DISABILITY OR CREATIVE ABILITY?
RE-EXAMINING OUR MISCONCEPTIONS

Patricia Klug
His book focused on those who appear to society as at a disadvantage when in reality they have hidden strengths that others do not possess. It is focused on taking disadvantages and turning them into advantages. An entire chapter is devoted to dyslexia. 1/3 of Entrepreneurs are dyslexic. Estimates of dyslexics in the population ranges from 15-20% with 80% of those undiagnosed with learning disabilities believed to have dyslexia. Many are not diagnosed until later in life.
1) Brain is distinguishably different – NIH studies on brain. 2) Depends on teacher relationship and how accommodations are implemented 3) Brain doesn’t change once they learn how to read 4) They have to work twice as hard as other students 5) Estimates 14.5 million to 43 million (many are not diagnosed) – Stephen Spielberg just a year ago. 6) Each school is different in their approach and understanding. Special Ed doesn’t always have expertise in Dyslexia or access to good programs to help them. 7) Famous authors, poets – Jonathan Mooney, Graduate degree in English Literature.
The controversy lies in the two ways of thinking about how dyslexics strengths come about in the first place. There is recently a growing body of evidence that is proving that the dyslexic brain is distinguishably different from a non-dyslexic brain. But there is also a growing body of evidence from the discipline of Education that is focused on how adversity produces a resilient and successful student. Finally, there is the acknowledgement that imposed adversity from bullying, labelling, and classroom humiliation and discrimination in the classroom effects self-esteem detrimentally.
Learning Disabilities Effects How One Views the World and Oneself in the World

“I was completely outclassed and left out at the beginning of the race.”

Winston Churchill
How Do We Determine Intelligence?

“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

Albert Einstein
Reminiscent of another book by Malcolm Gladwell – *Outliers* – “Those with advantages are given more advantages.”
1 in 5 are dyslexic – that’s 20% of the population
Dyslexics Can Persevere In Spite of Their Challenges

- "Never give up hope. When someone helping you gets frustrated, don't let them. Take a step back, because you can't learn anything under pressure. And don't worry about the label!"

- Erin Bronkovich
The struggle is real, and it has mostly to do with our expectations and standards of what intelligence looks like.
These struggles can lead to various approaches to being dyslexic in the world.

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Dyslexia advocacy can encompass one, more than one, or all of these approaches.
Accommodations is what our Disabilities office does their best at trying to do for our students.
I have combined the two sayings by Churchill and Einstein as a way of viewing the challenge of the Dyslexic. The fish given the running shoes represents accommodations. The fish given options of running on the track or swimming in the pond represents universal design and available learning styles in accessing and demonstrating knowledge, and last is the fish leaving the race altogether. In the 1996 book, Living with Dyslexia, Barbara Riddick explores the challenges of dyslexics and its effects on self esteem. “With reference to dyslexic children, Kloomok and Cosden (1994) and Hagborg (1996) found that some dyslexic children maintained healthy self-esteem in the face of academic failure by apparently perceiving themselves as successful in other areas, for example, sport, or perceiving themselves as enjoying high levels of social support. These are examples of compensatory self-concept, self-protective measures. Other dyslexic children (Feick & Rhodewalt, 1997) were found to have proactively protected their self-esteem by claiming “self-handicap” before undertaking tasks where failure was a likely outcome, that is, adopting a stance of predicting failure as a certain outcome because of insuperable difficulties within themselves. “
Advocates of Dyslexia also take on the various approaches to being Dyslexic as well as acknowledging their own struggles and self esteem issues in their Dyslexia journey. Both Ben Foss, a Stanford Law Graduate, and Jonathan Mooney, a graduate student in English possessed their own very crucial advocates, their moms. In fact, the difference between a Dyslexic succeeding in education and subsequently their careers is tied strongly to having an advocate in their corner, very oftentimes that is a parent.
In Jacky Riddsdale 2004, *The Study of Dyslexia*, points out the early experience of Dyslexics and their consequences to self-esteem. “Chapman (1988) reviews much work in the area of dyslexia and self-esteem and concludes that dyslexic children tend to have lower general and not just academic, self-concepts than their peers. He suggests, however, that by and large this does not indicate self-esteem so low as to be dysfunctional. He also suggests that dyslexic students may establish markedly lower than normal academic self-esteem levels by School Year Three and that these remain relatively stable throughout school. On a more positive note, dyslexic students are often able to compensate for their loss of self-esteem through acknowledged success in nonacademic or extracurricular activities.” Even with an advocate, the struggle can be immense, and not all outcomes are good. In fact, incarceration rates of dyslexics are quite high with some estimates of up to 50% of the Prison population being a product of a Learning Disabilities.
In 2010, Dr. Brock Eide and Dr. Fernette Eide, parents of a dyslexic child, compiled research on the strengths of the Dyslexic mind and categorized them in four ways. This has been part of a revolutionary change or wave reverberating in the Dyslexic community. Increasingly we are seeing the Neuroscience community direct its attention to the strengths of the Dyslexia. This has culminated in a website the Dyslexic Advantage, which features webinars, conferences, and resources for the Dyslexic Community.
The Eides provide evidence for this very different ways of experiencing and seeing the world. They show how these strengths are crucial for human progress. Dyslexics may have one or more of these strengths.
The visual/spatial perception strength has been further validated by the work of various scientists and is exhibited by this print by the artist M.C. Escher used by Dr. Matthew Schneps in his recent August 2014 article in Scientific American on “The Advantages of Dyslexia.” Citing the work of a Psychologist at the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire, Catya von Károlyi, Dyslexics were able to detect what psychologists call the “impossible figures” in optical illusions like this consistently quicker.
In an earlier 2012 article in the NY Times, titled “The Upside of Dyslexia,” author Annie Murphy Paul, cited this same research along with Dr. Schneps’s, an Astrophysicist with Dyslexia, and his work at the Laboratory for Visual Learning located at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. This along with Dr. James Howard’s findings on the detection of irregularity of “T”’s in a sea of “L”’s.
Scientific American article in August 2014, “The Advantages of Dyslexia”

“Impairments in one area can lead to advantages in others, and it is these differences that drive progress in many fields, including science and math. “ “In one study, we tested professional astrophysicists with and without dyslexia for their abilities to spot the simulated graphical signature in a spectrum characteristic of a black hole. The scientists with dyslexia . . . were better at picking out the black holes from the noise, an advantage useful in their careers.”
Thomas West, author of *Inside the Mind’s Eye*, is featured in this video about the gifts of Dyslexia. His work, recently out in a second edition with an Oliver Sachs Foreword, shows both the struggle and creativity strengths of Dyslexics.
“Portrait of a dyslexic artist, who transforms neurons into ‘butterflies’ (Rolfes).

An example of this was also featured on the PBS NewsHour website April of this year. Rebecca Kamen, was admitted to college on probation. Some of Rebecca’s high school teachers questioned her intelligence. When she first entered college, the counselor asked her why her parents were wasting their money sending her to college. She chose an Art major because it was the only major at Pennsylvania State University that didn’t require a math course. Today, she is an accomplished artist that whose work includes these representations of the neural circuitry of the brain.
Kamen says about her learning, “I learned about things by taking things apart, examining them.” “I think that enabled me to develop the skills of working with my hands more than just processing things in a more linear way.”
How can we capitalize on this thinking in our classrooms, workplace, and world?

Rebecca Kamen’s *Illumination*

Kamen says, “People with dyslexia understand things in relationship to other things, “which in retrospect, is such an incredible gift” (Rolfes)
What if you were asked to illustrate cartoons in every class as the main kind of way you understand what you read? Now you can understand how a Dyslexic feels when we assign papers.

**Ways to Access and Demonstrate Knowledge**

- Illustrate your understanding  Cartoon, drawing, diagrams
- Act out a play showing your understanding
- Create a PowerPoint and deliver an oral presentation about the topic
- Make a video
- Write a poem about the concept
- Find patterns in events, dates, facts, concepts, ideas.
- Build a model or sculpture
- Deconstruct a problem, a reading, a concept.
# Works Cited


Works Cited


*The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity.* Yale School of Medicine, 2014. Web 10 October 2014.
