

Imagine the Possibilities

Written by: Guest Columnist Kelly Steinke

Is your child reading & spelling at grade level?

Reading is fundamental and essential for academic success. So, what do you do when your child is not reading at grade level? Consider the following scenario.

Steve is a 6th grade student with a reading disability. Although Steve is very smart and shows great strengths in math and the ability to work with his hands, he is reading at the 3rd grade level. When asked to read aloud in class he fiends a sudden headache, or becomes the class clown. Steve has difficulty pronouncing long words and uses many "um's" and pauses when he's searching for the right words to say. Steve's spelling is well below grade level and his reading rate is very slow. Sounding out new words is frustrating for Steve and after several attempts at sounding out a word incorrectly he becomes exasperated and states, "I don't know this word – I can't read!" Steve's inability to read fluently like the rest of his classmates has affected his self-esteem, and Steve would often rather stay home than go to school.

Although Steve is not formally diagnosed with dyslexia, his teachers and parents have deduced from current reading research that dyslexia is why Steve struggles with reading, spelling, and other areas. Dyslexia literally means "difficulty with language." Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It affects reading, spelling, word retrieval, articulation, directionality, and the ability to remember certain facts. Individuals with dyslexia do not see things backwards, though they may reverse letters and numbers in writing, and despite common myths - they can read, but their reading may be slow and inaccurate if left untreated.

What a relief for Steve and his parents! Why? Because current research in the field of dyslexia has shown that students with dyslexia can be taught to read, write, and spell up to grade level, go to college, and live a happy, successful life. For Steve and his parents, knowing that dyslexia is what they're dealing with is half the battle.

Closing the gap between your child's reading level and grade level expectations

Time is of the essence – especially when it comes to reading ability. Typically students make reading gains that are year for year. Every year a child is in school, they will make one year's gain in instructional reading level. That's great if the student is already reading at grade level. What happens when a student is reading 1-3 years - or more, below grade level? How do these students ever catch up?

Reading research reveals that students with dyslexia need research-based, multisensory instruction in phonemic awareness and reading skills. Research also shows that 95% of reading failure is preventable when students are given the right type of instruction. The International Dyslexia Association supports the Orton-Gillingham sequence and methodology as best practice when working with students who have dyslexia. This type of instruction is explicit, systematic, intense (one-on-one is best), and delivered by a trained individual with consistency (minimum of two 50 minute sessions per week). In my experience as a special educator, this type of instruction is most readily available through hiring a private teacher to work with your child. This teaching is in addition to instruction received at school.

Targeted intervention, in the form of private teaching, will bridge the gap in your child's reading, writing, and spelling skills. But, that is only the beginning. It will also give your child hope, improve their self-confidence, their grades, and allow them to experience college and beyond. Imagine the possibilities! If your child is not reading or spelling at grade level, there are resources available. You can help your child begin to close the gap in their instructional reading level by investing in private instruction. The resources listed below can be used to find private instruction.

Local Resources

- Go to the web site for the Oregon Branch of the International Dyslexia Association.
<http://www.orbida.org/> Click on "Resources", then click on "Diagnosis and Instruction"
You will find a list of service providers and diagnosticians in the local area.
- R.E.A.D. Learning Services – This is my own Vancouver based business. I offer private teaching using research-based programs for students with dyslexia and/or dysgraphia.
www.readlearnservices.com or email ksteinke@readlearnservices.com
- Go to the web site for the Barton Reading and Spelling System.
<http://www.bartonreading.com/> click on "Tutors" then click on "Hire a Tutor." This site will give you a list of local tutors certified in the Barton System and questions to ask a prospective tutor.
- Go to the web site for Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes.
<http://www.lindamoodbell.com/> Click on "Learning Centers", then click on "Instruction"
You will find contact information for learning centers in Washington.
- Go to the web site for Slingerland Institute for Literacy.
<http://slingerland.org/parents/tutors.html> Scroll to the bottom of the page and click on "Washington."