highly likely to learn about or stock decodable texts.

Why Access to Decodable Book is Essential

Decodable books are the training wheels that enable children to apply reading skills they have recently learned to additional text so that they can read independently. Decodable books are systematic and cumulative, and as children progress they encounter longer passages that offer increased opportunities for development of language, vocabulary, and comprehension. Decodable books can help all learners achieve reading proficiency, although children with learning differences like dyslexia need even more practice with decodable books.

Many schools include a phonics component in their reading instruction, but most still lack adequate access to matching decodable books. This practice leaves these students stranded in leveled readers that aren't matched to their phonics skills, and reading instruction becomes fragmented. Children with learning differences like dyslexia need a structured-literacy approach to learn to read, and libraries can support this approach by stocking decodable books.

Structured literacy and decodable books are a hand-in-glove connection. Without decodable books, children have minimal opportunities to practice reading books that match their skill set. Libraries are open to all members of the community, so all children can have access to resources that help them become skilled readers. Once librarians understand how we learn to read and where decodable books fit, they can support more of the community.

Structured Literacy & Decodable Books



Why Libraries and Community Solutions are Necessary

We know from decades of reading research that ninety-five percent of all children have the cognitive ability to become skilled readers. Yet, two-third of all fourth graders are not reading proficiently. All children benefit when they learn to read using a structured-literacy approach based on the science of reading. Children with learning differences like dyslexia must learn to read using a structured-literacy approach.

Unfortunately, school districts have been slow to embrace instructional approaches based on the science of reading. The majority of schools use balanced-literacy approaches that leave many students behind in reading skills. Getting evidence-based practices that are rooted in cognitive science implemented in classrooms and training teachers to use these methods is an ongoing struggle.

Why The Road to Decode Supports The Science of Reading

Now more than ever we see that all kids need to be able to read, and more members of our communities need a basic understanding of the processes and resources that enable reading. Literacy rates directly correlate to public health, socio-emotional well-being, academic success, and future economic independence. Moreover, the educational landscape is undeniably changed, and further changes throughout the educational system seem inescapable and unpredictable. Parents and concerned stakeholders in each community also have unique concerns. Parents in particular are shouldering more responsibility as schools re-imagine what the upcoming school year will look like. We must prepare for all potential variables. Even in this environment, libraries can serve as community hubs and make access to decodable books, structured-literacy-based materials, and dyslexia resources available online to empower all stakeholders.

Signing up for The Road to Decode

Many libraries were closed in 2020, so The Road to Decode has pivoted online and expanded beyond New York for October 2020. The Road to Decode provides librarians with program materials, information about decodable books, social-media kits, incentives from collaborators, and virtual and online events. In October we will offer a free mini-course for professional development. Literacy expert Faith Borkowsky will lead an early-literacy train-the-trainer program that offers libraries additional information that they can then to give parents or caregivers to support their children's literacy development. Look for more information over the next few months.

Let's get The Road to Decode in all our libraries and provide effective, equitable solutions that enable all children learn to read! Sign up as a volunteer for The Road to Decode and encourage or help a local library to create change!
<https://teachmykidtoread.org/the-road-to-decode/the-road-to-decode-2020/>



Teach My Kid to Read
 Community Literacy Solutions

ARE WRITING SKILLS BEING TAUGHT?

BY: ASHLEY ROBERTS

Fun fact, I have an under graduate degree in English with a specialization in Creative Writing. From as young as I can remember, I was given exercises and encouraged to write as much as possible. My grandmother, a former teacher with an M.Ed., constantly sent me writing materials, trying to foster my love of language.. Fast forward more years than I care to admit, to my own child attending public school. Naively, I assumed the writing process was actually being taught, but what the e-Learning environment proved to me was that the same assumption that all children are simply born knowing how to read was being made about writing; in other words, that all children were born just knowing how to write.

Diving in deep, the picture that quickly became clear was not simply the lack of understanding of HOW to structure a sentence, much less a paragraph, but there was a severe lack of understanding of grammar and syntax.

While my child could construct what was required for class purposes, his dyslexia and dysgraphia held him back. Four years of remediation had focused keenly on his reading ability, but little effort had been put forth into his ability to write (yes, this was a choice given the severity of his reading ability). Que the double whammy whack on the head for mom.

Like the lack of explicit reading instruction, the same thing happened with writing instruction, grammar and syntax. The assumption that any child can just KNOW how to write is an egregious fallacy with dire consequences. Now I understand why so many college professors complain that their students do not know how to write a paper. The general product is incomplete sentences, with dialog based language that is inappropriate for the written form. Thoughts are not well constructed, and the various forms of writing are mysteries to the average student.

If you are finding yourself in the same situation, consider then Sedita's Writing Rope which may be found through the International Dyslexia Association's website at the following link: <https://dyslexiaida.org/joan-seditas-writing-rope/?fbclid=IwAR2C3F4gbvxEjUiYenMCf4NDmFuFDWxbRsQ2l5f6goMQ8KjmpdOCenbogqo>. Similar to the Simple View of Writing, as epitomized by Scarborough's Rope, what the rope argues is there are various components that must be understood in order to write well. Within the strands you have critical thinking (generating ideas, gathering information, and the writing process which is organizing, drafting, writing and refining), syntax (grammar and syntactic awareness, sentence elaboration, punctuation), text structure (narrative, informational, opinion structures, paragraph structures, patterns of organization (description, sequence, cause / effect, compare / contrast, problem / solution), linking and transition words and phrases), writing craft (word order, awareness of task / audience, literary devices) and transcription (spelling, handwriting / keyboarding).

Overwhelmed? The fact is now that you're an adult, much of this is automatic. You've learned it so well that you rarely stop to consider the pieces, but how often do you stop and question the placement of a comma?

To write correctly and well is no simple task and frankly it just isn't being taught anymore. This much change. Writing must be taught and taught with explicitness and with great attention to detail. Will every child be the next Charles Dickens? No, but every child CAN learn to write and write well.

The written form is not equivalent to the spoken form. It is a different skill altogether, and one we cannot deny our children.

"I believe the world is made of words and if you know the words the world is made of, you can make of it whatever you wish."
-Terence McKenna

For further information I recommend The Writing Revolution, A Guide to Advancing Thinking Through Writing in All Subjects and Grades by Judith C. Hochman and Natalie Wexler. The book may be purchased on Amazon, https://www.amazon.com/Writing-Revolution-Advancing-Thinking-Subjects/dp/1119364914/ref=sr_1_3?dchild=1&keywords=The+writing+revolution&qid=1593115943&sr=8-3



ALFABET SOOP

BY: AMY TRAYNOR, OTR, M.A., ATP

A column dedicated to facilitating an understanding of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework and Assistive Technology (AT) and what each might look like for individuals with dyslexia.

If there is anything we know as parents, advocates, educators or individuals with dyslexia know is that one size does not fit all. Whether you're examining the characteristics, intervention needs or even assistive technology, each is personal to individuals with dyslexia. To say there is "one best AT tool" for dyslexia would be remiss, however, there are categories of tools that are a brilliant place to start when investigating support solutions for literacy. **Text-to-speech (TTS)** is one category of tools that do exactly that, they take printed text and turn it into "speech" that is spoken/read to the user, and what we will focus on this time.

Text to speech (TTS) takes many forms and is an ever growing segment of technology; it is the ultimate in 'leveling the playing field' for an individual with dyslexia. While it is exciting to see 'mainstream' platforms embrace accessibility, it is important to remember that while there are free options, many times the customizable features that individuals desire are only available in paid apps/programs/devices. Given that TTS is critical for providing grade level content to students with print disabilities in a barrier-free format, it is most responsible to consider all options, not just those that are free or most easily obtained. Don't just take my word on it though; the benefit of TTS for individuals with dyslexia or other print disabilities is well documented in evidence-based, peer-reviewed sources! Here is one very current resource that you can have in-hand when you address TTS needs for your student with their school. Keelor, et al (2020) published a nice research article that in short provides that "Text to speech technology is an effective compensatory for struggling readers. Increasing reading comprehension with TTS not only allows students with reading difficulties to access but also comprehend text that is more commensurate with their typical peers. This has positive implications in overall academic success, self-esteem and self-efficacy." It's available for download for free-I've cited it at the end of this article!

The following are my "top picks" for tools that provide TTS and what I like most about them. Remember, this area is ever-expanding and these are just a few of my favorite text-to-speech options to have available in your 'toolbox' of options!

Snap and Read Universal (paid): This tool is available as a Chrome extension as well as an iOS app. It is much more robust than simply text to speech. Created and distributed by Don Johnston, Incorporated (<https://learningtools.donjohnston.com/product/snap-read/>), Snap and Read will of course read text both in standard electronic presentation and as screen-shot for "locked text" but also can change the reading level of text, translate text into 100+ languages, annotate (write on, complete) PDFs/worksheets, remove distractions, provide overlay/line guide, provides study tools such as outlining, bibliographer and picture-supported dictionary. The toolbar also integrates with Overdrive for use with borrowed library books! There is nothing I don't love about this extension and I really love the v2 iOS app! You can LITERALLY receive a worksheet from a teacher, snap a picture of it and be able to have it read to you AND complete electronically using the keyboard, word prediction OR speech to text that can then be immediately saved or shared! They have fabulous demos and product support on their website and also offer a free trial, so go check it out!

ReaderPen (paid): What I love most about the ReaderPen is the discrete portability of this tool. It is about the size of a highlighter, used in a similar fashion and is much less 'attention getting' than tablets or even mobile phones. Another bonus to the pen is that it does not require internet! The user moves the pen over printed text (ideally a flat, non-shiny surface) to hear the text read either through the speaker or use of a headset. The pen can be used in English, Spanish or French and also provides dictionary support, voice recorder and has the ability to scan and store text! This company also offers free trials (typically between the company and school districts) so head to their website (www.scanningpens.com) to learn more and find out how to get your hands on one for a trial!

Microsoft Immersive Reader (free): Immersive Reader is part of Microsoft's Learning Tools suite and students and teachers are eligible to have Office 365 Education free! Immersive Reader reads text aloud, contains a picture dictionary and also allows the user to change the spacing and size of the text, highlight words as they are read and break words into syllables. While free and built in, there are quite a few steps and the learning tools are not built into all of Microsoft's programs, lending it not as 'user friendly', in my opinion, but it is a free option. <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/education/products/learning-tools>.



Office Lens: Office Lens is a free app (iOS or android) that allows the user to take a picture of text and then provides options to store/save the captured text but also provides Immersive Reader as an option that will convert the text into a format that can be read. Once text is converted into readable text, the text is highlighted as it is read out loud. Again, while free, there are multiple steps and cannot be used with all programs, lending it not as user-friendly (again, my opinion), but it is a nice free option when there are no others. Search it up in your app store!

Seeing AI: Developed and touted as a 'talking camera for the blind', Seeing AI provides some lovely support for all individuals with print disabilities! It is designed to work with the voice-over accessibility option in iOS devices and the features most beneficial for individuals with dyslexia include text to speech (signage, documents, menus, etc) as soon as it appears in front of the camera, can scan product barcodes which then allows the user to hear the product name and information (when available) including instructions, and can even read small amounts of handwriting! It is available in English, Italian, Dutch, German, French, Japanese and Spanish.

Speaking of working with the iOS voice-over accessibility option, don't forget about accessibility options that are built into mainstream technology-computers, phones, tablets, etc. all have accessibility options already available!

Keelor, Jennifer L. "Text-to-Speech Technology: Enhancing Reading Comprehension for Students with Reading Difficulty." *Assistive Technology Outcomes and Benefits*, Nancy Creaghead, Noah Silbert, and Tzipi Horowitz-Kraus, vol. 14, Spring 2020, pp 19-35. https://www.atia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ATOB-V14-A2-Keelor_et al.pdf

Amy Traynor, OTR, M.A., ATP: Amy is an occupational therapist, assistive technology professional, and most proud of her role as mom. She began her occupational therapy career in August 2000, committed to success and participation for ALL students in the school setting. Most of her 20 years supporting students in public schools were focused on assistive technology supports for literacy and physical access. As a parent of a child with dyslexia, she has a deep understanding and appreciation for the role technology plays for students who learn differently. Amy recently founded E2 Alliance, LLC, providers for educational consultation, evaluation, advocacy and training. Given her commitment as a parent advocate, the National Center for Learning Disabilities has contracted with Amy to lead their Texas Parent Advisory and Advocacy Council. Feel free to share thoughts or ask questions by emailing Amy at info@e2alliance.org



THE POWER OF RELATABILITY

BY: JAKE SUSSMAN, (@JAKESUSSMANLIVE)

FOUNDER OF SUPERPOWER CONSULTING, DYSLEXIA/ADHD INFLUENCER & MENTOR

Before reading any further, imagine yourself in your child's shoes...Doing this may require you to mentally put aside your to-do's, outstanding tasks, emails, responsibilities, and everything else that comes with parenting an LD child. Once fully engaged, we can now begin to explore their world...

What do you see? Perhaps you see a world with untainted joy, wonder, and excitement. Or maybe you experience endless curiosity and bewilderment. Letting your mind run wild, eagerly learning the world, each day, comes with a new adventure. Now, the world of joy, curiosity, and imagination that you just immersed yourself in is "labeled": it is made to believe that it is no-good and different. Not "normal."

The negative labels are not only destructive but are also counterproductive to our children's success.

As an LD mind myself, I know first hand the challenges of overcoming these labels. Throughout the younger years of my life, my parents were constantly turning to doctors, therapists, tutors and specialists. No one could reach me. Because I was so misunderstood, my impulses turned erratic. I was labeled a behavioral problem. Sound familiar?

As I look back on my grade school years, I envision what my life might have looked like had I had access to someone who truly understood my mind and my potential. One thing was missing. A mentor. Someone who was also misunderstood. Another "behavioral problem". Someone who has been through the same struggles, felt the same isolation, judgement and confusion, and who was eager to support me through my challenging process. Someone who fought against the labels and won. If only...

Flash forward to today, and mentorship has become a highly reliable alternative for social and emotional growth, development and evolution of one's self.

I founded Superpower Consulting with one simple belief; unlike professionals, mentors guide and advise, instead of fix or prescribe. Statistics show that 81% of those who meet regularly with a mentor are more likely to participate in extracurriculars (The Mentoring Effect, 2014), 52% less likely to skip a day of school, and 55% more likely to get into college (The Role of Risk, 2013). In other words, mentorship is designed to empower and equip mentees with the skills they need to confidently succeed in any environment. For LD kids/young adults, being able to excel in a traditional learning environment is the name of the game.

Our philosophy is built on 3 pillars; Self reflection, Communication, Self advocacy. Each one building on the next. We believe that when children are given the space to safely communicate and express their emotions, explore their habits and behaviors, and feel confident about their hobbies, confidence undoubtedly skyrockets. This success gives them the strength and the courage to tackle more challenging tasks.

Now more than ever, children with minds like mine, are craving support and connection with someone who understands them. Especially in times of uncertain change. While we each may have our unique story, we can all agree that our children have struggled to stay engaged and connected with online learning, have felt isolated from their friends, and worst of all, have been out of a consistent, reliable routine.



The fact of the matter is, is that when our kids feel filled with fear, anxiety, and stress, they are unable to manage and prioritize their emotions (especially when they do not have the skills to self-reflect or the language to effectively communicate with others.)

However, when given the space of relatability, comfortability and connection, kids in our program share how they feel and what they love. Once heard, validated and understood, kids have experienced a new sense of awareness, engagement and confidence in their abilities to manage emotions and pursue more challenging tasks (i.e. schoolwork, chores, relationships, communication, self awareness).

Here are our top 5 Tips on how you can actively relate to your kids:

1. **Get vulnerable.** If you've gone through challenges in life, share with them your emotional experience of the challenge. It will validate your kids' experience and have them feeling supported.
2. **Be willing to enter their world** with an open mind and encouragement
3. **Pay close attention** to their passions, interests, and natural abilities "This will help show insight to activities needed to feel expressed and safe. At Superpower Consulting we call these outlets.
4. **Don't be afraid** to ask the "why". In order to get to the root of how our kids are truly feeling, we need to be willing to dig deeper and ask questions. Use the "I don't know" response as a launchpad for curiosity.
5. **Keep your kids on a schedule.** Consistency is one of the most important tools to support the momentum for kids with learning and attention challenges. Hold them accountable, and instead of "discipline" explore and communicate the impact of their actions.

For additional reading and resources, here are some of my most recommended books :

- Permission to Feeling by Dr. Marc Bracket
- How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie
- Power of Habit by Charles Duhigg
- Crucial Conversations by Multiple Authors

You can contact Jake Sussman with questions and follow-ups at jake@superpowerconsulting.com, @JakeSussmanLive or visit our website www.superpowerconsulting.com



DYSLEXIA ROCKS



Spread happiness, love & inspiration through the simple gesture of painting rocks & "hiding" them throughout the community for people to find. This is a community-building initiative meant to inspire creativity in all ages & bring kids/families back together again in a world gone completely wild. This is for any person of any age.

Here is how it works: All you have to do is decorate rocks and place them outside for others to find. Ex: gas pump, park bench. Use Acrylic paint found in craft sections, paint markers, Sharpies, etc. It is recommended that you spray your rocks with a clear gloss spray paint when finished to help protect the paint from the weather. On the back of your artwork, we would love if you referenced "Dyslexia Rocks!"

If you find an art rock, you can either keep the rock or re-hide the rock for someone else to find :) Please be considerate of others. If you find several rocks together, please take one and leave some for others.

We would love it if you posted pictures of your painted rocks with the hashtag #DyslexiaRocks before you hide them, or when you find them.

Everyone loves to see when their rocks are found, but please understand that not everyone has Facebook or the Internet. This is more about making someone smile than it is Facebook recognition. :)

There is a Facebook page called @DyslexiaRocksProject and a group called Dyslexia Rocks for all postings. The goal is to get lots of people all across our county, maybe even internationally, painting so that there are lots of rocks to find out there! And, to help spread awareness of dyslexia! This is meant to be fun for every one of all ages and abilities.

Rules: Please keep your artwork and comments PG rated as kids love to look for and find the hidden rocks. Please only leave rocks outside (but not in grass or anywhere a mower could run over), not inside businesses. Remember to be respectful of private property and businesses. DO NOT take unpainted OR painted rocks from businesses, people's yards, flower beds, cemeteries etc. Also, it is illegal to get rocks from the railroad tracks. Please don't place rocks inside or in front of the credit/debit card readers at ATMs, gas stations, sonic etc. Please be careful placing rocks close to businesses after hours. It's possible to trip alarms. And, lastly, no advertising on the rocks!

VOICES OF DYSLEXIA

Something very near and dear to my heart is a little something we created called Voices of Dyslexia. Voices is an archive of testimony, whether written or recorded, showing the good, the bad and the ugly, to show the world the truth of what it is to be dyslexic. We profoundly believe that there shouldn't be an ounce of shame in being dyslexic as there is nothing wrong with the dyslexic individual, it's simply how their brain is wired, yet the truth is the way our educational system ignores our children, the cost can be severe. This archive of testimony is meant to serve as a reflection of that truth. This is open to children (with a parent's or legal guardian's permission), adults, advocates, parents, to tell their truth. Our dream is that one day the archive will be large enough that the truth of dyslexia can no longer be ignored.

To lend your voice to the archive, please reach out to The @VoicesofDyslexia or the @DyslexiaInitiative pages on Facebook, or message us through our website.



Don't forget to subscribe for updates like our newsletter and more on our website,
www.TheDyslexiaInitiative.org.

