

Dyslexia: Take a Time Out
by Dr. Kelli Sandman-Hurley
Dyslexia Training Institute

As the dyslexia awareness movement marches forward and starts to become more and more visible to the public and the powers that be, I think it is time to stop, take a breath and think about where we are today. What do we know about dyslexia? What advice are we offering parents? Are we being careful stewards of the information science has provided us? What is most alarming to me is that I hear parents and professionals stating that only one intervention is appropriate for all kids with dyslexia and I think whenever a group demands one intervention by name, it worries me. For those of us who have worked with more than one student with dyslexia, we know that one intervention does not work for everyone. We know how complex dyslexia is and that many kids with dyslexia also have co-existing struggles with attention, speech and executive function. Many are now asking for a one-size-fits all approach for a complex construct. I think we have to be make sure that we are remembering to keep evolving in our understanding of dyslexia and our understanding of how English is structured. We don't have all the answers. We have to remember to ask the researchers how they are defining reading in their studies and how they determining that their subjects have dyslexia. We have to include and examine the ideas and cautions put forth by people like Steven Strauss or Julian Elliott and appreciate them for making us think about how we are defining and assessing dyslexia. It is irresponsible to dismiss those with differing opinions, who are presenting facts, because they challenge our current beliefs. That takes us down a dangerous path. There has to be a squeaky wheel and in this case, these squeaky wheels have some valid points with evidence. I have also noticed people dismiss squeaky wheels without actually reading their points - this is also dangerous.

I have concerns that some dyslexia professionals are making claims that they have the only intervention that is appropriate for a child with dyslexia. But that is an impossibility due to all the fact that no human has the same needs as the next human. I recently watched a video from a dyslexia professional who was declaring she knew what all the pathways in the brain are doing when we are reading and how to 'open' them. Not even a scientist with a Phd would make such a claim about the brain, there are too many variables and the brain is too complex, they can make really good educated guesses, but professionals should not be making promises to parents on the premise that we completely understand the brain.

So, look out for the following red flags and check yourself. Before we begin to assert that there is one way to get to improved reading and writing, take a good hard look at the individual profile. Red Flag #1: A dyslexia professional who has 'the answer' which is equivalent to snake oil and that always makes me nervous. Red Flag #2: A professional who uses the same approach with every student. This is a red flag because many students with dyslexia come to us with more than dyslexia. If the tutor does not know how Executive Function is affecting their students' ability to read and spell and are only working on the reading, then progress will be affected. If the tutor does not consistently allow the student time to process their answers and not offer the answers (which almost everyone does until they unlearn this need to fill in the silence) the student will not learn to be independent. Red Flag #3: The professional who purports to know exactly how the reading process in the brain works without adding some qualifying words.

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There are still questions around how reading in fMRI studies is defined and what about those kids who can read but can't spell? The bottom line is that kids have reading and spelling problems for many different reasons and that dyslexia is one of those reasons. The way to help them is to look at their individual profile and determine which approach is the best for that child. It might be Orton-Gillingham, it might be Structured Word Inquiry, and it might be Lindamood-Bell and it might be the combination of all three and something else. ***The key is the teacher and if that teacher has enough knowledge about teaching and English to respond to the individual needs of the students and any co-existing challenges those students have.*** Having said all of that, I do believe the intervention for those with dyslexia should have a basis in teaching the structure of English, how that is implemented needs to be individualized. It should be described, not labeled and named. I think it is unhealthy for the professional in the dyslexia community to state that one thing they are doing works for everyone, if that was true, then we would eradicate dyslexia in one fell swoop. Dyslexia is real, now we must remind ourselves to keep it real.