

Section Three - Learning and Barriers

We know that students have many ways of learning. We have common sense and research that assures us that we do not learn in the same way, find interest in the same things and that we have different ways of approaching how we learn.

At present, our system of education sends out two conflicting messages.

- **the individual really matters**
and
- **we teach subjects, not students.**

That incongruity heightens when we look at standardized testing. By the time a student gets into high school, the gap between what an individual student is able to learn and what that student had better be learning can be quite a chasm.

The situation is made more difficult by pressures to use one set of scores to decide who is teaching and learning, and the pressure for everyone to have a diploma to be considered for employment. If a student who does not learn in the typical way. It can feel rather like trying to get into the swim of things with a killer whale circling the iceberg.



Since the educational climate isn't likely to change, we need to be the professionals who find a way to serve our students. We cannot coax a student to jump off the cliff without the skills to succeed. At the same time, we can't leave them teetering on the edge, unable to dive in and find success. Every student is precious, so it makes no sense to take a "survival of the fittest" stance either. The cost of failure is high - high for the student, the family, the community, and our own sense of hopelessness and inadequacy.

So what can we do? We support the student while we prepare them. If the student cannot learn to read, we teach coping, shortcuts, support systems, assistive technological advances. Not able to learn math? We utilize calculators, computers, peers, manipulatives. Short attention span? We help the student find ways to focus more efficiently

If a student has difficulty learning as most teachers teach, if entrance exams will be failed and doors closed because the student does not know how to learn, then we must teach the student how to find and use power tools. This next section addresses the possibility that we can expedite learning for students who have previously been thwarted.

I am a *teacher*,
and I believe in teaching and learning. I believe that great teachers teach what a student needs to learn, is prepared to learn, is excited about and motivated to learn. A *great teacher* does not teach to the test for the sake of scores -- a *master teacher* teaches the student what he or she can learn for the sake of the student.

And a student's skills are honed so that student can be all he or she is and share that with other youth, and ultimately with society.
I believe each of us has strengths and hard places when we are learning, but I believe in seeing what will work, not what will look good.

Low scores = not able to work comfortably at the same pace and on the same material as peers. They may signal learning problems, or missed skills, but they may also tell us that the student is just not ready to process that information. They may let us know that math is not a strength, but they do not tell us that math is a disability.

They may tell us that the student is not ready to learn math as it is being presented, but they do not tell us that the student is not ready to learn math. They may tell us that the student is not ready to learn math today, but they do not tell us that a student is not ever going to be ready to learn math.

Low scores do not = learning disability



Remember the big picture --- today the student is not learning, so how can you empower him to learn tomorrow?



The student may not do well on the tests --- how can you prepare him to do well in life?



The student may not be able to do everything in school at age 50 not so far away what will s/he be able to contribute to the community?



Today you set the foundation for that contribution or unfulfilled promise.



When we look at what is working, we find a key.

When we look at what a student can do - likes to do - is passionate about doing,

We find a learning ability.

When we recognize what a student:

- cannot do
- puts off,
- refuses to work on,
- gets poor scores on,
- finds frustrating and confusing,

that is the key to allowing us do a better job of helping the youth.

We view it as a challenge - an opportunity.

Because we honor the name, TEACHER, when we find something a student cannot do, we find a challenge rather than a disability.

Our challenge is to find what will work, what ought to come next, to prepare the student . . . TO DO and To Succeed

When we find something a student may never be able to do - we move on to *what they can do* rather than labeling the student as disabled.

Can't carry a tune? Then that is not your strength, so we focus on what you can do. Can't memorize times tables? We will help you memorize something else, and give you a calculator.

Can't see colors? We will help you adapt and work on what you do well.

Dr. J's Socratic Creed

I believe that each person whom I teach will be a wiser person and a better human being for having been my student.




I believe in the moral, intellectual, emotional, social and physical upward development of every human being.

I believe that my presence as a teacher can promote and facilitate rather than retard this complete development.

I promise I shall never use my position of authority to belittle another human, but rather I shall always relate to the students under my care with the respect and the dignity they deserve, as the highest form of earthly life; capable of becoming more noble, perhaps with my help.

I promise to continue in my own upward development as a whole person and to devote my professional life to the practice of this creed.

Reading issues and dyslexia

	<p>"I can't read that." "Do letters move around when you try to read?" "Yeah, I read the directions!" "This is stupid." My dad makes a ton of money and he didn't graduate! * * * * *</p>	<p>Definition: Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability in which a person has trouble reading words, sentences or paragraphs. Both oral and written language are affected.</p> <p>The Definition of Dyslexia as adopted by the Research Committee of IDA, May 11, 1994 and the National Institutes of Health, 1994 is...</p> <p>Dyslexia is one of several distinct learning disabilities. It is a language-based disorder of constitutional origin characterized by difficulties in single word decoding, usually reflecting insufficient phonological processing abilities. These difficulties in single word decoding are often unexpected in relation to age and other cognitive and academic abilities; they are not the result of generalized developmental disability or sensory impairment. Dyslexia is manifest by variable difficulty with different forms of language, often including, in addition to problems reading, a conspicuous problem with acquiring proficiency in writing and spelling.</p> <p>http://www.interdys.org</p>
 <p>A Teacher Can!</p> 	<p>Teacher. . . can this student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Focus attention on the words * Sound out words <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easily, • Phonetically • at grade level * Know what the word means when able to say it? * Find meaning and understand, what was read? * Remember ideas to utilize them? 	<p>What can a teacher do about it?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Care, care, care!</p> <p>Until this student can read and make meaning.</p> <p>Otherwise, too many doors are shut, too many opportunities are lost to him or her. Too many of the student's gifts are lost to us all. A teacher is a facilitator.</p> <p>Great teachers <i>teach people</i>, not subjects.</p>

Reading, figuring out what the symbols mean and making meaning of it is complex and it is difficult. Every once in a while a program or author comes along who has all the answers. Ever notice how often reading programs and diets are being sold on TV? Ever notice all the fuss surrounding reading? The media even reports about and weighs in on the "Reading Wars."

Learning to read, teaching others to read - occurs through acquiring bits of this, pieces of that. One day, enough pieces fit together and reading begins. Like putting together a puzzle, it helps to look at the box.



This is a checklist to help identify the possibility that a student needs reading support. Take one day early in the instructional year and focus on basics of reading, watching for these points. It can be incorporated in the day by having students read a passage and then write a short response to the material. As the class is reading, go by each desk and note obvious signs of difficulty. Take the responses and check for additional clues. Once you recognize students who do these things, take a few minutes to chat with them. Ask them to help you identify the things they do well and check for weak areas. They know what you are doing, and that you care. By the week-end you and the students will know more about reading and writing skills.

Watch for these signs of trouble with literacy for Students in Upper Grades

1. May read very slowly with many inaccuracies.
2. Continues to spell incorrectly, frequently spelling the same word differently in a single piece of writing.
3. May avoid reading and writing tasks.
4. May have trouble summarizing and outlining.
5. May have trouble answering open-ended questions on tests.
6. May have difficulty learning a foreign language.
7. May have poor memory skills.
8. May work slowly.
9. May pay too little attention to details or focus too much on them.
10. May misread information.
11. May have an inadequate vocabulary.
12. May have an inadequate store of knowledge from previous reading.
13. May have difficulty with planning, organizing and managing time, materials and tasks.

* These are nationally recognized signs that a student is going to need special help and support to acquire grade level skills in reading:

<http://www.interdys.org>

Each of these is critical to successful reading and comprehension. As each area is strengthened, reading and school potential will increase dramatically.

With no additional instruction, the student is unlikely to progress in reading, achievement test scores, success in school, or feeling of adequacy as a learner.

Remember to include the student in the screening process. When s/he understands that these are discrete skills that can be taught, that it is possible to tap into success, motivation increases to work through and gain competence.

