



NASET's LD Report

Students Coping with Dyslexia in General Education Classrooms

By Michelle Norman

This issue of **NASET's LD Report** was written by Michelle Norman. Coping with dyslexia can be frustrating for a student in general education classes. The mainstream model which is typically used for most students with dyslexia, can be successful if the teacher has the knowledge or background to provide the appropriate interventions so that a student with dyslexia can learn to cope. In an inclusive class, a student with dyslexia typically will avoid reading aloud or answering questions and this behavior can be interpreted as an uninterested or unmotivated student when in reality the student is struggling to cope. In conclusion, a multisensory approach in a regular education classroom setting will give a student with dyslexia the tools to be able to cope. Therefore, the implication is to educate and train teachers to understand the effects that dyslexia has on student learning and the accommodations a student needs to succeed in a general classroom setting.

Abstract

Coping with dyslexia can be frustrating for a student in general education classes. The mainstream model which is typically used for most students with dyslexia, can be successful if the teacher has the knowledge or background to provide the appropriate interventions so that a student with dyslexia can learn to cope. In an inclusive class, a student with dyslexia typically will avoid reading aloud or answering questions and this behavior can be interpreted as an uninterested or unmotivated student when in reality the student is struggling to cope. In conclusion, a multisensory approach in a regular education classroom setting will give a student with dyslexia the tools to be able to cope. Therefore, the implication is to educate and train

teachers to understand the effects that dyslexia has on student learning and the accommodations a student needs to succeed in a general classroom setting.

Key Words: congenital dyslexia, acquired dyslexia, traumatic brain injury, phenomenological design, multisensory approach

Introduction

Students coping with dyslexia in a regular education class setting can be simply frustrated. Since dyslexia is a difficulty with language, not intelligence. Dyslexia is a disorder which manifests by difficulty in learning to read, write and spell. Developmental dyslexia is congenital or hereditary and acquired dyslexia develops due to traumatic brain injury. Most students with dyslexia placed in general classroom settings have developmental dyslexia. The effects can be lessened by remediation and compensatory techniques. If a teacher does not have the knowledge of providing that remediation or intervention, a student with dyslexia may not have the ability to learn, as others in the same classroom.

Since dyslexia may affect learning to speak, remembering, pronouncing words clearly, expressing ideas meaningfully, listening and following directions students often are seen as lazy or unmotivated by a general education teacher. Other signs of difficulty might be not finishing classwork on time, messy handwriting, inadequate organizational skills, and an inability to pay attention or complete a task. A student with dyslexia may have a few of these characteristics, but others might have many of the characteristics. Dyslexia is accompanied by social, emotional and psychological problems, students find themselves a bit lost in large general education classes. Students with dyslexia often misread social cues, have a poor self-image, or socially immature and have difficulty communicating orally (Wadlington, Jacob & Bailey, 1996). When a student with dyslexia fails to meet others' expectations they might feel frustrated, anxious, inadequate, depressed and angry.

A regular education teacher needs to accommodate and modify the curriculum to facilitate it for students with dyslexia. An accommodation refers to a strategy that changes the academic environment but does not alter the information. There are many resources available to teachers including Reading Rockets which outlines accommodations for students with dyslexia in all classroom settings. An example of an accommodation may include providing the student with

extra time to complete assignments. A modification strategy changes the work itself, making it different from other students' to encourage success. A good example of a modification is an oral report when other students are doing a written report.

This topic of literature, "coping with dyslexia" is important because a student can be in the shadow of the other students and disguise their disability by pretending to understand the lesson's objective. Students with dyslexia sometimes need shorter and fewer assignments, especially in reading and writing. As inclusive classrooms become increasingly prevalent, more general education teachers should be educated on dealing with students with dyslexia in their classroom. Dyslexia is considered an "invisible" disability but nonetheless, a disability.

As an Intensive Reading teacher for 6th grade students for the past eight years, I have witnessed firsthand how uncomfortable a student with dyslexia can become when he or she reads aloud. Other students might snicker, make comments under their breath, or simply have a smirk on their face. This can be extremely frustrating for a student with dyslexia. A student with dyslexia may have a difficult time coping with their disability if their peers are not accepting of the behavior.

Methods

Research done by Burton (2000) focused on the effects that dyslexia has on self-esteem. The study was qualitative in nature and followed a phenomenological design, which allows researchers to identify the students' lived experiences regarding their challenges and their coping mechanism (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The research was conducted using the voice of the learners as a variable. The sample consisted of the students with dyslexia. This study sought to take the students' voices and opinions into consideration in an attempt to understand how a student with dyslexia copes in a mainstream classroom. Students were asked about their school experiences. Students with dyslexia do better in special schools and reading units, and are happier and have a positive experience than those placed in mainstream schools (Nugent, 2008). This research observed that learners with dyslexia attending mainstream schools are more likely to experience bullying from their peers. The research showed that students with dyslexia require a classroom environment which is predominantly a learning environment where they can feel comfortable and develop confidence and self-esteem.

Conclusion

Richardson (1996) stated that inclusion would only be successful if colleges of education would redesign their teacher programs to include special education as a more significant part of their curriculum. Successful collaborative teaching approaches have developed in general education classrooms. This is not universal and many issues still remain.

The literature states that students with dyslexia do not develop less adaptive coping strategies and a more external sense of control until they reach a more challenging environment, during middle school. A study done by Firth, Frydenberg, Steeg, Bond (2013) compared students with and without dyslexia at pre-test, post-test and follow up. The students who had dyslexia and received intervention had similar profiles as those without dyslexia with regards to school connectedness and happiness, and higher well-being than those that did not receive intervention.

Implications

For students with dyslexia to cope in the regular classroom, the first consideration should be directed to preschool, where children are learning to read, write and spell. It is imperative that students are identified as early as possible with learning difficulties so they are given support before failure begins to take a toll and hinder their coping skills. For students with dyslexia, a multisensory, structured language education program has proven to be the most successful when provided by teachers who are well trained and experienced in this approach. A multisensory approach is a method of teaching and learning that involves the stimulation of multiple senses, such as visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile. This approach can enhance memory and ability to learn, especially with younger children and those with learning disabilities. It can help in building and strengthening foundational skills. Montessori education showed that with a multisensory, or sensorimotor approach, preschoolers could learn to read and write. As a trained Montessori teacher, I truly believe that this approach is by far exemplary. When a child sees self-success they build self-confidence and equip themselves with ways to cope with the real world. A student's well-being is more important than academics. To succeed, one must believe in themselves, therefore we need to educate the “whole child.”

Many states have passed laws requiring dyslexia training for teachers because there are many misconceptions about dyslexia. Research on conceptual change suggests a different teaching

approach is needed, as stated above (Peltier, Washburn, Heddy, and Binks-Cantrell, 2022). The better teachers are trained and prepared to identify and support students with dyslexia in a general classroom, the better experience and outcomes students with dyslexia will have.

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