The Science of Advocacy



DYSLEXIA TRAINING INSTITUTE
EDUCATION CHANGES EVERYTHING

Kelli Sandman-Hurley, Ed.D.

Intellectual Property of Kelli Sandman-Hurley, Ed.D.

1

DYSLEXIA TRAINING INSTITUTE
EDUCATION CHANGES EVERYTHING

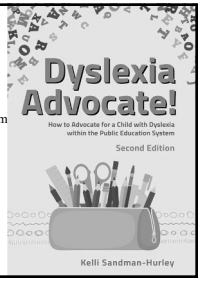


- Accredited Dyslexia Certificate Program
- Dyslexia Advocate Certificate Program
- Virtual Spring Conference
- Online Monthly Courses
- Dyslexia for a Day Simulation

ASHA CE APPROVED PROVIDER

dyslexiaspec@gmail.com
www.dyslexiatraininginstitute.org

©Dyslexia Training Institute - Not to be copied or used without consent



2

The research is mostly qualitative

Qualitative research is a method of exploring and understanding human behavior, experiences, and social phenomena. It is an **interpretive approach** that seeks to investigate the **meanings, perspectives, and contexts** of participants' lived experiences. Instead of focusing on numerical data, qualitative research collects and analyzes textual, visual, or audio data to uncover patterns, themes, and deeper insights.

Key Characteristics

- **Contextual**: Emphasizes the role of context in shaping behavior or experiences.
- **Inductive**: Often generates theories or concepts from the collected data.
- **Subjective**: Recognizes the researcher's role in interpreting findings.
- **Exploratory**: Helps in understanding "how" and "why" phenomena occur.

Common Methods

- **Interviews**: In-depth conversations to gather rich, personal insights.
- **Focus Groups**: Group discussions to explore collective perceptions or behaviors.
- **Ethnography**: Immersive observation of people in their natural environments.
- **Case Studies**: Detailed investigations of particular cases, events, or entities.
- **Grounded Theory**: Developing theories directly from systematic analysis of data.
- **Narrative Research**: Analyzing stories to understand individual experiences.

Intellectual Property of Kelli Sandman-Hurley, Ed.D.

3

The IEP Process (Generally Speaking)

1) The parent (usually) requests an assessment
2) If the school agrees, they conduct the assessment and hold the first meeting.
3) The school usually does not provide assessments ahead of time, if the parent does not request it.
4) At the meeting, the parent is offered the Procedural Safeguards. These are usually not explained in detail, but the parent might be advised to read them later.
5) The school leads the meeting, provide the agenda and sets the ground rules and time restrictions. They might ask for parent concerns.
6) They review the assessments and inform the parent if the student qualified or not.
7) If they qualify, the team them presents the parent with an IEP that is usually already filled out.
8) Once this agreed upon, services begin.

Intellectual Property of Kelli Sandman-Hurley, Ed.D.



4

Let's review common self-reported themes in this course over the years at DTI.

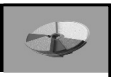
- Parents feel stress prior to meetings.
  - But...so does school staff.
- Parents start the process with trust.
  - However, parents soon become frustrated.
- School staff uses too much jargon.
- School staff admit that the parents with advocates/attorneys get the services.



Intellectual Property of Kelli Sandman-Hurley, Ed.D.

5

The research backs them up…



- Most parents report that their child's (initial) IEP meetings were a negative experience (Stoner et al. 2005; Sanderson, 2023; Fish, 2006):
  - Traumatic
  - Confusing
  - Complicated
- These experiences can lead parents to participate less (Fish, 2006; Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006).
- Many educators assume that parents are better educated about their rights and the process than they are (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006)
- Parents attend meetings with a lack of knowledge about the process (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001)
- IEP meeting often have a power imbalance (Burke & Goldman, 2017)
- Parents speak less than the school IEP team members (Martin et al., 2006)
- School staff has limited knowledge about child's disability.

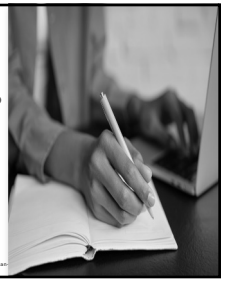
Intellectual Property of Kelli Sandman-Hurley, Ed.D.

6

The research says…

- Parents report a power imbalance and feel disconnected with the school, especially during the IEP process:
  - They report that the IEP is a passive process that is scripted, uses technical jargon and a deficit-oriented depiction of their child. (DeMathews & Means-Parker, 2024)
- School personnel might be misinformed or confused about parent rights, appropriate supports and instruction and what meaningful parent participant looks like.
- Principals expressed concern for advocacy for just one student instead of a collective group (Zaretsky, 2004)
- It is consistently reported that parents with advocates get better services for their students.
- Advocates improve the outcome of the process (Burke et al., 2018)
- Cultural issues (Biles, 2022)

Intellectual Property of Kelli Sandman-



7

Behind the scenes issues.

- Most teachers report they never received any training how to facilitate a high-states IEP meeting (Beck & DeSutter, 2020).
- The described their training as:
  - Trial by fire
  - Just get thrown in there
  - On-the-job training
- Teachers report that they have difficulty getting team members to agree on a time, participate adequately and prepare adequately.
- Team members can be openly unhappy about attending meetings.

Intellectual Property of Kelli Sand



8

Who's talking (aka Who's in power)?

"The majority of parents asked few questions and responded little during the conference" (Vaughn et al., 1988)

- Unfortunately, this dynamic has not changed much over time. (Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011; Bacon & Casuton-Theohais, 2013; Bray & Russell, 2016)
- School psychologists and Sped teachers kept a tight-script and agenda during meetings. This was used to reduce the questions and dialogue from gen ed teachers and parents. (Bray & Russell, 2016)
- This leads to parent discontent and frustration and can lead to confrontation (Sanderson, 2023)
- Parent concerns are usually documented in the notes but don't often lead to changes in goals and/or services (Kurth, 2019)

Intellectual Property of Kelli Sandman-Hurley, Ed.D.



9



Reasons for Conflict

- Little to no training.
- Team members being unprepared (Martinez et al.,2023)
- Disagreements lead to stress and frustration.
  - "As a teacher I could see where I would have been more defensive in the sense that I am taking it as I didn't do this right and so that's why the parent is questioning me or not understanding what I am trying to get at."(P. 135, Beck & DeSutter, 2020)
- Having professional opinions questioned can lead to decreased teacher confidence.
- Lack of cultural competency

Property of Kelli Sandman-Hurley, Ed.D.

10

Conflict Management

"*…requires sophisticated facilitation skills"*
*(*p.140, Beck and DeSutter, 2020)

- Facilitators are expected to be articulate, prepared and student-centered.
- An understanding of IDEA and the IEP process does not always translate into meeting facilitators demonstrating communication competence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1982 as cited in Beck & DeSutter, 2020)
- Some pre-meetings are designed to try to avoid conflict or prepare for parent conflict.
- If conflict arises, team members might ask to collect more data.
- Make an effort to listen parents during meetings.
- Use "I" statements
- Complement parents
- Preservice Simulated IEPs (Mueller et al., 2019; Toledo, 2023)



Intellectual Property of Kelli Sandman-Hurley

11

What the schools can do

- Provide facilitation techniques training (Beck & DeSutter, 2020)
- Listen to parents and foster a collaborative atmosphere (Sanderson, 2023)
- A school district in California implemented bilingual IEP facilitators, leading to a 25% increase in parent satisfaction scores (Haines et al., 2015).
- Parents respond positively to proactive communication and culturally inclusive practices.
- Student-centered (Fish, 2006)
- Empower parents by providing information about the process prior to the process beginning.
- Schools addressing diverse needs foster better relationships (Lo, 2008).

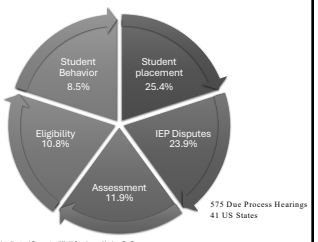


Intellectual Property of Kelli Sandman-Hurley

12

What does the litigation look like?

(Mueller & Carranza, 2011)



575 Due Process Hearings
41 US States

Intellectual Property of Kelli Sandman-Hurley, Ed.D.

13

2004 IDEA
(Implemented in 2006) –
Addition of peer-reviewed reading research (PRR)

- Subject to broad interpretation
- May have given parents more incentive to file
- More State Laws and awareness

14



15