Differences, not Disabilities*:
Stepping away from the Deficit Model

zach edson
zach edson

kenley triss

LD teacher for 7 years
middle school science
Language Matters
Disability or Difference?
Disability

great resources:

- Mark Lewis, TEDxRoyalHolloway
- National Center on Disability and Journalism (NCDJ)

“calling someone ‘differently abled’ is euphemistic. It is borderline cutesy and it diminishes the actual experiences of disabled people. It suggests that the term disability should be uncomfortable and therefore should be avoided.”

- Lydia X. Z. Brown, autisticchoya.com
Difference

“the term we prefer at Wheeler because we believe differences are not deficits”
The bottom line:

Individuals with learning disabilities/differences are capable of immense achievement in, and out of, school.
“people-first language conveys respect by emphasizing the fact that people with disabilities are first and foremost just that—people.” – EARN.org
People-First Language

instead of... please say...

dyslexic person --> person with dyslexia
So...

- how do we talk about our children’s LDs?
- how do we talk about our students’ LDs?
Positively!

congratulations!

you have an LD

71% above avg communication skills
84% above avg reasoning skills
84% above avg curiosity skills

madebydyslexia.org, 2020
Congratulations!
You have an LD!
Realistically!

Unfortunately, school may be harder for you

91% teachers are untrained in dyslexic strengths

80% of individuals with dyslexia graduate unidentified

madebydyslexia.org, 2019
“4 in 5 dyslexics say that knowing they were dyslexic helped them develop the perseverance needed to succeed.”

madebydyslexia.org, 2020
More tips

Praise specifically & sincerely

Find local role models

Encourage them to talk about the challenges/normalize it
Obstacles, not impossibilities

“You have an amazing brain and there are roads for math and the road for decoding... learning to read has a few rocks in the way, and your tutors will help you clear the rocks.”

– Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity
Yet
Reframe Obstacles with “Yet”

I don’t get fractions --> I don’t get fractions yet.

I stink at reading --> I’m not a great reader yet.

I hate school --> I don’t like school yet.
Help them find success & build confidence
The Dyslexic Advantage
Unlocking the Hidden Potential of the Dyslexic Brain

by Drs. Eide & Eide
Dyslexic brains are organized in a way that maximizes strength in making big picture connections at the expense of weaknesses in processing fine details.

Dr Fernette Eide
Spatial

quickly understanding graphs
finding weeds in a garden
interpret medical imagery

schneps, et al. 2011
Spatial

They may work in design, 3-D art, architecture, be engineers, builders, inventors, organic chemists or be exceptionally good at bagging your groceries

Dr Brock Eide
At home

- Legos
- Art
- Tools
- Modeling clay

At school

- Hands on work
- Physical & interactive models
- Building, designing, doing
Interconnected Reasoning

See unique patterns
Determine causality
Big picture
Interconnected Reasoning

Data analysts
Consultants
Dog trainers
Scientists
At home

Strategy games – Catan, Battleship
Science experiments
Cooking/Baking

Teach inferences, predictions & pattern making
Alternative assessments
Deprioritize multiple choice

At school
Narrative Reasoning

Episodic Memory
Learn from experience
Understanding stories/storytelling
Narrative Reasoning

Counselling

Teaching

Law

Writing
At home

Read – practice inference

YouTube/Podcast

Charades

Improv class

At school

Emphasize & normalize assistive technologies

Teach story analysis & creative writing

Different flashcards
Dynamic Reasoning

Using incomplete data
Mercurial circumstances
Navigating uncertainty
Dynamic Reasoning

Entrepreneurs

Finances

Geology & Paleontology
At home

Puzzles – KenKen, Sudoku
Mysteries
Scavenger hunts

At school

Long term experiments
Investing clubs
Fantasy sports league
Designers
Engineers
Inventors
Organic chemists

Data analysts
Consultants
Dog trainers
Scientists

Counselling
Teaching
Law
Writing

Entrepreneurs
Finances
Geology & Paleontology

An Incomplete List
Supporting in School
91% of teachers are untrained in dyslexic strengths.

80% of individuals with dyslexia graduate unidentified.

madebydyslexia.org, 2019
Reading support

Orton-Gillingham (OG) tutoring

Wilson reading

Assistive technologies

RITES - www.ritutorial.org
Push for alternative assessments

Deprioritize testing

Authentic, project-based learning
Tutorial support

organization, EF tutoring

“HW helper”
VIRTUAL
Supporting in School
Technologies

Speechify

Google Read & Write
Dedicated “tech” support

Troubleshooting

Tutorial videos

One-on-one availability
Reduce asynchronous learning

direct instruction is foundational for students with LDs

but keep it bite-sized
Self Care

- Breaks every 20 minutes
- Netflix/YouTube is not a break
- Patience
- “Crisis teaching”

- Relax – “progress” is not greatly “lesser”
- Connect with friends safely
- Change physical location*
In summary...

LDs are awesome

Give them space to shine

Give them extra support for their “Not There Yets”
Resources

MadeByDyslexia.org
Understood.org
DyslexicAdvantage.org
NoticeAbility.org
RItutorial.org
OrtonAcademy.org
WilsonLanguage.com
please bother me

Zach Edson

ZachEdson@WheelerSchool.org

Triss

Kenley