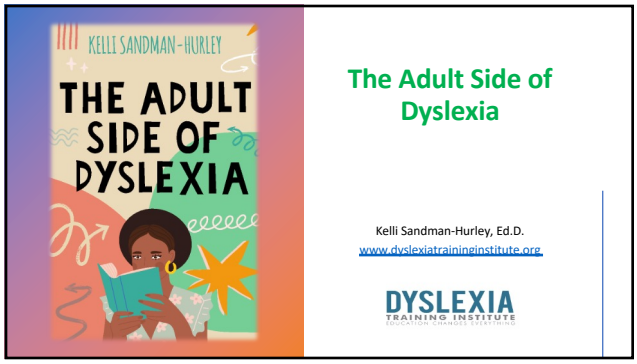

The Adult Side of Dyslexia

Kelli Sandman-Hurley, Ed.D.
www.dyslexiatraininginstitute.org

DYSLEXIA TRAINING INSTITUTE

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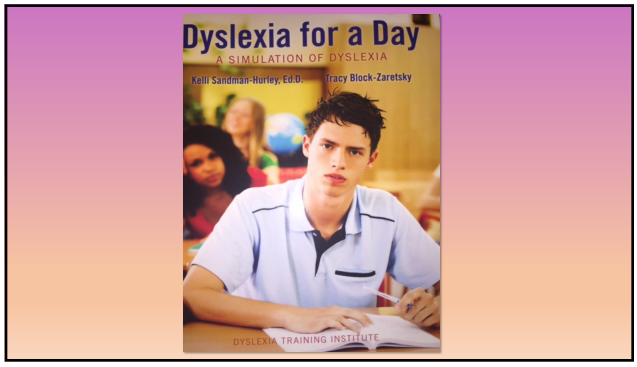

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Why do I care?
Lynford

3

What is dyslexia?

4

dys + lex + ia

dys	lex	ia
to lack, difficult, imperfect	words	abstract noun suffix

5

Definition

"Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge."
~International Dyslexia Associaton

6

Literacy in Adulthood

- 75% of incarcerated individuals did not complete high school or can be classified as low literate.
- Incarcerated individuals who participate in correctional education programs are 43% less likely to recidivate than inmates who do not..
- A mother's reading skill is the greatest determinant of her children's academic success, outweighing other factors, such as neighborhood and family income.

Sources

- Wolf Harlow, Ph.D, C. (2003). *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Education and Correctional Populations.* https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf
- 11. Davis, L., Bozick, R., Steele, J., Saunders, J., & Miles, J. (2013). *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults.* https://doi.org/10.7249/rr266
- 12. ProLiteracy Annual Statistical Report. (2021, January). https://www.proliteracy.org/Resources/Media-Kit/Brochures/Statistical-Report

7

Children with dyslexia become adults with dyslexia.

"I was in the 3rd grade, and I would get a stomachache when we would have English class. My mom took me to the doctor and said I was just trying to be a perfectionist."

To parents - "Reassure them that they are normal."

To Teachers - "Not all children learn in the same way. Be open an encourage ALL students to come to you with their questions."

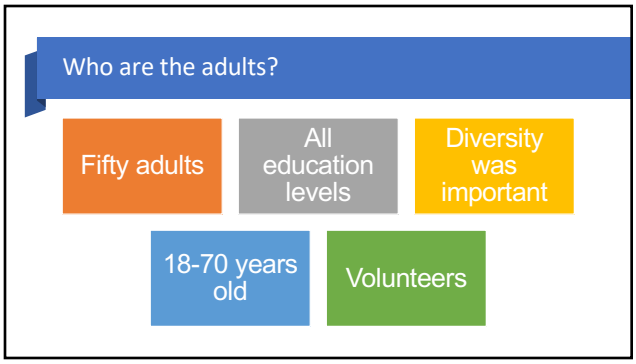
8

What is qualitative research: What did I do?

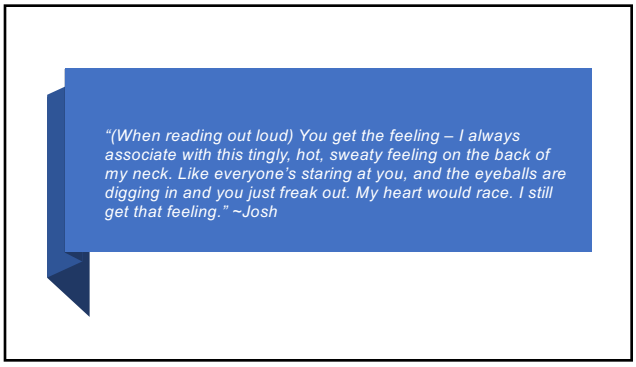
- The aim of qualitative research is to understand the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it.
- Research following a qualitative approach is exploratory and seeks to explain 'how' and 'why' a particular phenomenon, or behavior, operates as it does in a particular context. It can be used to generate hypotheses and theory from the data.

Source: Simplypsychology.org

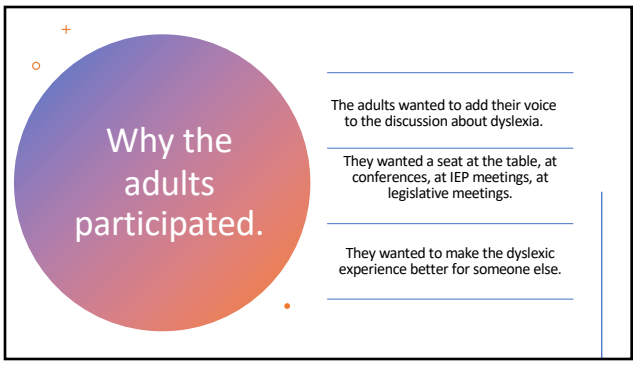
9


Who are the adults?
Fifty adults
All education levels
Diversity was important
18-70 years old
Volunteers

10


"(When reading out loud) You get the feeling – I always associate with this tingly, hot, sweaty feeling on the back of my neck. Like everyone's staring at you, and the eyeballs are digging in and you just freak out. My heart would race. I still get that feeling." ~Josh

11


Why the adults participated.
The adults wanted to add their voice to the discussion about dyslexia.
They wanted a seat at the table, at conferences, at IEP meetings, at legislative meetings.
They wanted to make the dyslexic experience better for someone else.

12



Person with dyslexia or dyslexic person?

13

The Themes

We have a definition disconnect	Dyslexia Hurts	Dyslexia-Induced Distrust	Traumatic Teaching Practices
Spelling Matters	A gift? No so fast.	Dyslexia Affects Goals	Acknowledge, Advocate and Accommodate

14

How do you describe your dyslexia?

- For the most part, no one has previously asked them to describe it.

You struggle every day. ~Tom

- They describe it as an emotional experience.

"It was very difficult for me in school with teachers and administrators and early I think I was labeled a behavior problem. I know that is a very common thing." ~Earl

- We have to understand how they experience dyslexia before we can help.

15

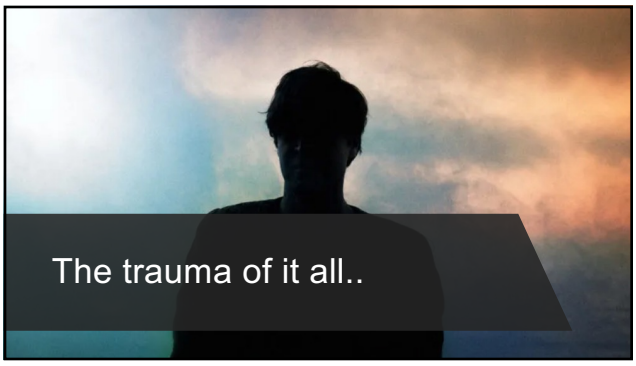
Adults with dyslexia do not describe their dyslexia the same way educators and researchers do.

16

How do educators, researchers, etc. describe dyslexia?

"Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge."

17



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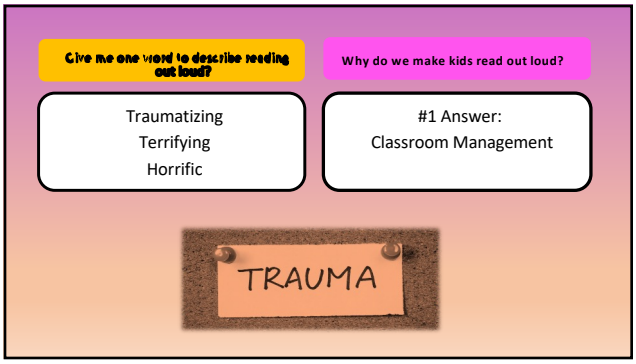
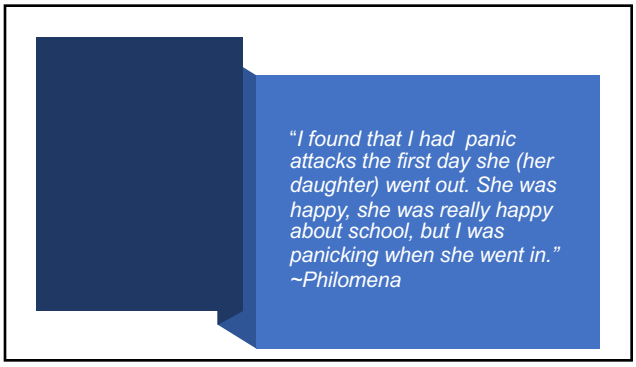
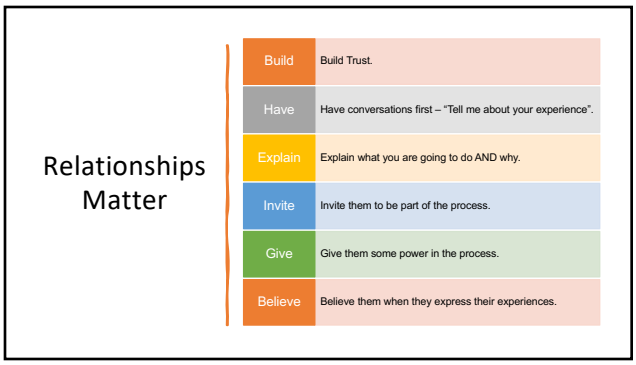

Give me one word to describe reading out loud?
Why do we make kids read out loud?
Traumatizing
Terrifying
Horrific
#1 Answer:
Classroom Management
TRAUMA

19


"I found that I had panic attacks the first day she (her daughter) went out. She was happy, she was really happy about school, but I was panicking when she went in."
~Philomena

20


Relationships Matter
Build
Build Trust.
Have
Have conversations first – "Tell me about your experience".
Explain
Explain what you are going to do AND why.
Invite
Invite them to be part of the process.
Give
Give them some power in the process.
Believe
Believe them when they express their experiences.

21

I was like "You people have tried and tried to bring me up to an appropriate level on reading, writing and spelling and it's not going to happen." So, I've got to figuring out strategies to deal with that…My success story is that I told you guys to screw off, and I went and figured out things on my own. ~Cary

22

Their school experiences do affect their life outcomes.

- Avoiding higher education, job opportunities, helping their children with homework, having kids altogether.

"I wanted to be a nurse. I'm too afraid to go to school." ~Denisha

- Creates stress at work because they spend so much time and energy hiding their literacy struggles.
- Have visceral responses when they have to go back to k-12 for the own children.
- Resentment and anger at lost potential.

"I recently took a class to get my insurance license. I could not get the information from the reading. I was very stressed and did not think there was any way I could pass. I cried a lot and felt stupid."

23



24

Is Dyslexia a Gift? The answer is nuanced.

"Plain and simple, it's (dyslexia) a major pain in the butt. I don't know how else to describe it" ~Natalee

Most of the adults laughed at this question.
Most adults would prefer not to have dyslexia.
They believe it has made them work harder or create work-arounds, but not a gift.
Adults in this book who did not have support and resources did not fare as well as those who did.



25

I thought about it, but not really because I didn't want more stressful nights and because it was just – it was just going to be too much. ~Will

26

What should we learn from their stories?

- What not to say.
  - Try Harder
  - Spelling doesn't matter.
  - You just haven't found a book you like yet.
  - Nothing…saying nothing is just as bad as saying other things.
  - The 'label' is liberating.
  - Accommodations are cheating.
- Throwing multiple interventions at the wall.
  - They internalize each failed attempt as their own failure.
  - This often leads to them not wanting to pursue higher education.
- Lack of resources/support as they get older.
  - They feel like they are left 'twisting in the wind' after high school.
  - No guidance after high school.
  - No resources for adults.
  - They feel very isolated.

27



Basically…

All the science, training and 'appropriate' approaches in the world are worthless if the child does not feel acknowledged, safe and understood.

Acknowledge, Advocate and Accommodate

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Let's Hear From the Adults!





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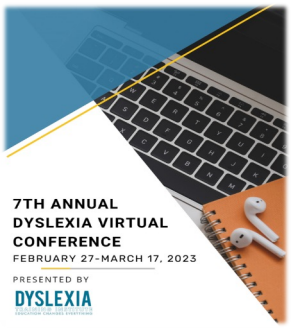
2023 DTI's Dyslexia Virtual Conference



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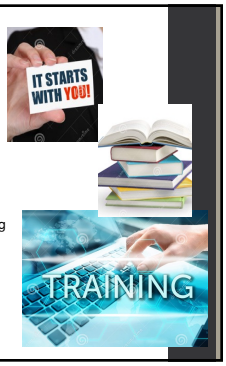
Resources

- Training
  - Dyslexia Training Institute Online Courses
    - 4 week courses & 2 Certificate Programs
  - Free webinars on Learning Ally
- Books
  - The Adult Side of Dyslexia by Kelli Sandman-Hurley
  - Dyslexia Advocate by Kelli Sandman-Hurley
  - Dyslexia and Spelling by Kelli Sandman-Hurley
  - Overcoming Dyslexia by Sally Shaywitz
  - Reading at the Speed of Sight by Mark Seidenberg
  - Reading in the Brain by Stanislas Dehaene
  - Proust and the Squid by Maryanne Wolf
  - Reader Come Home by Maryanne Wolf
  - The Dyslexia Empowerment Plan by Ben Foss
  - The Dyslexic Advantage by Drs. Eides



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Qu&A

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