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ENGLISH COMPOSITION AND THE DYSLEXIC/  
LEARNING DISABLED STUDENT

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
English Composition

---

by  
John William Almy  
March 1994

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## ABSTRACT

Dyslexia is a highly complex neurological disorder which prohibits intelligent and often highly capable people, those from all walks of life, from learning to read and write. Such noted and diverse authorities as Samuel T. Orton, Margaret Rawson, Norman Geschwind, Katrina de Hirsch, George Pavlidis, Albert Galaburda, and Susan Vogel have labelled dyslexia as one of the most debilitating and frustrating handicaps that students of language will ever face, yet many teachers and other professionals remain oblivious to the problem.

In this paper I will present a comprehensive discussion on dyslexia, its probable causes and ramifications, and I will explore problems typically exhibited by dyslexic and other learning disabled writers. Such problems include highly erratic spelling (inability to decode, impaired grapheme and phoneme awareness), illegible handwriting, lack of organization, an inability to properly sequence events, poor discriminatory abilities, and severe problems in grammar, punctuation and syntax.

The severity of these and other problems of the learning disabled have led researchers such as Newcomer and Barenbaum to conclude that, "Writers with learning disabilities [including dyslexia] simply do not think thoughts that result in coherent compositions." And many experts feel that the learning disabled have very little chance of ever becoming proficient writers. However, in this paper I contend, as a dyslexic writer and teacher of composition, that with the proper guidance and through the use of structured, systematic, sequential,

cumulative, multisensory teaching techniques, dyslexic and other learning disabled students can become skillful writers.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate this thesis to the best friend I have ever had, my wife, Victoria. Without her love, support, guidance and faith I would still be spending my days pounding concrete with a jackhammer, and my nights wishing that the next day would never come. Thank you, Torrie.

I thank all of the wonderful teachers who have taught me, more than anything else, that I am a worthwhile person. Your faith has become my faith, your goal, my goal.

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## FOREWORD

In his sometimes controversial text, The Making of Knowledge in Composition, Stephen North tells us that, "Two or three or ten outsider perspectives can never accumulate the authenticity of that of a single insider" (312). While that notion may not seem all that profound, until reading North I had never stopped to consider that I might have an insider's perspective on a subject that was of value and interest to others. But North got me thinking.

I am a dyslexic, and a very lucky one at that, for I am now, unlike so many of my fellow dyslexics, able to read, write, and speak with relative ease. Today, language, in all its forms, has become an ally. But for nearly forty years I felt certain that language, or rather my lack of language skills, was going to kill me--or worse yet, someone around me who just happened to cross my path at the wrong time.

Language is, among other things, the medium by which we maintain our civility. If you doubt that, just imagine being without language, even for a short time. Like the traveler in a foreign land, you cannot talk, write, read, or understand what others have to say. Yet you still must attempt to get by in the world and express your thoughts and needs to those around you. How would you handle being lost under those circumstances, or catching a bus, or ordering something to eat in a restaurant, or explaining to a policeman what you were doing on private property? (It is quite easy to end up in the wrong place when you cannot read). How long do you think it would be before you boiled over in frustration and found yourself in



an argument? And how would you get out of that argument once you were in it? Granted, this is a worse case scenario, but millions of dyslexics go through similar situations daily, and unlike the foreign traveler they cannot simply go home.

Indeed, if the dyslexic in today's society--a society so reliant on the written word--is to have any chance of achieving success, financial or personal, they must be taught to read and write. James Berlin tells us that merely by teaching writing, "We are teaching a way of experiencing the world, a way of ordering and making sense of it" (57). Lee Odell says "the act of writing is one means by which we come to understand what we have read or seen or heard" (103). And Walter Ong stresses that writing and print "are absolutely essential not just for distributing knowledge but for performing the central noetic operations which a high-technology culture takes for granted" (39). Civilized societies around the world agree that reading and writing are fundamental survival skills in today's world. Yet millions of dyslexics, though they are of adequate intelligence, have not been taught to read, write, or express themselves clearly. Their world is, more often than not, without order and without hope. Most are passive, but still, our prisons and juvenile facilities are stuffed to overflowing with those who are not.

Dr. Mary Scholl, Medical and Clinical Director of Neurosciences at U.C.S.D., has labelled dyslexia as the quiet destroyer of children. Most experts agree with Dr. Scholl on this, just as they agree that millions of children and adults in this country, as well as the rest of the

world, are dyslexic. But to date, very little has been done to alleviate and illuminate the problem.

Dyslexic people come from all walks of life. They often have no idea of what is wrong with them, though they do know that they are not like other people. Their disabilities are invisible to all but the trained observer. They pass through school and sometimes their entire lives feeling inferior to those around them and believing that they are mentally inadequate because they do not learn by the same methods as "normal" people do. Most never get over their beginnings; a few, if they are lucky and determined, do.

Until a few years ago, I had never heard of dyslexia. No educator, or therapist, or any other person I had ever encountered had so much as mentioned the word dyslexia. Consequently, it took me forty-one years to discover--quite by chance--that I am a dyslexic, though I knew all of my life that something was "wrong" with me. Still, even after making that monumental discovery, I did not understand dyslexia, nor did I even try to until I began researching this paper some three and a half years later. Donald Murray tells us that "we all have a primitive need to experience experience by articulating it." He says, "When we tell others or ourselves what has happened to us, it makes that happening more real and often understandable" (Approaches 9). For me, this paper is, above all else, an attempt to articulate experience and to gain understanding. The following is a brief account of my own experiences with dyslexia, and what it means to me to be an "insider":

Just before Christmas of 1985, I was laid off from the construction job I had had for four years. I hated the job, but I hated losing it even more. At the time, my family and I lived in a small, isolated mountain community, a company town that suddenly found itself collapsing. Overnight, industry had folded. Unemployment soared to 33%, the highest in the nation. Hundreds of houses went on the market, but no one was buying. A lot of people, mostly those who didn't have too much invested, just walked away. The rest of us were left to compete for whatever jobs might be available.

I was thirty-nine years old when I got laid off. And for the first time in my life I walked into an unemployment office, hat in hand. They asked what jobs I'd had, previous to this. The list included janitor, busboy, pool cleaner, soldier, moving man, stevedore, asphalt worker, and general construction worker. They said, "Get in line." And a few months later, after being turned down for every petty position I had applied for, that's just what I did: I drove an hour and a half to the registrar's office at Sonoma State University, and, with knees knocking, I got in line.

One afternoon in January of 1987, my counselor and friend Dr. Tak Richards called me into her office. She wanted to know if I would be interested in sharing my experiences in education, if I would join a panel of my peers while they tried to help the university recruit students from one of the local community colleges. She explained that many potential transfer students reported feeling

intimidated by the thought of moving to a four year university, so much so that numbers of them didn't even bother to try.

Tak called on me because of my background. I had a very tumultuous history when it came to education. I had been expelled from high school long before I could finish, and I had dropped out of college numerous times before finally learning to become a successful student. Fear, anxiety, self-doubt, and frustration had been my constant companions through school, and Tak knew that I wanted to help others who had similar feelings, if I could.

Our first visit to the community college quickly proved that groups such as ours could indeed have a positive effect. Each member of our panel had at one time or another attended a community college, and that night each shared some of their very personal fears and tribulations regarding their own matriculation into the university. By the end of the meeting, through nothing more than warmth and candor, we had encouraged dozens of students to continue their educations.

That evening, for the first time in my life, I spoke openly about my past and the factors which I felt had contributed most to my early failures as a student, factors which I didn't completely understand at the time and which are, sadly enough, just as real today for millions of others.

I disclosed first of all that I had, through no choice of my own, been raised in filth and poverty, and far worse in an atmosphere so charged with physical and emotional violence that fear was like a

constant, palpable entity. As a youngster I had been routinely beaten, bound and gagged, locked in closets or the woodshed and left for hours on end. I also had the misfortune of being a bed-wetter, and as one of my many punishments for that indiscretion I was often placed on a stool in the corner and wrapped head-to-toe in my own urine soaked sheets. This was to teach me not to wet the bed again.

Like so many others today, by the time I entered school I looked upon adults as one might view a large vial of nitroglycerin: Adults may appear calm and harmless on the outside--even inviting, but an explosion is always imminent.

Consequently, when a teacher told me to do something, I did it (except for homework, which I didn't know how to do). And when a teacher asked if I understood what they were talking about, I said yes, regardless of whether I did or not. For the most part I shunned the attention of my teachers, and I felt like running if one so much as lingered near my desk. But, much to my dismay, my educational needs proved great, and teachers were drawn to my desk daily as it soon became apparent that I could not learn in the same manner as other children did.

From the very beginning of my so called "education," I was the class oddball. I inadvertently wrote letters and numbers backwards or upside-down, and I found it impossible to distinguish many letters of the alphabet from others. I could not remember the multiplication tables, left from right, the day of the week, the month, the year, the rudimentary rules of grammar, or how to tell time. Nor could I

maintain my concentration for more than a few minutes at a spell. As one might expect, I did not get off to a very good start in school, and things grew steadily worse as I went along.

Clearly, most of my teachers had no idea of what to do with me. A few believed that public humiliation was the cure, and they practiced it regularly with their little dunce hats or the edge of their ruler on my knuckles. Others ignored me. Some did their best to help--and those were the teachers I always felt the worst about. I still remember with shame and sorrow the day that one of my favorite teachers--a lovely, patient woman for the most part--stood and threw her pencil across the room after trying to help me with spelling. "You are so bright," she screamed down at me, in utter frustration, "but you just don't try!" That, I suppose, is what she had mistakenly come to believe, while I on the other hand "knew" that my problem was exactly the opposite.

After publicly disclosing some of my experiences with education, at the community college that evening, I was approached by a doctor from the university, a learning specialist who wanted to know if I would be willing to take some tests. I agreed, and it was soon discovered that I had a specific learning disability known as dyslexia. The university offered to help me compensate for my learning differences by offering aids such as alternative testing, tape recorders, a note keeper, or whatever else I may need to offset my disadvantage. They also gave me a letter to give to my professors, explaining my rights. Still, I left their office that day with no idea of

what dyslexia was and feeling certain (as I always had) that I was retarded. I ignored what help had been offered, and I refused to tell any of my teachers that I was learning disabled (LD). I felt ashamed and angry that I was *so* stupid! But I went on with my life just the same, and I redoubled my efforts to succeed in college.

I graduated from the university in January of 1988. I had maintained a 3.70 GPA, been named as a Presidential Scholar, won one of the largest and most prestigious scholarships offered by my department, and I had been included in Who's Who Among Students in American Universities, listed for "academic excellence and contributions to campus life." Still, despite my successes, it didn't seem to me that I had learned much of anything in college. All of my life I truly believed that college *made* people smart, yet here I was an honor student, and all I felt was ignorant and exhausted.

I knew that I had succeeded in college only because I drove myself relentlessly. Everything I did--reading, research, writing--took me at least twice as long as it took my classmates. Yet I succeeded because I persisted. Between school and making a living I worked twelve to eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, and I steadfastly (and naively) refused to accept any "special treatment." Still, as good a student as I had become, I could not remember the basics--the multiplication tables, the parts of speech, the rules of grammar, or a host of other things which I felt certain a college graduate--especially an English major--*should* know. I felt like a walking contradiction, like I was smart enough to get by but

hopelessly stupid at the same time, and I was deeply disappointed in myself and my inability to "learn." But I didn't know what to do about it. Finally, I broke my silence and discussed my problems with several trusted faculty members, all of whom assured me that my fears were unfounded, that I was a first rate student whether I could remember the parts of speech or not, and that I had obviously outgrown my learning disability. In other words, none of us knew anything about dyslexia.

Hoping to become a teacher and writer, I entered a graduate program in English where I continued on in the same compulsive manner. I maintained my standing, as well as my belief that I was somehow retarded, and I turned my back on dyslexia, hopefully forever. But then, by means of a little boy I will probably never know, dyslexia forced itself back into my life.

One night during break in a graduate English class which dealt with problems in writing, I overheard a half dozen local elementary and secondary teachers talking about problem children. One veteran fifth grade teacher said that she currently had a little boy who appeared bright enough, but he couldn't spell, or keep his writing on the page, or do math, or any number of other things that "normal" children could do. She said that she had asked his parents in for a conference but they responded by saying that it was her problem not theirs. She also said that she had had about enough of this troublesome boy. The other teachers, all having experienced similar situations, were in sympathy with her, and so was I.



Finally, feeling somewhat sheepish but at the same time highly enlightened, I stood and approached the group. "Excuse me," I said. "Did it ever occur to you that the little boy you're describing is probably dyslexic?" There was a hush, then, much to my surprise, laughter. Suddenly, the teacher who had been complaining turned toward me and spat out--with a vehemence that truly shocked me-- "I'm so damned tired of that excuse. *There is no such thing as dyslexia !*"

That night, on the long drive home, my head filled with bitter memories of countless humiliations I had suffered at the hands of school teachers and so many others. I felt deeply ashamed for *knowing* that there was something fundamentally different about me, something called dyslexia, which I continued to ignore even though untold numbers of children were still suffering daily. I decided that the next time someone spoke to me in ignorance about dyslexia, I would not stand muted by my own stupidity, as I had that night, but rather be fully prepared to discuss the issue.

With Stephen North's maxim on authenticity and the insider still ringing in my ears, and a heart filled with a burning desire to make a contribution, my research into dyslexia and this master's thesis began the following day.

## Defining Dyslexia

The word dyslexia literally means not good at language, or language sickness. Basically, dyslexia--which is but one of several learning disabilities--is thought to be a neurological disorder which prohibits otherwise normal people from learning and manipulating written or sometimes spoken language. All dyslexics are considered to be learning disabled, but all learning disabled are not dyslexic. Researcher, Dale Brown, describes the effects of learning disabilities: "Learning disabled adults receive inaccurate information through their senses and/or have trouble processing that information. Like static on the radio or a bad TV picture, the information becomes garbled as it travels from the eye, ear, or skin to the brain" (Scheiber 11). In the case of dyslexia, this "garbled" information pertains to or centers around language. Therefore, language instructors are frequently in a position to note the manifestations of dyslexia, but unfortunately, they are rarely trained to do so.

Often, researchers report that far more males than females are dyslexic, sometimes citing as many as ten or fifteen to one; however, this vast discrepancy has been disproven by researchers such as Julie Gilligan, Susan Vogel and others who show that this simply is not the case. Rather, according to Vogel, it is far more likely that boys are identified more often than girls because, for one thing, whether one likes to admit it or not, boys are generally more disruptive than girls and therefore get more attention. Also,

according to Vogel, girls may react somewhat differently to dyslexia than boys and therefore be harder to detect (Gender Differences 44-50). This theory is currently under investigation and may, in the near future, alter our statistics even further. Still, by all reputable standards of measurement, dyslexic boys do seem to outnumber dyslexic girls by about 4 to 1.

As Matejcek points out, dyslexia is "a specific disorder of language communication process [which] seems to be universal--we encounter it wherever children learn to read and write" (213).

Of course, there are those such as Sally E. Shaywitz of Yale University (See Shaywitz et al.) who claim that dyslexia, though it does have a biological source, is not a distinct disorder at all, but rather part of a wide spectrum of "reading difficulties found throughout the population" (Rennie 31). Indeed, dyslexia *is* a part of that spectrum, just as it is a part of the spectrum of problems faced daily by basic writing instructors. But it is also more than that, which is why Shaywitz and her methodology have recently come under attack by some of the foremost authorities in the field, such as Albert Galaburda, Director of the Neurological Unit and Charles A. Dana Research Institute, Beth Israel Hospital, Department of Neurology, Harvard Medical School. Galaburda dismisses the Shaywitz study as being, so flawed that it turns into nothing more than "a self-fulfilling prophecy" (Rennie 32). And Paula Tallal, Language Disorder Specialist at Rutgers University, says that

Shaywitz didn't even begin her studies with children who had been clearly diagnosed as dyslexic (Rennie 32).

In fairness to Shaywitz--who claims that she is attempting to help *all* children with reading problems, not just dyslexics--it is not uncommon for disputes to occur over the definition of dyslexia and therefore who should and should not be included in various studies. However, the vast majority of experts do agree that dyslexia is quite real and very serious. Many, including the U.S. Department of Education, CASAS, and the Federal government's GAIN program (an agency designed to help people achieve literacy and escape poverty) have labelled dyslexia as the most serious and debilitating of all learning disorders (CASAS 5). Still, defining dyslexia (and literacy, for that matter) has proven to be an arduous task, even for those experts who have devoted their entire careers to the study of this phenomenon.

Dyslexia is a highly complex and often baffling disorder, and nearly everyone involved in its research admits to being, at least at times, confounded by its seemingly infinite variety of properties. Researcher, Dennis Fisher, comments:

It is apparent from the voluminous literature that has appeared in the last decade on dyslexia and learning disabilities that these phenomena and their ramifications are still poorly understood. Moreover, these disabilities seem to manifest themselves in as many different forms as there are students who are disabled (23).

This theme of dyslexia taking many forms is widely commented on throughout the literature, and, not surprisingly, dyslexics are

often compared to snowflakes, in that we are all alike in some respects yet different in others.

According to Fisher:

"Severe reading disability or dyslexia is not a simple syndrome with one etiology; it is a dysfunction or delay, and the underlying basis of the disorder is the brain, not a poor environment, poor parenting, poor teaching, difficulties in gross motor balance, or difficulties in visual tracking. Personality problems or emotional disorders may compound the disability, but children who are poor readers because they are emotionally disturbed are not dyslexic. Any of these problems can exist in combination, and good diagnostic evaluations are necessary to best factor out the causes since the causes frequently determine the focus of treatment and remediation" (Fisher 18).

Researcher Bruce Pennington adds:

"Dyslexia, like other complex behavioral disorders, confronts us with a baffling array of symptoms. There are reported associations between dyslexia and abnormal eye movements, left handedness, letter reversals, attention problems, poor self-esteem and depression, juvenile delinquency, early articulation problems [Albert Einstein, one of many famous dyslexics, barely spoke until he was four years old and was thought by his parents to be retarded], word finding problems, verbal short term memory problems, tic disorders, and even immune disorders" (81).

Baffling though they may be, some of these symptoms, and others, have been recognized by the scientific community for more than a century (or at least as long as Harvard has been bemoaning the poor quality of the essays of its entering freshmen). In 1877, "Kussmaul . . . pointed out that blindness for words can be found

clinically as an isolated condition. He stated that word-blindness represents the 'pathological condition of a special faculty' and that 'a complete text blindness may exist although the power of sight, the intellect, and the powers of speech are intact'" (Richardson 7).

Dr. Norman Geschwind, who, prior to his death in 1984, was the James Jackson Putman Professor of Neurology at Harvard Medical School as well as the Director of the Neurological Unit, Beth Israel Hospital, and Professor of Psychology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, devoted much of his later career to the study of dyslexia. He comments briefly on its history and origins:

"In the years 1891 and 1892 the great French neurologist Jules Dejerine described the brain lesions which were responsible for the loss of the capacity to understand written language.

"Of particular importance from the point of view of the understanding of dyslexia was the description by Dejerine (1891) of the post-mortem findings in a case of acquired alexia with agraphia. In this condition a person who had previously been capable of reading and writing loses these abilities while retaining his capacities for the production of spoken language and for the comprehension of the utterances of others (Benson and Geschwind, 1969). The loss of reading and writing is best described as a return to the state of illiteracy. Thus, like the illiterate, these patients retain normal visual function and are able to describe objects in the environment with great accuracy. On the other hand, they are incapable of comprehending the written word. Although they can use their limbs quite normally for other activities, they are no longer capable of writing. Even the act of copying the printed word is slow and the patients copy words of their own language as slowly as a native reader of English might copy a text in a strange alphabet such as Chinese or Russian" (Dyslexia, Cerebral Dominance 52).

Geschwind's fascination with Dejerine's studies would lead him to later conclude that, "These three findings, i.e. the resemblance of childhood dyslexia to acquired alexia with agraphia, the elevated frequency of left-handedness among dyslexics, and the male predominance of this condition, contained the seeds of a biological theory of this condition as well as of other related disorders such as stuttering and delayed speech" (53).

Even though many brilliant researchers, such as Geschwind and Galaburda, feel confident that the root of the problem lies somewhere in the left hemisphere of the brain (more on this later), there are, as yet, no absolute answers. Dr. Sylvia Richardson of the University of South Florida comments: "Many great neurologists have contributed to our knowledge of the aphasia, yet none of the theories of the various types of aphasia has had general acceptance. In spite of a century of study, the mechanisms of speech and language disorders remain as challenging problems" (5).

Still, incomplete though it may be, a great deal of useful information has come from past inquiries. "In his seminal monograph, *Congenital Word Blindness*, (1917), Hinshelwood, a Scottish ophthalmologist, emphasized the importance of two observations: there were often several cases in one family, and their symptoms were closely parallel to those which appeared in adults who had lost the capacity to read because of injury to the brain" (Richardson 7). Hinshelwood's observations are just as relevant today as they were in 1917, as evidenced in the following statement

by Pennington: On the genetic side, current evidence supports the view that dyslexia is familial, substantially heritable, and heterogeneous in its genetic mechanisms. At least some forms of familial dyslexia appear to be autosomal dominant, with linkage studies supporting both a major locus on chromosome 15 and genetic heterogeneity (81). One can readily see that if one member of a family is identified as dyslexic, it would certainly behoove the others, particularly siblings and offspring, to undergo testing and thereby increase the chance of early detection and intervention.

While there have been many dedicated researchers who have furthered the cause of dyslexia, none have been more influential than the revered neuropathologist Samuel T. Orton. Orton, who Geschwind has referred to as the "teacher of teachers," was "the first medical scientist who stressed the unitary nature of the language system and its sensory-motor connections" (Richardson 9). He is generally considered to be the progenitor of modern-day dyslexia research, and, as Richardson points out, many who followed Orton felt that they owed him a great deal.

Geschwind credits Orton for being the first to identify the major clinical features of dyslexia and for establishing the biological framework in which dyslexia could be studied (9). Geschwind states: "in his original observations he [Orton] pointed out the frequency of delay in the acquisition of speech in dyslexic children, thus laying the groundwork for the important concept that dyslexia appears on a foundation of delay in the development of the entire system devoted



to language" (8). Also, Orton, like Hinshelwood, felt that dyslexia was neurologically based, but that the treatment must be educational. Among other training procedures, Orton recommended the use of phoneme-grapheme association and a sequential approach to written and auditory symbols, thereby converting "a spatial display into a temporal sequence" (9). He pointed out "the one factor which is common to the entire group (of language disorders) and that is a difficulty in re-picturing or rebuilding in the order of presentation, sequences of letters, of sounds, or of units of movement" (9). This inability to re-picture images and sounds may deeply affect dyslexic writers, for as Walter Ong points out, "The ability to write is closely connected with the ability to hear in one's imagination what a written text would sound like when read aloud" (38). Orton "emphasized that in teaching [dyslexics] one should establish associations involving the simplest possible units and should use various reinforcement techniques in order to establish firm association links" (Richardson 9).

Still, even though Orton and others did much to define the differences in perception and potential problems that dyslexics might face, they were unable to clearly define the disorder. Dr. George Pavlidis, famed researcher and Director of the Eye Movement and Dyslexia Project, Department of Pediatrics, Rutgers Medical School, reiterates the problem: "Dyslexia is a difficult topic to research because not all dyslexics present the same symptomatology, a fact that often leads to confusion and controversy" (xvii).

Of course, as we have seen with Shaywitz, one of the very real dangers in not having a clear, universally accepted definition of dyslexia is that we (researchers) never know exactly what it is we are talking about. It is not uncommon for one group of researchers to include samples or criteria in their studies which others would dismiss as having no pertinence or validity. For instance, it is often erroneously reported that 20% or more of the general population is dyslexic. This is probably because the reporting agent has lumped others with disabilities--including those with low IQs and brain damage--together with the LD population. Yet the working definition of dyslexia employed by most researchers clearly states that dyslexics are neither brain damaged nor do they possess low IQs. In fact, dyslexics are usually quite bright. And, even though some researchers, such as Linda Siegel, have argued that in terms of reading and writing ability there is very little difference between dyslexics and the reading retarded (comprehension probably being the most significant difference) (618-629), others maintain that having an average or above average IQ makes all the difference. After all, they reason, it would not be in the least bit unusual for a brain damaged person, or one with an IQ of say, 65, to have difficulty learning to read and write. There would be no perceived discrepancy between ability and performance, and few bystanders, or educators, would even take notice. On the other hand, when a person has an IQ of 126 and no perceivable disorders, yet still cannot

learn to read and write by conventional methods, despite strenuous efforts, this is cause for inquiry.

Thomas Alva Edison was dyslexic, and he was considered so slow and disruptive by his teachers that he had to be taught at home by his mother. The following copy of a letter to his mother is an example of young (19 years old) Edison's writing:

Dear Mother--started the Store several weeks. I have growed considerably I don't liik much like a Boy now--  
Hows all the folk did you receive a Box of Books from Memphis that he promised to send them--languages.  
Your son Al.

Understandably, because it is such a source of frustration, dyslexics often grow to dislike language. For instance, Einstein said of himself: Writing is difficult, and I communicate this way (by speaking) very badly . . . I very rarely think in words at all (Scheiber 11). Another famous dyslexic, Nelson A. Rockefeller, said, "I saw all words backward and today I can't spell" (Scheiber 11). Obviously, both of these men demonstrate that dyslexics are educable; however, most dyslexics do not have the opportunity or support that they need in order to receive an adequate education.

In any event, as researchers progress through the literature, they soon learn to pay close attention to how the research was conducted and how the term dyslexia has been defined. In much of the literature, the terms dyslexia and learning disability are so often used as synonyms that it is sometimes difficult to know which is

being discussed. Therefore, it is not always possible to find research which separates the two. Also, until recently, the vast amount of research done on dyslexia, as well as all learning disabilities, focused almost exclusively on children. Yet today, due to the widespread recognition that learning disabilities vary in their symptoms over the years but never go away, adults are being studied with greater interest and, at least in some cases, a certain degree of fervency.

As a matter of reference, a learning disability as defined by Public Law 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, passed by Congress in 1975) is:

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, or mental retardation, or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage" (PL 94-142, 121a. 5[9]).

Clearly, the term "learning disability" is so inclusive that one can readily see why researchers and other interested professionals are anxious to isolate and define dyslexia.

Concern about our inability to adequately define dyslexia is expressed by several recent investigators. For example, noted researcher Dr. Regina Cicci commented on the problem of definition during her 1989 acceptance speech of the coveted Samuel T. Orton

Award: "As the professional organization with dyslexia in our name [The Orton Dyslexia Society] we better know what it is and stop adding to it willy-nilly. It will lessen our credibility with other professionals and will confuse the persons we hope to serve"

(Response). Despite Cicci's and other's concern, a precise definition is still not available.

To date, however, the most widely quoted definition of dyslexia is the one written by Dr. Macdonald Critchley, President Emeritus of The World Federation of Neurology, "whose efforts on behalf of the dyslexic child have won him international renown" (Pavlidis, Dyslexia Research xii). Critchley begins his essay, "Dyslexia: An Overview," with the following: "In an attempt to fathom the unfathomable, to unscrew the inscrutable, I will try and analyse something which according to the critics, is incapable of being defined--despite a number of excellent attempts over the past half-century—namely, dyslexia." According to Critchley, dyslexia is:

A learning disability which initially shows itself by difficulty in learning to read, and later by erratic spelling and by lack of facility in manipulating written as opposed to spoken words. The condition is cognitive in essence, and usually genetically determined. It is not due to intellectual inadequacy or to lack of socio-cultural opportunity, or to emotional factors, or to any known structural brain-defect" (1).

Of course, there are other recognized definitions of dyslexia, and, so that the reader may have some measure for comparison, I include two others here. One comes from Dr. Lucius Waites of the Texas

Scottish Rite Hospital, an organization specializing in orthopedic, neurologic, and developmental disorders in children:

Specific dyslexia is a disorder involving difficulty with the symbols of written language. By definition, this disability includes basic problems in learning the alphabet and its phonic properties, as well as word recognition, reading, reading comprehension, writing, copying, and spelling. The term "specific" is included in the definition of dyslexia to establish the absence of mental retardation, brain damage, or a primary emotional or mental problem. Family and home environment do not cause specific dyslexia and it is not a result of faulty training in school. Specific dyslexia may be inherited from either side of the family or may occur without any family history. Children with this syndrome usually have no problems in the three-dimensional (everyday) world. Their disability becomes evident with the introduction of abstract symbols, which are the basis of written language" (4)

In contrast to Waites' elaborate definition, here is the definition currently found in the Fourth Annual Resource Directory, 1993, from the Orton Dyslexia Society, the most informed, influential, and powerful organization of its kind in the world today: "Dyslexia is a difference in brain formation which is present at birth and occurs in 15% of the general population. It results in an impairment in the ability to learn, retain and express information" (4). Compact though it may be, this definition seems too vague. For instance, the term "difference in brain formation" seems wide open to conjecture. After all, might not a host of dysfunctions such as mental retardation stem from a similar circumstance, and also impair ones ability to learn, retain, and express information?

Be that as it may, until recently, Critchley's definition of dyslexia was the most widely accepted in the world, but no longer. Recent discoveries, which I will discuss shortly, have altered the way we now view dyslexia. Still, Galaburda states flatly, "There is no uniform agreement as to the nature of developmental dyslexia" (Animal Studies 39). Pavlidis adds that, "The interdisciplinary nature of inquiry into the problems of dyslexia has provided a rich source of hypothesis testing and frustration." He also asks the question which seems to be uppermost in the thoughts of so many researchers: "Why is it that with so many minds working in so many directions that a 'cure' for reading problems has not been found?" (Pavlidis xvii).

In the end, many (myself included) will agree with Tallal that the definition issue has become somewhat of a straw man, when the real issue is, or at least should be, one of better understanding the mechanisms which prohibit people from learning to read, so that we can then deal with the problem (Rennie 32). Certainly, dyslexia must be clearly and thoroughly defined so that we can better understand what we are dealing with and how we might overcome it; however, as the situation stands today, we are knowingly allowing millions of people to go untreated while we debate over definitions, and this is inexcusable.

Meanwhile, while there are those individuals and organizations who remain relatively inactive as the debate over a precise

definition of dyslexia persist, as we shall see in the next chapter,  
there are still others who do not hesitate to profit



## A Good Study Gone Bad

Though dyslexia may be lacking a suitable definition or cure, it is certainly not due to a lack of interest. As Margaret Rawson, Editor-in-Chief for The Orton Dyslexia Society, Professor of Sociology at Hood College, and

one of the world's foremost authorities on dyslexia, tells us, "One recent bibliography of some 2400 annotated items confined to 'dyslexia', with varying definitions (Evans, 1982), is less than complete and reaches only into 1976" (6). Furthermore, "Buried in this plethora of print are some very significant findings, together with some material that is interesting and promisingly worth watching, and a very great deal that, to put it politely, we can readily do without" (6).

In keeping with Rawson's previous statement, when I first began researching dyslexia, more than a year and a half ago, several people recommended that I read what is surely the most popular text on the subject today (at least among lay people)--the aptly named book, Smart But Feeling Dumb, by Harold N. Levinson. Because of its relative popularity and its usefulness as an example of what can and does go wrong in dyslexia research--even highly insightful research, as much of Levinson's is--I think it bears a brief examination.

Levinson, a practicing psychiatrist and teacher at the New York University Medical Center, says that he has treated more than ten thousand dyslexics. He is an ardent advocate for the dyslexic, and

his studies parallel much of what other experts have to say on the subject.

Unfortunately, like so many others, Levinson's prognosis for dyslexics is not very optimistic: "Dyslexia," says Levinson, "does not disappear with age. It is not outgrown. It merely is partially compensated for, which often results in severe emotional scarring. As a result, most dyslexics do not succeed. They do not become famous. They do not overcome" (4). So what, according to Levinson, does become of most dyslexics?:

Some withdraw or exhibit other antisocial behavior. Most are forced to settle for mediocrity and an inner sense of isolation. Their hopes and aspirations are desperately suppressed, often beyond recovery. Frustration and anger become all-consuming. Many are motivated to direct outwardly their deeply felt feelings of inferiority, inflicting and infecting those about them. Without proper understanding and treatment, the lives of millions of dyslexics are doomed to a continuous stream of failures (4).

Many, myself included, would wish to claim that Levinson paints far too bleak a picture, but unfortunately a vast amount of research supports him on this (See: United States; Swartz and Lewis; and Kidder). According to Levinson, even those rare dyslexics who do succeed often feel "that they have succeeded [only] in fooling everyone around them, and that others are not truly aware of how inept they really are. They attribute their successes to chance, a lucky break, a fluke of nature." Furthermore, "Bright dyslexic children who feel dumb invariably become bright adult dyslexics who continue to feel the very same way" (3-4). Levinson is

absolutely correct here. Sadly enough, nearly every adult dyslexic I have ever met has told me that he or she still feels "dumb," regardless of what they have achieved. Perhaps, as Einstein often alluded, constantly fumbling with something as elemental as language leaves one feeling inadequate. Also, since most dyslexics have experienced--at least from their earliest attempts at language--what it means to be inferior in no fewer than one of education's major functions--the teaching of language, there can be little doubt that a self-fulfilling prophecy generally ensues.

Correct though he may be here, Levinson's work deteriorates as he goes along. As a medical practitioner, Levinson refers to himself as a "scientific researcher" (22). However, his chosen method of inquiry is not that of the medical model (though his "cure" relies on drugs), or the experimentalist but rather, as is becoming a psychiatrist, the clinical model. As mentioned above, Levinson claims to have completed more than ten thousand case studies from which he draws his conclusions about dyslexia. By his own account, he talks with and observes his patients, listens to what they and their family members and friends have to say, and then, based on this method of inquiry, makes his own clinical assessment (214).

While there is nothing wrong with Levinson's methods of gaining knowledge or collecting data, what he attempts to do with that data leaves something to be desired. As North points out, "Exciting as it can be to collect and analyze such seemingly fertile data, it can be very hard to interpret, to say with any real confidence what it might

*mean* " (226). Unfortunately, Levinson shares no such reservations when it comes to asserting what his data means. And in fact, he claims that *all* his concepts are in harmony with "The instincts, feelings, and symptoms of *all* dyslexics," as well as, "the experience of *all* educators and clinicians who have taken the time and effort to speak meaningfully to and examine dyslexic patients," and "the observations of *all* scientists, clinicians, educators, and patients" who have examined his methods (212-213).

Certainly, ten thousand is an impressive number of case studies, and obviously these studies have yielded a wealth of information, but still, Levinson goes too far in his interpretations. He overstates the authority of the clinical method of inquiry, and indeed seemingly attempts to "make his premises into knowledge of a different order, to make them unassailable" (North 104). Furthermore, he attempts to defend his method by stating:

"Numbers and scores most certainly have their place in science and research. They are most effective in biological research, especially where the subject tested cannot verbally respond, as in the cases of apes, dogs, and unconscious patients, and in chemical assays. But as scientists we should not rely *entirely* on numbers when attempting to understand the symptoms experienced by human beings who are desperately attempting to verbalize and clarify" (12).

Many in the field of composition would surely agree with Levinson that the experimental model, useful as it is, does not always represent the best way to study and gain knowledge about human beings. However, the clinical mode of inquiry also has its boundaries.

Sadly enough, Levinson seems oblivious to these boundaries and succeeds primarily in nullifying a good deal of what might otherwise be considered valuable and enlightening information.

Through his many years of case studies Levinson has reached the conclusion that dyslexia stems from an inner-ear dysfunction (22), treatable by a variety of what are generally considered anti-motion sickness medications. His book is filled with dozens of fascinating clinical case studies (including two involving his dyslexic daughters) and a host of testimonials to his abilities to cure dyslexia (so much so that I couldn't help but await a sales pitch--"Step right up and get your bottle of Dr. Levinson's Dyslexaway"--which thankfully never comes).

Oddly enough, even though Levinson offers thousands of case studies to back up his conclusions, he wields none of the power and authority which many other researchers in the field do. If anything, the harder Levinson tries to convince us, the further astray he goes, until at last we are left to wonder if "zealot" might not be a more appropriate title for Levinson than that of researcher.

I doubt that anyone, regardless of how they feel about his "cure," would deny that the doctor knows a great deal about dyslexia. I found some of his insights to be so thought provoking and disturbing that they were actually painful. For instance, Levinson says that in an attempt to alleviate the inescapable symptoms of dyslexia many dyslexics spend years involved in fruitless psychotherapy, not that the therapy does not help to alleviate some of the problems--poor

self-esteem for instance--but it cannot and never will cure what really ails the dyslexic.

This struck a common chord in me, because I spent many years in therapy (with two very fine doctors) struggling (and failing) to cure the very symptoms that Levinson and so many others attribute to dyslexia (such as feelings of being stupid no matter what one accomplishes, an inability to concentrate, poor self-esteem, hyperactivity, obsessive-compulsive behavior, irresistible, repetitive thoughts and actions, indecisiveness, and the list goes on). After reading Levinson, who is after all a practicing psychiatrist, I felt inclined to request a psychotherapy refund.

In any event, Levinson claims that "no critic has ever disproved any of [his] reported results" (40). However, he also acknowledges that he draws serious conclusions (on how well a medication works, for instance) which are not backed up by any type of control study. And thus, Levinson falls prey to what North warns is a major downfall of the clinicians methodology: "Clinicians," cautions North, "remain vulnerable to questionable nomothetic interpretations as they move toward these summary claims. Swept up in the power of their own words, there is always the risk that they will lose sight of their investigative limits" (232). Observe, as Levinson (and unfortunately much of his credibility) is swept away by the power of his own words:

"I have thus far successfully managed to help over 75 percent of my patients improve while simultaneously sketching a portrait of dyslexia never before seen or

imagined. All this was done without the help of double-blind studies. The results of my treatment are most clear and dramatic. In fact, the vast majority of reported symptomatic improvements were completely unanticipated and thus free from bias" (41).

And this:

Should I have begun my medication research by reinventing the wheel? Should I therefore have begun giving my inner-ear—disfunctioning dyslexic patients sugar pills as well as "real" pills, waited three months to retest them, tried another double-blind trial if the first one did not work, and then waited another three months to retest them all over again?" "Once I knew the medications helped dyslexics and witnessed responses similar to those you have read, should I have attempted to treat as many patients as possible as rapidly and as effectively as possible" Should I 'prove' what I already knew—merely to avoid criticism? (215)

And lastly, here is Levinson sounding--at least to me--far more like a patient than a doctor as he tries to turn the tables on his tormentors: "I realize now why some critics are driven to *demand* double-blind studies: Underlying this need is no doubt a feeling of uncertainty as to the reality, objectivity, and honesty of their own observations" (41). Here indeed is a tragic example of a potentially valuable study gone bad, and all because the researcher, a man seemingly dedicated to the well-being of dyslexics, could not accept the boundaries of his chosen method of inquiry. Certainly--and sadly in this case--as Rawson has made clear, there is a great deal within the literature which "we can readily do without."

Unfortunately, though Levinson claims that his research is grounded in science it most certainly is not. However, as we shall see

in the following chapter, there is a substantial body of highly acclaimed researchers who are currently, through rigorous scientific methods, exploring and mapping those areas of the brain believed to be responsible for the phenomenon referred to as dyslexia.



### Physiological Characteristics

A rapidly growing body of research, spearheaded by Geschwind and Galaburda, strongly supports the theory that dyslexia is indeed the result of a physical abnormality, though it is not, as Levinson states, related to an inner-ear problem. Beginning in 1983, Galaburda pointed out that, "Both subtle and more obvious distortions of cortical architecture have been demonstrated in the left hemisphere of the dyslexic brain, and this type of distortion probably dates back to the period of neuronal migration occurring somewhere between the 16th and 24th week of gestation" (Developmental 51). Moreover, in this 1983 study a "Section of cortex from the left perisylvian frontal region of the brain of a 14 year-old dyslexic boy [showed] architectonic distortion (large cells, swirls, loss of lamination) and ectopic collection of neurons in the superficial layer. Similar abnormalities were found in left parietal and temporal perisylvian cortex, the sites of language areas" (50).

Geschwind, though he pursued a slightly different path, concurs with Galaburda and states that, "The lesion in this remarkable condition, as has been verified many times since Dejerine's original description, illustrates again the laterality of language function. There is destruction within the cortical area lying at the junction of the temporal, parietal and occipital lobes on the left side" (Dyslexia 52). Furthermore, "It is now clear, however, that anomalies of formation of the cortex at the junction of the temporal and parietal

lobes are indeed present in a significant proportion of dyslexic brains, and these anomalies may be found only on the left side" (53). Also, "the pre-natal lesion may lead to impairment of the function normally represented in the area of cortex which is disturbed, but in compensation there is superior development of cortical regions mediating other functions" (53). In keeping with this theory, Badian, McAnulty, and Duffy state that "Electrophysiological findings suggest a large left hemispheric difference, which is mainly parietal and frontal, between the dyslexics and normal readers. A smaller right hemispheric difference, mainly occipital and parietal, was also found" (167).

These hemispheric differences should prove interesting to writing instructors, for as Emig has pointed out, "Writing involves the fullest possible functioning of the brain, which entails the active participation in the process of both the left and the right hemispheres. Writing is markedly bispherical" (88).

Galaburda currently has a brain bank at Harvard University containing several male and female dyslexic brains as well as non-dyslexic brains, and, interestingly enough, he has discovered that "dyslexic brains, which have symmetrical plana temporale (compared to asymmetrical in "normal" brains), are not short on language areas, but instead contain excessive language cortex, particularly in the right hemisphere" (Ordinary 73). Again, as Emig tells us, "The right hemisphere seems to be the source of intuition, of sudden gestalts, of flashes of images, of abstractions occurring as visual or spatial

wholes, as the initiating metaphors in the creative process" (88).

Also, it may be the "seat of emotions." Howard Gardner adds, "Emotional appropriateness, in sum--being related not only to *what* is said, but to how it is said and to what is *not* said, as well--is crucially dependent on right hemisphere intactness" (Emig 88).

Galaburda's studies show that dyslexics have plenty of neurons, but they are not always where they should be. It appears that dyslexics have ectopic nests of cells which actually make the language areas in their brains larger and more symmetrical than non-dyslexics. This "perhaps excessive" development of the "usually smaller right side" may actually cause the brain to have problems when dealing with language dominance. It may well be that, in the dyslexic, both sides of the brain are "struggling" to control language skills. Furthermore, "The greater development may reflect an increase in the total number of neurons involved in language processing" (Ordinary 78). Also, "The change in neuron numbers may be accompanied by changes in callosal connectivity [in other words, the mass of white, transverse fibers connecting the cerebral hemispheres], and therefore in interhemispheric interactions. It is also possible that the changes in interhemispheric interactions lead to changes in intrahemispheric interactions, as these two may be complementary" (Ordinary 78). Therefore, it is likely that the activity of the brain is reflected in the symptoms of attention problems, word recognition, and retrieval of information.

Information goes in, but because of internal hemispheric struggle it is not always accessible to the dyslexic person.

Galaburda has also proposed that:

The effect of sex steroids, particularly male hormones, on the development of the asymmetry of the hemispheres suggests that male sex steroids could be acting to retard the growth of the left hemisphere . . . This could possibly lead to abnormal cortical development and the presence of ectopias [abnormal positioning of brain cells], dysplasias [ in this case, disordered growth or faulty development of brain cells] and primitive patterns of cortical connections. In the latter situation a left hemisphere could be produced which is incapable of handling effectively the linguistic tasks required for reading and writing, hence developmental dyslexia. This hypothesis would also explain the excessive incidence of dyslexia among boys, as compared to girls, and the greater representation of left-handers among dyslexic populations (Animal Studies 46).

After recently attending a presentation of Dr. Galaburda's work, I feel certain that he has discovered the root of our (dyslexic's) problems; however, in keeping with practical scientific procedures, Galaburda is the first to caution that "the causal relationship between excessive brain tissue and functional disability cannot be made on the basis of association alone, and further statements on this possibility await some form of experimental modeling" (Ordinary 75).

In discussing his as well as Galaburda's work, Geschwind--who believes "that left-handedness, learning disability, and immune disease all stem from a common cause but one does not cause the other" (Dyslexia 60)--states that, "In brief, the theory outlined here suggests that there is some common factor *in utero* which delays the

growth of the left hemisphere and the development of the immune system and thus increases the rate of left-handedness, learning disabilities and immune disorders" (Dyslexia 61-62). In addition, "We know that all dyslexics are not similar to each other. The theory presented here suggests the possibility that delays at different periods in fetal life may lead to a wide variety of patterns of alteration in the final brain structure" (62).

As we shall see in a later chapter, those of us involved in teaching English composition to dyslexic students will also, undoubtedly, encounter a wide variety of errors produced by dyslexic writers. For example, while many will be atrocious spellers, others will be quite adept. And while some may seem almost brilliant in their ability to generate ideas, certain numbers of their peers will most certainly appear to be dotes. Still, different though they may be, the astute composition instructor can learn to recognize patterns within this population, and therefore, hopefully, provide knowledgeable assistance. In the following chapter some communalities among dyslexics are discussed. It is hoped that the interested reader will be provided with a clearer picture of dyslexic behavior, and therefore be in a better position to provide instruction, or, as the case may be, intervention.

### Other Common Characteristics

Even though dyslexics do not always share the same symptoms, more often than not they do display a wide variety of very similar physical and mental abnormalities. Pavlidis, who has focused his attention on visual variations among dyslexics, tells us that, "Normal readers make regular eye movements across lines of text that are of more constant size and duration than those made by poor readers (Tinker, 1958; Pavlidis, 1981b; 1985a). An even greater irregularity of eye movement patterns have been found in dyslexics . . . eye movements during reading have been found to be both erratic and idiosyncratic" (Role 99-100). Furthermore, dyslexia and erratic eye movements can "be seen as the results of the same or parallel but independent brain malfunctions. Such a theory would explain the dyslexics' erratic eye movements found during reading and non-reading tasks, and also their language, attentional, synchronization, and sequential problems" (Role 101). Of course, erratic eye movements might also contribute to the slow reading rates reported for most dyslexics. Also, interestingly enough, "Ojemann and his colleagues found that the functions of naming, phoneme identification, and reading were located in the same area of the left hemisphere" spoken of by the researchers above (Role 101). Thus, recalling the names of parts of speech, the sound /d/ for the symbol d, and the capacity for steady eye movement (from left to right in Western cultures) lie in the same language processing center.

Other common similarities and symptoms found in dyslexics include (and Critchley, Waites, the Texas State Board of Education, and a host of other experts have also identified these or very similar symptoms in dyslexics):

#### Childhood:

Difficulty expressing oneself

Delay in learning tasks such as tying shoes and telling time

Inattentiveness; distractibility

Inability to follow directions

Difficulty learning the alphabet, times tables, words of songs or rhymes

Poor playground skills

Difficulty learning to read

Mixing the order of letters or numbers while writing

#### Adolescence & Adulthood

Difficulty in processing auditory information

Losing possessions; poor organizational skills

Slow reading; low comprehension

Difficulty remembering names of people and places

Hesitant speech; difficulty finding appropriate words

Difficulty organizing ideas to write a letter or paper

Poor spelling

Difficulty learning a foreign language

Inability to recall numbers in proper sequence

Lowered self-esteem due to past frustrations and failures (Fourth Annual Resource Directory, 1993)

One of the interesting things about dyslexia is that nearly everyone can identify with the above symptoms. Have you ever met anyone (including yourself) who didn't occasionally complain about or display some or even many of the foregoing symptoms? Because they can so readily identify with the symptoms, many people want to dismiss the problem by saying things like: "Oh, everyone does that." Or, as one of my fellow English professors recently quipped: "Based on the symptoms, at least half of the students on this campus must be dyslexic." Of course, the difference is one of degree as well as longevity. We all know what it feels like to have difficulty falling asleep, or to find ourselves backing away from a cliff because it suddenly and inexplicably seems dangerous, yet we do not label ourselves as an insomniac or an acrophobe.

Margaret Rawson ruminates:

"Is the word [dyslexia] used simply descriptively or denotatively, as we recognize that all persons (even, in minor ways, identical twins) are unique? To this we readily agree, while we also agree that people can be grouped in terms of certain characteristics or patterns of characteristics. It is in this sense that many of us have no semantic discomfort in saying that the problems we name 'dyslexia' are real, and experienced by real people we handily call dyslexic. So considered, especially in our modern, literate world, dyslexia is certainly 'real'. If you doubt it, ask the person who has these characteristics" (A Diversity Model 15).



In their study of dyslexic college students, Aaron and Phillips identify dyslexia as a syndrome, because they found that all of the students they worked with shared the following four symptoms: "(1) slow reading speed; (2) incorrect oral reading; (3) poor spelling ability; and (4) grammatical errors in written language" (46). Furthermore, they claim that all of these symptoms can be traced to a poor mastery of the grapheme-phoneme relational rules (a subject we will return to later).

By far the most common characteristic of dyslexia, at least in the minds of the general public, is letter and number reversal. In fact, many people think that this *is* dyslexia, rather than just one symptom of it, and when their children demonstrate such behavior they become concerned. Waites explains, "Mirror-image writing, reversals, and translocations of letters and words in reading and writing are frequent [among dyslexics]. They suggest the child is demonstrating an inability to manipulate abstract symbols in space" (8). However, "Many normal children show some reversals and translocations in the early preschool and early school years, but the tendency is not as frequent or prolonged as in children with specific dyslexia. The reversals should disappear by the eighth birthday" (8).

Furthermore, "It has been an erroneous assumption by the media and by many parents that the appearance of reversals in writing or reading always indicates specific dyslexia. This is simply not true. When the writing reversals persist beyond the eighth birthday without reading and spelling deficiencies, they are probably caused

by some disorder other than specific dyslexia" (8). Therefore, it would be wise to monitor students who demonstrate letter or number reversals, particularly those who demonstrate problems in reading and writing, but caution must be exercised since not all of these students will be dyslexic. Margaret Snowling goes so far as to say that: "While there may be a minority of children who have visual perceptual deficits underlying their reading failure, the consensus view is that reversal errors reflect a low level of literacy skill and do not signal dyslexia" (5). Certainly, Shaywitz would agree with Snowling on this issue, but they are far from forming a "consensus" point of view. In fact, many of the dyslexic college students that I work with today are quite literate, yet they constantly reverse letters, particularly when they are feeling rushed.

Regardless of where they originate, letter and number reversals are but the tip of the iceberg when it comes to problems shared by dyslexics. As T.R. Miles, Professor of Psychology at the University College of North Wales points out:

Developmental dyslexia should not be thought of simply as difficulty with reading or even as difficulty with spelling, but that the reading and spelling problems of a dyslexic person are part of a wider disability which shows itself whenever symbolic material has to be identified and named. At the very least one should treat with caution the view that when the reading and spelling of a dyslexic person have reached an adequate level no other problems remain (Miles 161).

What generally happens is that students establish a pattern of classroom failure when they can't remember the alphabet, the

multiplication tables, the basic parts of speech, and other abstract materials. And to assume that if a dyslexic student does learn these things he or she will have no further difficulties does the student a great disservice.

Waites adds that:

Many children with specific dyslexia seem to lack the ability for organizing study skills and habits. The lack of organization poses another hazard for the child, as this may be interpreted by his parents and teachers as a lack of interest in and concern for home pursuits and school work. The lament of parents is 'he just does not seem to care.' The child really does care and is greatly concerned, but this disorganization gives the opposite appearance" (10).

Year after year dyslexic students receive negative input, criticism, and chastisement for their supposed indifference. By the time they reach college age the majority have given up on education. Those few who remain often have a history of repeated failure and will undoubtedly--if they are to survive the rigors of college life--need help with their self-esteem. Not only that, but if their difficulties with reading and writing have gone unchecked, the dyslexic student will inevitably fall behind mentally as well. "Lev Vygotsky, A.R. Luria, and Jerome Bruner, for example, have all pointed out that higher cognitive functions, such as analysis and synthesis, seem to develop most fully only with the support system of verbal language--particularly, it seems, of written language" (Emig 85). This being the case, the writing instructor obviously has the potential to play a crucial role in the life of the dyslexic.

Another culprit which often results in some dyslexics being labelled as highly distractible (and I'm one of them) is ADHD or ADD (Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder or Attention Deficit Disorder). Richardson comments that because language disorders are invisible and hyperactivity and disorders of attention are both visible and audible, "the smallest percentage of children with learning disabilities, those whom we now call children with attention deficit disorder (ADD), ultimately had the strongest influence on educational change" (15). Still, many dyslexics, both adults and children, do have this disorder (25% or more--see Silver, below) which is generally characterized by *one or more* of the following types of behavior: hyperactivity (which makes some children nearly unbearable to be around); distractibility; and/or impulsivity. ADHD/ADD is a very serious disorder which often coexists with depressive disorder as well as drug and alcohol abuse. There is also a subgroup of ADHD individuals who, frighteningly enough, are often diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder. These individuals have little or no conscience and rarely feel remorse for any act they may commit against others.

The most common behavioral characteristics found in adults with ADHD/ADD include the following: Trouble attending, feelings of restlessness and fidgetiness, quick and excessive temper, impulsivity, moodiness, disorganization, and low stress tolerance. These people often have great difficulty completing tasks, even when to do so is vital to their own self-interest. Drugs are often prescribed for this

condition, though many doctors are, despite highly conclusive studies conducted by Yale and Harvard, among others, unaware that this condition exists in adults. After being diagnosed as having ADD, in addition to dyslexia, I was put on Wellbutrin, an anti-depressant medication designed to help. But rather than helping, Wellbutrin only intensified my problems. Likewise, I found that Ritalin provided no relief either. Today I do the best I can to stay on track without drugs, but at times it seems almost hopeless.

ADHD/ADD is an evolving field of study, one completely worthy of discussion here, but it is also a highly complex disorder, one requiring a great deal of attention. I recommend that the interested reader refer to the writings of Drs. Gabrielle Weiss, Lili Hechtman, Thomas Brown, Wade Horn, Edward Hallowell, and/or Larry Silver, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University School of Medicine (See: The Misunderstood Child. A Guide for Parents of Learning Disabled Children. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984).

While the dyslexic often finds it difficult to focus his or her attention, this is not the product of a poorly developed sense of awareness but rather an overactive one. Some dyslexics are stimulated by almost everything they encounter. More than one expert has compared being dyslexic with trying to watch and comprehend multiple television stations at once, with the volume turned up on each set. Understandably, some dyslexic children find it nearly impossible to pay attention in class, especially while the student at the next desk is tapping his pencil and the clock on the

wall is ticking insistently and the birds outside are singing sweetly and Billy and Sherry are whispering secrets to each other and the teacher is wearing a shiny new pair of shoes and so on and so forth. For the dyslexic, each and everyone of these distractions (not to mention the voice of the lecturing teacher) is often competing equally for his or her attention. Again, the dyslexic may appear to be uninterested or even bored, when in reality their senses are in a state of complete overload. A non distracting environment would undoubtedly be of great help to these students. This might be easily and inexpensively provided in the form of partitions, cubicles, screens, or, if need be, quiet rooms where the students may study.

Motor system disorder is another complication sometimes present in dyslexics. According to Waites, "This disorder is manifested by incoordination of gross motor function, fine motor function, alternating movements, and visual motor performance. The child with specific dyslexia complicated by visual motor incoordination has great difficulty with writing. He is usually unable to remember the configuration of the letters, which complicates the successful execution of motor activities required in writing" (10). Waites comments further on this problem as it relates to poor handwriting, often identified as dysgraphia:

The frequency of this syndrome has not been determined. Attempts to improve patients' cursive writing have generally not been satisfactory and the handwriting remains almost illegible in spite of intense efforts. All dysgraphic patients deserve the privilege of learning keyboarding, typing, word processing with a

spelling corrector, and operation of a printer. This greatly enhances their ability to place their thoughts on paper in a legible manner (65).

One can readily see that in-class writing assignments can become torturous for some dyslexics. Not only do they have great difficulty collecting their thoughts (more about this shortly), but they also must struggle just to produce words on paper.

Knowledge of motor system disorders also helps to explain why some dyslexics, such as Bruce Jenner--the former Olympic decathlon gold medalist--become superb athletes, while others have a hard time walking in a straight line or even writing their name.

Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome is yet another distinct type of visual dyslexia, one which is related to problems with light source, intensity, and color. I know people with this disorder who claim that prior to being fitted with special colored lenses, or Irlen lenses as they are sometimes called, could not read at all. Words, they say, would bounce all over the page or vibrate with great intensity. However, after being tested by a specialist and receiving a prescription pair of colored glasses, these people often find that they can, for the first time in their lives, read well. Some of the reported results brought about by Irlen lenses border on being miraculous. The Irlen Institute of Long Beach, California claims that 50% of those with reading difficulties suffer from Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome, and that 90% of those are usually helped by the lenses. I don't know if these claims are true or not, but I would certainly recommend that

an individual who is having unexplained reading problems investigate this procedure.

Dyslexics also suffer from more than physical and emotional problems. As one might expect--since being "different" is often the kiss of death in grade and high school--more often than not LD children tend to be of low social status among their peers. As Pavlidis points out, "The individual dyslexic, of course, is subjected to a number of injustices in school, society, and the work place" (xvii). Not the least of these injustices is rejection by fellow classmates. In a recent study, Stone and La Greca found that LD children are "disproportionately overrepresented in the rejected and neglected sociometric groups, and underrepresented in the popular and average groups." In fact, "Over half of the total LD sample was classified into one of the low status categories, with approximately equal numbers in the rejected and neglected groups" (32-37). Part of the reason for this is that LD children, in general, display poor communication skills, poor adaptability, low self-esteem, a lack of skillfulness, inappropriate behavior and responses, and sometimes a high degree of aggression. Furthermore, as pointed out by Bickett and Milich, LD children tend to make unfavorable first impressions, which, unfortunately, often sets the standard throughout the school years and perhaps throughout the individual's lifetime (253-259).

Also, Michaels and Lewandowski found that LD boys generally tend to be more anxious, hyperactive, schizoid, depressed and obsessive compulsive than non LD boys. Not only that, but "families



of boys with LD tended to score more frequently in the extreme (disturbed) range of family functioning" (446). This should come as no surprise to anyone sensible enough to acknowledge that environment plays a major role in our lives. After all, dyslexia, like illiteracy, runs in families and often contributes to family problems. Dysfunctional families raise dysfunctional children who more often than not grow to be dysfunctional adults who, unless highly motivated, continue the cycle ad infinitum. Furthermore, as mentioned before, "there are many reports in the literature which suggest that adolescent and adult dyslexics do not simply outgrow their problems despite the many respects in which they can make progress" (Miles 149).

Richardson tells us that:

A [dyslexic] child will usually demonstrate problems across several domains. A child with a history of developmental delay in the acquisition and use of spoken language will frequently demonstrate academic difficulties in learning to read, write, and/or spell. He may also demonstrate disorder in the functions of attention, perception, and/or poor coordination. And the problems will change in severity and in kind over the individual's life span (17).

Obviously, LD students are often carrying more than their share of problems, and this may not be readily apparent to the composition teacher unless he or she is informed on the issues. Teachers also need to know that dyslexic students do advance, but they still face many problems.

In a recent, highly controlled study, Geber et al. confirmed that learning disabilities are not outgrown. In fact, in keeping with several other studies, it was shown that learning disabilities get significantly worse as time goes by (570-72). Still, Hugh Catts reports that "with appropriate instruction, high motivation, and considerable practice many dyslexics learn to read, write, and do mathematics." However, "their skills in these areas usually will not be as proficient as those of nondyslexic individuals with similar experience and motivation (Aaron and Phillips 1986; Johnson and Blalock 1987; Thomson 1984). Nevertheless, many dyslexics acquire rudimentary (or even skilled) reading, writing, and mathematic abilities (e.g., Campbell and Butterworth 1985). Research, however, demonstrates that the language processing disorder that underlies dyslexia does not go away, but continues to manifest itself in other ways during the late school years and into adulthood (Blalock 1982; Campbell and Butterworth 1985)" (Catts 58).

As we can see from this chapter, teachers, parents, friends and even acquaintances need not be experts in the field of learning disabilities in order to recognize many of the problems. When one notices continuous letter reversals, apparent inattention, difficulty with articulating ideas--either in speech or in writing--or any of the other symptoms mentioned above, they should, at least, bring this to the attention of the individual, or to the attention of the parents of afflicted youngsters. Early detection and remediation are essential if the dyslexic is to have a fair chance to succeed, and simply by

becoming more aware of the problem and helping others to do so, we can all be of service.

Unfortunately, learning disabilities are all but ignored by our society, yet at the same time they have become so pervasive and disruptive that legal intervention is now imminent. Consequently, there is a growing body of concerned individuals within the legal profession who are fighting to change our current, apathetic policies toward the learning disabled. The ramifications of this involvement will undoubtedly prove disconcerting for many schools, businesses, and individuals. In the following chapter, in order to better understand why those in the legal profession have become involved in this issue, we shall explore dyslexia and the law.

## Dyslexia And The Law

Recently, and with good reason, dyslexia has become of great interest to the legal profession. As Richardson so accurately points out, "Our history tells us that, regardless of profession--whether medical or educational--there has been some agreement that disorders of language and/or perceptual-motor processes can interfere with learning the basic academic skills as well as the living, or social skills. These disorders are not mutually exclusive" (Richardson 18). Freud would agree. In 1891 he said that "understanding becomes impossible once reading itself has become difficult." Far too often, dyslexics become living proof that bright people who are not afforded an education and therefore the means to better themselves, become bright criminals.

Presiding Justice of the New York Supreme Court, Judge Francis T. Murphy tells us that "it is estimated that within the typical juvenile detention center and adult jail, at least 40 percent [60-75% is most often quoted] of the population suffers from dyslexia or some other form of learning disability. A recent study indicates that learning disabled individuals are 220 percent more likely to be adjudicated delinquents than those free from disabilities" (18). Murphy explains:

Juvenile delinquency is not caused by learning disabilities, but rather children with undiagnosed or untreated disabilities have a greater tendency to be involved in antisocial behavior. This is the result of being unskilled, suffering from low self-esteem, and being manipulated by others. These children also have a high

rate of recidivism. Psychologists and sociologists have labeled this the LD/JD (learning disability/juvenile delinquency) link (18-19).

Antonoff, Cohen, and Fink, who advise attorneys on how to prepare dispositional hearings for learning disabled individuals, caution that "this disability is almost certain to lead to even more destructive behavior unless the respondent receives proper treatment" (39). And fortunately, research shows that treatment doesn't always have to be costly or extensive. Gilligan, as well as Murphy and others, reports that "when a young person who enters the juvenile justice system for a minor offense is tested and found to have undetected LD--and when the youngster is then given 60 hours of appropriate remediation--there is rarely a second offense" (14). Consider the cost of 60 hours of remediation compared to the approximate \$35,000 per year it costs to keep one individual locked in prison.

Of course, most learning disabled people never receive so much as one hour of "appropriate remediation," a fact which deeply disturbs Judge Murphy. He poignantly tells us:

Decades ago, a great poet asked: 'What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? . . . or does it explode?' Like all children, youngsters afflicted with learning disabilities dream great dreams. But too often their dreams flicker and die simply because society does not recognize their unique problems and capabilities.

"Learning disabled children who are not properly diagnosed and helped become depressed, withdrawn, hopeless. They 'explode' into aggressive or antisocial behavior. A child whose dream is so early crushed, who

feels himself the victim of forces he thinks he cannot control, is a tragic loss to himself, to his family, and to society. It is truly cruel punishment to condemn one so young to a lifetime of despair, simply because nature has equipped him to learn in a manner which is inconvenient for the rest of us.

"Two-thirds of all children who come before the Family Court for delinquency or status offenses suffer from undiagnosed learning disabilities" (18).

The above statistics serve as a good reminder of what awaits many of those who do not learn well. They also serve as a reminder of what awaits the rest of us. Those individuals who are taught that they are worthless, often strike back in the most vicious and seemingly senseless ways. We all know this, yet we continue to allow children to be raised in the most deplorable conditions and to pass through school without even so much as learning to read and write. As Walter Ong reminds us, "writing is essential for the realization of fuller human potential and for the evolution of consciousness itself" (39). In fact, according to Ong, "most of the words in English lexicon today represent concepts which could not even be formed without writing" (39).

Another consideration having to do with the law and the learning disabled is that on July 26, 1990, President Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This law mandates Civil Rights Protection for the learning disabled and others; it went into effect on July 26, 1992. Couple this with the fact that the American Bar Association has unanimously voted to recognize learning disabilities and to acknowledge their disastrous effects on millions of

individuals (Murphy 18-19), and one can readily see that schools, government, and private industry are about to be assailed with law suits filed on behalf of the learning disabled. Perhaps this is why interest in learning disabilities seems to be increasing rapidly.

Last April, after delivering a speech at the Orton Dyslexia Societies 1993 convention, I was literally besieged by representatives from various organizations and corporations; they wanted to know if I would be willing to come and address their staffs, to update them on the needs of the dyslexic worker. This was the first time that I had witnessed such widespread curiosity about learning disabilities, but it was enough to give me hope.

As is so often true, recognition that a problem exists is the first step toward finding a solution. Today, for the first time, there is a growing interest in learning disabilities. Many, including those afflicted and those interested in helping them, are turning to a handful of experts for guidance. In the following chapter we will be looking at how those experts perceive the abilities and disabilities of the learning disabled.

### How The Experts Perceive Us

What is the life of a learning-disabled adult like? According to Learning Disabilities Specialist, Janet Lerner, "These adults sometimes have great difficulty finding their niche in the world. They have trouble finding and keeping a job, developing a satisfying social life, and even coping with individual daily living" (264). Still, despite their many problems, dyslexics are often bright, talented people, or so says educator Priscilla Vail (3-17). The list of suspected (obviously, not all were confirmed through testing) dyslexics includes such names as Leonardo da Vinci, Agatha Christie, Walt Disney, Hans Christian Anderson, Whoopi Goldberg, John Lennon, John F. Kennedy, Winston Churchill, and F. Scott Fitzgerald to name just a few. Still, talented though they may be, dyslexics can also be quite perplexing to others. A good example of this is provided by Ernest Hemingway in A Moveable Feast. Hemingway says of Fitzgerald:

Scott was very articulate and told a story well. He did not have to spell the words nor attempt to punctuate and you did not have the feeling of reading an illiterate that his letters gave you before they had been corrected. I knew him for two years before he could spell my name; but then it was a long name to spell and perhaps it became harder to spell all of the time, and I give him great credit for spelling it correctly finally. He learned to spell more important things and he tried to think straight about many more.

Had Mr. Hemingway known anything about dyslexia, he might have saved himself the apparent anguish produced by Fitzgerald's poor spelling.



Certainly, even though we are not all geniuses, dyslexics, along with most of the LD population, can be taught to read and write. As Rawson says:

We have much clinical and some statistical evidence to show that, with the right help, the learner can become competently literate at levels commensurate with his other abilities and his appropriate life-style expectations, even if his IQ reaches in the 190s or his achievements eventually result in a Nobel prize. Truly, what the linguistically facile seem to absorb with little or no trouble and the rest of us can reach with reasonable effort, the dyslexic can usually aspire to if he gets the right help--as have many young people my colleagues and I have followed into adulthood (see Rawson, 1968; Finucci *et al.*, 1983)" (Developmental 6-7).

Richardson tells us, "Fernald believed that 'most cases of reading disability are due to blocking of the learning process by the use of limited, uniform methods of teaching. These methods, although they have been used successfully with the majority of children, make it impossible for certain children to learn because they [the methods] interfere with the functioning of certain abilities that these children possess'" (19).

Still, as Fisher cautions:

Information on the etiology and symptomatology of learning disabilities is as yet incomplete. We have much to learn about the general characteristics of this group, characteristics that are liable, in any event, to be transformed by individual differences among cases. Two subjects of the same IQ and reading level may well be performing below their expected level for totally different reasons. Naturally, this variability will affect the kinds of pedagogical recommendations that are

appropriate in each case. Similarly, attempts to match the 'educational opportunity' of LD subjects will be doomed to failure unless these individual differences are taken into account" (Fisher 35).

Certainly, for most teachers, who already have more than enough to do, this poses a very real problem--how to teach to all.

Rawson cautions us to "teach the language as it is to the person as he is" (2), and she stresses that:

Always appropriate in all our relationships is caution about being sure that our client shall continue to be for us a whole person and not become lost in those fractions of him that we must examine and work with. Both the student and his mentors should remain conscious that dyslexia, rather than pointing to a defect or a deficiency, indicates a *kind of mind*, inherent and persistent (Developmental 7).

This notion that LD individuals are unique in their learning styles can not be stressed enough. Even teaching techniques as apparently successful as the multisensory approach to learning may at times prove harmful. Lerner cautions, "For some students the pathways stimulated during learning should be limited. The multisensory approach may in fact actually disturb their learning. That is, simultaneous stimulation of the auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic sensory pathways may prevent rather than enhance learning" (Lerner 119). Donovan and McClelland add: "Moreover, teaching is like writing itself, an art that depends less on formulas than on a blend of knowledge, skill, and creativity. Indeed, if anything, the new paradigm requires that teachers be flexible enough to respond to students as individuals and be ready to pursue

any appropriate methodology" (xi). Once again, we must learn to see each student as an individual and attempt to recognize their strengths and weaknesses.

Obviously, if a teacher is to have any chance of helping the dyslexic student under normal classroom conditions, that teacher must learn to identify and utilize the LD student's strengths and abilities. In fact, speaking of utilization, putting an LD student to work in the classroom may be one of the best "cures" available. Find out what the student is good at--art for instance, or mathematics--and allow the student to help others who are having difficulty. Empower the LD student. Let them know for once in their lives what it is like to be recognized for excellence, and not only that, but what it is like to be of service to others.

When I first started teaching, I had a dyslexic man in my class--a sinister looking fellow with jailhouse tattoos and half a dozen earrings. As it turned out, he was extremely good at writing--not with the mechanics so much but with ideas and honest, heartfelt responses. After he finished the GED program, I asked him if he would like to return to class as my paid assistant. He later told me, with tears in his eyes, that that was an extremely inspiring experience. And in fact, the very idea that he could be of value to others changed his life. The last I heard, he had graduated from college and was on his way to becoming an elementary school teacher. Honest recognition of one's strengths and talents really can go a long way.

As Priscilla Vail is quick to point out, "Many dyslexic students have deep reservoirs of creativity and intellectual power." If put to good use, this will surely help them in their quest for an education. But, "sadly, these are capped by some of the methods and materials in today's standard classrooms" (5). Vail goes on to say that dyslexics [in keeping with Emig's comments on right-brain activities] tend to be highly empathetic, inquisitive, and intuitive, which at times can be disconcerting for those around them. As she says, "The dyslexic frequently spots or invents patterns in mathematics or music, but may be unable to see them in spelling rules" (8). This type of inequity can be very confusing for teachers and others (Hemingway, for instance). Also, says Vail, "divergent thinking is the fountainhead, or wellspring, of barrier breaking questions and concepts. The dyslexic may abound in them, but get in trouble because of them" (10): Divergent thinkers often see things in an entirely different way, and they question everything around them; unfortunately, many teachers do not have the time for, nor do they wish to encourage, this type of "distracting" behavior. Further complicating the issue, the dyslexic "may have an encyclopedic experiential and emotional memory and at the same time forget last week's spelling rule, the multiplication tables, or the capital of North Dakota. The discrepancy between facility with personal memory and difficulty with rote memorization often irritates and confuses adults and the student himself" (9). I have heard many parents of dyslexics complain that their child (be they 4 or 40) can recall, with

astounding accuracy, everything that has ever happened to them from the time they were 2 years old, but they can't remember one single rule of spelling. Most parents don't handle this discrepancy too well, and for that and many other reasons they rarely make good teachers of their own children. And, as we shall see in the next chapter, teachers and their chosen approach to education play one of the most pivotal roles in the life of the learning disabled individual.

### Traditional Education And The Learning Disabled

Studies indicate an extremely high dropout rate for LD students, up to 54% (White 453) compared to a 33% rate for the non-LD. The major educational problem facing most dyslexics, as well as other LD students, appears to be, as pointed out by Mary Lee Enfield, "that there is a mismatch between the way these children learn and the way we are teaching all children traditionally" (12). She adds that:

The underlying assumption is that all children learn in the same way so we only need one technology. That is the conclusion you can draw. A few years ago, Marilyn Ferguson, in her book, The Aquarian Conspiracy, challenged all of us to begin to examine our paradigms. Have you ever examined your paradigm when it comes to your philosophy of reading instruction? Do you honestly believe that all children can learn in the same way? Our nation's schools must because that is how we have organized children" (14).

Happily, many in the field of English composition seem to constantly be testing accepted paradigms. James Berlin echoes what so many in the field seem to feel today: "The test of one's competence as a composition instructor, it seems to me, resides in being able to recognize and justify the version of the process being taught, complete with all of its significance for the student" (59). And David Bartholomae, who feels that all writing, no matter how obscure, has an intended meaning, adds that, "The task for both teacher and researcher, then, is to discover the grammar of *that* coherence, of the 'idiosyncratic dialect' that belongs to a particular writer at a particular moment in the history of his attempts to

imagine and reproduce the standard idiom of academic discourse" (305).

Many in the field of English composition seem determined to accept responsibility for their actions. Mina Shaughnessy, for one, encourages self-examination: "This system of exchange between teacher and student," she says, "has so far yielded much more information about what is wrong with students than about what is wrong with teachers, reinforcing the notion that students, not teachers, are the people in education who must do the changing" (297).

Goldberg, Shiffman, and Bender believe that all children who are having difficulty in school deserve to be carefully tested for strengths and weaknesses, so that their cognitive skills and areas of dysfunction may be clearly identified. Teachers who do not understand their students:

May commit many major errors in dealing with a child with a learning disability. For example, the teacher is likely to spend excessive time, even years, trying to develop a totally nonfunctioning auditory system. In the same child, the teacher may also spend an inordinate amount of time attempting to develop a kinesthetic system beyond the potential usefulness of that system. In pursuing these two aims in the child, the teacher runs a high risk of not fully utilizing other, more adequate channels of learning (36-37).

Enfield provides a useful example of how traditional teaching methods don't always meet the needs of dyslexics. She tells of a child whose auditory discrimination was so poor that he could not tell the difference between the words whooping crane and whipping

cream. Naturally, when the teacher began discussing the near extinction of the whooping crane, the boy became very confused. Had the teacher provided something as simple as a picture, the boy's confusion could have been completely avoided (15).

Another example provided by Enfield gives further insight into a problem many teachers have surely encountered:

Before she [the teacher] knew better, she had a little boy who couldn't remember anything; he had an auditory memory deficit. She said, "Listen, so you can remember better'. It was just as if I came into your classroom wearing corrective lenses and you said to me, 'Aha, Mary Lee, I see you are wearing a crutch. You take those glasses off when you are in my room, and you practice seeing, and you will see better.' You wouldn't say that to me. You would move me to the front of the classroom. You would make sure that the print was very clear on the board.

But auditory processing problems are hidden and insidious. We discover them only by observing behavior, and that behavior is often most irritating. When we start to talk, youngsters with these problems often get up to sharpen their pencils, or they open their desks and start rummaging around (15-16).

Enfield tells the following story of one of her teachers:

She usually tests children for auditory memory problems by giving them three directions in a row and having them repeat or perform them. She said to one little boy who had been referred to her because he 'wouldn't listen to directions,' 'Kent, would you hop on one foot,' and he started hopping without waiting for the other directions. Then she said, 'Now, listen carefully, Kent, I am going to give you three directions and then you do them.' She began, 'Hop on one foot.' And again he started without waiting. So she said, 'Honey, I don't think we are



communicating.' He said, 'Yes, I know. But if I don't get started, I'll forget'" (16).

Enfield observes: "He had diagnosed himself very quickly. In reality, he should have been rewarded for his conscientious attitude rather than punished for being impulsive" (16).

Unfortunately, dyslexics are often punished even though they are trying their hardest. I once had a teacher who whipped the back of my hand with a ruler every time I started to form a letter incorrectly. She did this while I stood at the blackboard in front of the entire class, and, as my frustration and sense of shame increased, I became terrified that I was going to break down and cry. I can think of no greater incentive to write letters correctly than I had that day, yet, no matter how hard I tried I could not do it. By the time I took my seat, I think everyone in the classroom realized that I was not normal.

I do not tell that story in order to cast shame on teachers. Every profession has its misfits. But it is, as Shaughnessy points out, as though "the teacher assumes that he must not only hold out for the same product he held out for in the past but teach unflinchingly in the same way as before, as if any pedagogical adjustment to the needs of students were a kind of cheating" (298). And, in the same vein, Peter Elbow, who feels that teachers should be more like coaches, says:

It is as though we are doctors trying to treat patients who hide their symptoms from us for fear we will put them in the hospital . . . . When they trust the teacher to be wholly an ally, students are more willing to take risks,

connect the self to the material, and experiment. Here is the source not just of learning but also of genuine development or growth" (221).

The problem is, most teachers simply are not trained to deal with dyslexics, or anyone out of the ordinary for that matter. Richardson explains part of the difficulty by pointing out that "some Colleges of Education have first-rate researchers studying language, memory, and learning, yet the graduating teachers from those same colleges may not know more than one approach to beginning reading, and special education graduates may not even know one method of remediation. Much worse, to my way of thinking," Richardson continues, "they are usually unaware that good teaching practices have been described in the literature for at least two centuries" (19). And, ironically, these same graduates often end up in charge of learning disabilities programs across the country.

The teaching methods that Richardson alludes to include "listening, speaking, writing, spelling, and reading activities as part of a total language arts approach. This is in accord with the psychological principle of reinforcement of learning through the several sensory pathways to the brain; i.e., a multisensory approach" (19). Also, "Cicci cautions remedial teachers about focusing on only one segment of the reading-writing problems: 'Just as a reading problem will affect the child's spelling, it will affect his having words available to use in longer units of written language. A child with a reading (and writing) problem needs remediation that combines

work with reading, spelling and written formulation" (Richardson 30).

Multisensory teaching methods have been around for a long time. Richardson points out that "Hinshelwood was the first physician to advocate a specific instructional approach for written language disorder in children" (8). He called his technique the "Alphabetic Method," and it involved, through a multisensory approach, "the method of simultaneous appeal to as many cerebral centers as possible" (Richardson 8). However, this type of approach has been largely ignored; perhaps that is why, as Goldberg, Shiffman, and Bender point out, "The estimates of reading failure may include up to 10 to 20 percent of the school population. This percentage applies to the average school system with perhaps a higher incidence of failure in inner city or rural school systems" (7).

If these figures seem too high, one would do well to remember that according to the U.S. Department of Education, 20% of the entire population of the United States is functionally illiterate, and another 34% are only marginally literate; also, 13% of those who do graduate from high school remain functionally illiterate (Facts). Clearly, something is very wrong with our educational system. And many, I'm sure, would concur with Mary Enfield who says, "I will not accept the statement that environmental problems are causing illiteracy until we have in all of our classrooms throughout this nation alternative instructional systems delivered by teachers who are

compassionate--who are filled with passion about every child learning" (Enfield 20).

Unfortunately, Enfield's goal may be a long way off. Goldberg, Shiffman, and Bender observe that "local universities offer the most minimal undergraduate training in approaches to the teaching of reading. In fact, a secondary teacher of English or language arts can be graduated from many teacher training schools in the country and never have taken a course in the teaching of reading. The average primary teacher may be required to take one course in the teaching of reading or language arts" (181). Furthermore, "the problem is much greater in the area of special education. Few colleges even recognize the condition of learning disabilities nor do they offer courses in the area at the undergraduate or graduate level" (182). Unfortunately, as Flower and Hayes tell us, "People only solve the problems they give to themselves" (93).

And this lack of recognition of learning disabilities is just as true for those in the field of English composition as any other field. Even teachers as highly skilled and thoughtful as David Bartholomae proceed as though learning disabilities do not exist. Observe in the following how, even though evidence is apparent, Bartholomae never even considers that a learning disability may be the cause of his student's (John's) problems with writing. First, Bartholomae ponders, "And it is not simply a 'thinking' problem--John doesn't write this way because he thinks this way--since he perceives that the statement as it is written is other than that which he intended"

(312). And he goes on to add that, "One of the most interesting results of the comparison of the spoken and written versions of John's work is his inability to *see* the difference between 'frew and 'few' or 'dementic' and 'demerit.'" Of course, this inability to "see" is a very common symptom of dyslexia. But Bartholomae does not consider that, rather he goes on to say that he suspects that "when John substitutes a word like 'when' for 'went,' this is an accidental error, a slip of the pen" (313-314). Again, "People only solve the problems they give to themselves."

While I strongly agree with Enfield that schools must do much more to help those who fall behind, whatever the reasons, I also recognize that our educational system and its many shortcomings are not the only culprit when it comes to the failures of our children. If children grew up in families that truly cared for them, families that put the well being of their children above all else, it is highly unlikely that reading and writing problems would exist as such, not to mention a host of social ills. If one thing alone stands clear to me after spending hundreds of hours in researching and writing this paper, it is this: Reading and writing problems exist because we, all of us, allow them to exist.

As Goldberg, Shiffman, and Bender are quick to point out, "It is not only teachers, but reading clinicians, other professionals, and parents who often use terms such as 'emotional block,' 'minimal brain damage (MBD),' and 'brain damage' to dismiss a problem that they do not understand" (9). To my way of thinking, a continued

lack of understanding on the part of parents (and others) simply means that they do not intend to make the time to deal with their children's problems, no matter how serious and far reaching those problems may be. Like it or not, education begins and continues at home; if it doesn't, we have little or no right to run to our local schools shaking the finger of blame.

Likewise, there has been a century-long tradition among colleges and others of pointing the finger of blame at high schools for our problems with basic education and for the lack of preparedness among those entering college, yet if colleges and universities are not producing teachers who are capable of teaching the basics, then whose fault is that?

In a realistic approach to the problem, and one that echos the philosophy of many insightful composition instructors, such as Troyka, Ede, and Bartholomae, Richardson points out that "no one discipline, medical or educational, and no single technique or method of remediation has yet or will by itself solve the broad problem of learning disabilities" (16). (Exactly what many in the field of English composition tell us about basic writers.) Further complicating the issue is the fact that "the number of children with learning disabilities is increasing, and as the number increases so does the complexity of the problem" (Goldberg, Shiffman, and Bender 9).

Unfortunately, teachers, whether they like it or not, often represent the last opportunity for many LD students. Still, probably due to their lack of training, or perhaps due to intimidation by their

budget-minded administrators, many teachers are reluctant to acknowledge learning disabilities.

Even those teachers who do acknowledge learning disabilities often carry mistaken notions of what they are. In Dyslexia or Illiteracy, a book by two well-intended practitioners, Young and Tyre agree whole heartedly with Frank Smith--a teacher I admire when it comes to most educational issues--as he naively assumes that dyslexia manifests itself only as a reading problem. Smith comments, "To say that dyslexia is a cause of not being able to read is analogous to saying that lameness is a cause of not being able to walk . . . The cure for dyslexia is to learn to read" (18). And likewise, I assume, the cure for lameness is to learn to walk. Unfortunately, few dyslexics, if any, ever become truly proficient readers, and even if they do, reading does not cure all of the ailments produced by dyslexia.

Doris Johnson, Director of the Learning Disabilities Program for Northwestern University, has found that while many of the dyslexics she has studied were "reading at a twelve-or thirteen-year grade level, none could be classified as efficient readers." And, "while they managed to get by in many situations, they had not automatized the basic subskills necessary for reading" (252). It "is important to emphasize that reading problems rarely occur in isolation," she says. "Both clinical observations and research on subtypes of dyslexia indicate that oral language problems tend to co-occur with reading disabilities (Myklebust and Johnson, 1962; Mattis, French, and Rapin,

1975; Denckla, 1977; Lyon, 1983). For example, dyslexics frequently have disorders of phonemic discrimination, comprehension, memory span, retrieval, syntax, and linguistic awareness in addition to their reading difficulties (Johnson, 1980)" (252-53). Also, "Generally, one can expect to find written language problems among dyslexics since writing follows reading developmentally . . . all of the dyslexics we have studied had difficulty with written formulation of ideas" (253). Again, dyslexics must overcome many obstacles in order to become proficient writers. As Ong tells us, "To move from the entirely natural oral world into this artificial world of writing is bewildering and terrifying" (40). For the unaided dyslexic, this "move" far too often proves to be impossible.

Critchley (and nearly every other researcher that I have yet encountered) reminds us that "dyslexia implies vastly more than a delay in learning to read, which is but the tip of the iceberg" (Pavlidis, 2). He goes on to point out that while average dyslexic students may well improve in their reading skills over time, they will undoubtedly begin to encounter a myriad of related problems stemming from this "complex syndrome." Dyslexia, cautions Critchley, is not to be confused with--as the uneducated so often do--the more common but much less complex problem of specific reading retardation; they are not one and the same (An Overview 2).

Granted, as Critchley indicates above, the dyslexic will always experience problems stemming from the inability to perceive and process information in the same way that others do, and, as we have



seen earlier in this paper, perceptual problems often lead to emotional problems. However, experience has taught me that reading and writing are the greatest allies a dyslexic can have. In fact, without these two fundamental tools the dyslexic will almost certainly be relegated to a position of inferiority, yet far too many dyslexics do not learn to read and write adequately. Some say they don't want to learn to read and write; others say they can't. With that in mind, in the following chapter we will begin to explore the most common reading and writing problems experienced by dyslexics, as well as some of the most likely methods of remediation.

### From A Dyslexic Student's Point of View

Even though many if not all in the LD population are capable of learning to read and write, most don't. Critchley reports that most dyslexics show a marked reluctance when it comes to reading and writing, and others actually report hating or fearing words (An Overview 1). Furthermore, Critchley offers these highly insightful (at least from my point of view) observations on the problems that dyslexics face regarding both reading and writing:

Even when this reluctance [reading] has been overcome, which in itself constitutes an epochal surmounting of a hurdle, a turn of the tide, the resolving dyslexic is still a slow reader. He cannot be hurried, for if pressurized he falters and loses accuracy. Moreover he fails to hoist [sic] in the connotation of what it is he is scrambling to decipher. Allied to this disinclination to read and an associated slowness, is a similar avoidance of the act of writing. In a homely setting this shows itself in a dislike of writing 'thank you' letters, or seasonal greetings. In a classroom context, essays constitute a considerable problem. Though the dyslexic may know his work, and may have a head full of ideas, imaginative and penetrating, the task of committing them to paper is too much. He is painfully slow, being held up by a search even for words that are within his capacity to spell. Moreover, grammar, punctuation, and, of course, literary style, are all imperfect, and often too the handwriting is atrocious. This inadequate and laboured written work contrasts vividly with his ability to express his abundant ideas verbally, his diction probably being logical, crisp, restrained, concise and impressive (4).

I found the foregoing passage so reminiscent of myself that when I first read it, more than a year and a half ago, before I had become

familiar with so much of the literature, I was stunned. It was as if I were encountering myself on paper, my secret self. I suddenly, for the first time, realized that other people had many of the same problems with reading and writing that I had. Oddly enough, I found that a strangely liberating sensation. Suddenly, I was not alone (or retarded).

Critchley's words reminded me of how much I hated reading as a child, or at least I always said I did. The problem was that I was never good at reading, and when called upon to read aloud I self-conscientiously stuttered and stammered and lost my place on the page, yet I was regularly forced to make a fool of myself by attempting to read in front of my classmates. Consequently, I did everything I could to avoid being called upon to read. And for a long time I truly believed that reading was a bad thing. It wasn't until the fifth grade that I learned how wrong I had been: On the first day of class my new teacher, Mrs. Fitts, announced that throughout the year she was going to read to us. Knowing that reading was for sissies, I immediately decided that I didn't like Mrs. Fitts. However, a few days later and several pages into Huckleberry Finn, I changed my mind.

Mrs. Fitts and the school librarian, Mrs. Wilson, soon discovered that I couldn't read or write very well, so, rather than humiliate me in front of the others, they decided to have me sit in the library and listen during lunch while one or the other read "boys" adventure stories aloud. At first I was embarrassed and worried that the other

kids might find out, but as those wonderful tales unfolded--African Adventure and Amazon Adventure, The Wolf King and Call of the Wild--I soon forgot all about my fears. In fact, I couldn't wait to get to the library to hear what was going to happen next--was Hal going to escape from the giant clam before the tide came in? Was his brother going to get away from the evil pirates? And of course my teachers would always stop reading in the most exciting places. Unbearable agony! How could I go another day or (God forbid) a weekend without knowing what was going to happen? In time--though I was never very skilled--I became the reader and they the listeners. I even began to take books home with me. And for the first time in my life, I read a book from cover-to-cover.

Unfortunately, my reading lessons ended with the next school year and the customary change of instructors, but, though I didn't take another book from the library for many years, I never forgot the power and mystery that lived on those pages. Like it or not, books had aroused something in me that nothing else--not even the movies, which I dearly loved--could compare to. The seed that had been sown by Mrs. Fitts and Mrs. Wilson took root that year, and had it not been for their efforts, I might not be writing this paper today.

Even though my desire to read began long ago, my dislike for the slow, laborious process and my deep-seated feelings of inadequacy often kept me away from reading. Several years ago I took a class in speed reading which, contrary to my attitude in the beginning, helped me a great deal. I was such an insecure reader that I would

constantly reread everything over and over again until I lost all interest. The machines used in speed reading forced me to move on whether I wanted to or not and, much to my surprise, comprehension tests proved to me that I was getting more from the material than I thought possible. As a result, I became a faster and better reader.

Still, at times, college reading assignments have seemed like a form of torture. Reading materials which are not interesting (and no offense intended but that includes a good deal of my past course work--how did I survive discourse analysis?) cause me a great deal of turmoil. I read page after page but I do not comprehend, and I must constantly begin again. I have learned to keep a spray bottle of cold water beside me while I read so that I can spray my face regularly, or else I will fall asleep, or drift so far away that I might as well be asleep. Often I read outside, regardless of the temperature, because being out in the open, especially during cold weather, helps me to stay awake, though it is sometimes hard to focus with so many things to look at (like all the beautiful birds, for instance).

Not surprisingly, studies show that many dyslexics can read at much higher levels when we are reading something of interest or something which involves our background knowledge, which is part of the reason I became a literature major: I love good stories. Of course, this same principle applies to the general population--they read better when they are interested in the information. But where

the average reader may read a grade or two higher when their interest is peaked, the dyslexic may advance six, seven or even eight grades.

It only seems logical that the foregoing principle would also apply to writing, and that dyslexics would be much more inclined to write about "meaningful" subjects. As Stephen Judy tells us, "To write well, one must know something well" (39). Of course, college demands that we write about all sorts of things, so we can't always pick and choose, but still, high interest areas do seem like a good place to begin composition instruction for LD students. And, as Judy goes on to say, "Writing from experience does not preclude either 'serious' writing (e.g., exposition) or writing about new knowledge (research)" (39).

Mike Rose has made similar observations concerning his basic writers: "We needed a remedial program that slowly but steadily and systematically introduced remedial writers to transactional/expositional academic discourse" (321). "Certainly," he continues, "it is a sound motivation and learning principle to begin with the simple--let the student experience success--and then move toward the more complex. No argument" (322). And this would certainly hold true for the LD student as well. Of course, Rose goes on to caution that focusing on writing what seems simple will do little for the would-be-college writer's self-esteem.

Critchley says that when the dyslexic "puts pen to paper, which he does very unwillingly, his efforts are visibly marred by erratic

and inconsistent spelling. This is a symptom which is probably never 'cured' in the strict sense of the word, so that even late in adulthood, his spelling is still capricious" (8). Certainly, my spelling might be labelled "capricious," though it has greatly improved over the years, which I believe is in part due to the study of etymology, but more than that, I have, over the past few years, had a great deal of practice. And, as Winston Weathers points out, when it comes to writing essays, or driving cars, there is no substitute for practice (189).

Problems with spelling can be particularly disruptive for some beginning writers. I have sat with dyslexic students while they attempt to compose, and watched as their anxieties and embarrassment over poor spelling, or their search for just the right word, shut their mental processes down completely. And the same thing used to happen to me before I learned that spelling is secondary. First comes the ideas. Still, some dyslexics will get so hung up on one misspelled or mischosen word that minutes will pass before they can move on, if they move on at all. Meanwhile, their ideas are melting away as the old fears and frustrations set in. After all, it's easy to conclude that you're not a good writer when you find yourself stumbling over every third or fourth word you attempt to put on paper. As Mike Rose recounts, "The possibilities in writing--even 'incorrect' writing--for discovering, connecting, playing were lost. Conceptually, our students come to believe that what counts is

not the thought they give to a topic but how correctly that thought is conveyed. The results? Clean but empty papers" (324).

As for the dyslexic's spelling, there are techniques that can help. Multisensory techniques in teaching spelling might include practice in phonics and structural analysis, pronouncing the word and using it in a sentence, visualizing the word and saying it, spelling the word orally and then tracing the word either in the air or with ones finger on paper, also, writing the word correctly from memory and writing it repeatedly can be of value for some (Lerner 420). Still, I think that the best impetus when it comes to good spelling is learning that one has something of value to say. This, in turn, promotes the desire to say it well.

As you might imagine, dyslexic's in-class essay skills are generally marginal. Had most of my schooling required that type of testing, I would have failed, not because I didn't know the material, but rather because I could not get the information down on paper fast enough. As Donald Murray tells us in "Writing as Process," "The volume of material we gather--consciously and unconsciously-- becomes so immense and is so diverse it demands *connecting*. We are compelled to provide some order for the confusion of information or it will drown us" (Donovan and McClelland 8). And Emig adds that "The medium then of written verbal language requires the establishment of systematic connections and relationships" (89). Unfortunately, as we know, connecting and ordering are not strong points for most dyslexics, so these things must be taught or the



dyslexic writer will continue to drown in their own ideas. In fact, the lack of skill in these two abilities can unjustly end a dyslexic's college career before it even begins. I learned this the hard way: During my first attempt at going to a university, back in the early seventies, I fell in love with anthropology. I eagerly read most of my textbooks and willingly and gladly studied everything that I could. But when it came time to test, the instructor insisted on giving in-class timed essay exams. I found them to be impossible. Why? As Mina Shaughnessy says (and I think this is especially true for LD writers):

Similarly, the query 'What is your point?' may be difficult to answer because the conditions under which the student is writing have not allowed for the slow generation of an orienting conviction, that underlying sense of the direction he wants his thinking to take. Yet without this conviction, he cannot judge the relevance of what comes to his mind, as one sentence branches out into another or one idea engenders another, gradually crowding from his memory the direction he initially set for himself" (301).

When I sit down to write an in-class essay my mind instantly turns into a whirling vortex of images and ideas. I sit with pen in hand, ready to begin, envisioning the endless possibilities before me, and then--usually before I have ten words on paper--time is up. And of course I fail. In anthropology I went to my professor and pleaded with him. I told him I didn't understand what was wrong with me, that I knew every bit of the material but I just couldn't get it out. I begged him to listen to me, to ask me anything he wanted about the subject and satisfy himself that I had full command over the topic. He said, with pipe in hand and feet planted firmly on his

desk, that that wouldn't be fair to the other students, and that if I couldn't learn to express myself in a "normal fashion" I had no business being in a university. Of course I knew he was right. I had always known that he was right. As far as I was concerned I had no business being in the university. So, despite the fact that I had good marks in all of my other classes, I left school and went back (quite literally) to digging ditches for another dozen years. This is not uncommon behavior among the learning disabled. We have a very hard time recognizing our successes, and we tend to obsess over our failures.

Even though numerous studies have shown that normal students do not do better on tests when given extended time, many people find it difficult to accept that it is fair to grant a time extension to LD students. "It wouldn't be fair to the others" is one of the most common complaints made by professors and non LD students. Yet, consider this: What if you gave oral exams, in a speech class for instance, and one of your students was a stutterer. Would you consider it unfair to the others to grant this student more time in which to express his thoughts? Can you imagine telling him, "I'm sorry, but you take so long to say everything--it's obvious that you just don't belong in a university." When it comes to writing, that is exactly what happens to countless dyslexics daily--they stutter on paper, and they fail because of it. As Lerner points out, if LD students are to have any chance for success, they "need sufficient time to think and to respond as well as many opportunities to

respond, answer questions, or give an opinion" (116). Renee's paper (in the Appendix) provides us an opportunity to see how debilitating stress can be for the LD student. Clearly, sensible alternative testing needs to be implemented in our schools, nation wide.

Waites offers the following:

Tests and examinations produce more stress and anxiety in individuals with specific dyslexia than in their normal peers. As most school tests are timed and written, it is understandable that the dyslexic child is apprehensive. The time factor alone will cause him to fail. Written tests for students with dyslexia are no more than a crude approximation of the level of their reading, writing, and spelling skills and are certainly not a test of knowledge on the subject or course under consideration. The anxiety and stress of tests and exams may cause a regression in his ability to read, write, and spell, precipitating a return of the reversals and translocations of letters and words during the test. Therefore, these dyslexic students deserve the humane and civilized expediency of untimed oral tests. We should turn our efforts to advocating such exams for dyslexic students in order to give them a chance to achieve reasonable success" (Waites 12).

Mind you, no one is proposing that dyslexic students should be excluded from learning the wonderful and immeasurably valuable skill of composition; that would be a disastrous disservice to both the student and education in general. However, unless one is involved in professional racing, or newspaper reporting, speed rarely proves anything, especially when it comes to writing. James Joyce, who once took more than a dozen years to complete one novel, might serve as a good reminder of that. Obviously, any teacher who expects information to be processed quickly and results produced on demand

would do well to remember Janet Emig's dictum: "One writes best as one learns best, at one's own pace" (90).

What my anthropology professor failed to realize was that "normal" students either know the material or they don't, and no amount of sitting and staring or contemplating is going to change that. Learning disabled students, on the other hand, often benefit from extended time on tests because it gives them the opportunity to collect their thoughts and organize their material. To say that it is not fair to the rest of the class to give LD students extended time is a little like saying that it would not be fair to sign for the deaf student, unless you sign for everyone else, too. Fairness must be based on need. Blind students *need* to read in Braille or have someone read to them, others don't. LD students *need* extended time in order to share their knowledge, others don't. By all means, let's do be fair, for a change.

Vail adds:

Thanks to the work of the late Norman Geschwind, and the very much alive Albert Galaburda, we know that many dyslexics are at risk for two dimensional abstract activities but are equally at promise for three dimensional, hands-on work. They may understand ideas and people, and express their understanding through what they build or design but not through their written essays. Thus it seems obvious that educators must expand the ways in which we measure mastery" (13).

In keeping with the above, Lee Odell tells us: "Indeed, students may select interesting, challenging topics and still not understand what they need to do in order to explore those topics thoroughly and

sensitively" (105). Bartholomae says, "We are drawn to conclude that basic writers lack control, although it may be more precise to say that they lack choice and option, the power to make decisions about the idiosyncrasy of their writing" (305). Certainly, as we well know, this is very true for dyslexics who generally have no choices at all. Still, each student will, even after learning all that we have to offer, invariably proceed in his or her own way. This is partly why Cicci feels that "we need to attend to the individual in his or her own uniqueness. "Or as Kluckhohn and Murray said: 'All men are: A. like all other men, B. like some other men and C. like no other man'" (Cicci Response).

Truly, as pointed out by Shaughnessy, Rose, Lunsford and so many others in our profession, the instructor's attitude is paramount if the student--any student, but especially those with low self-esteem--is going to succeed. Lerner says that without a strong rapport between the teacher and the LD student "learning is not likely to take place, and with it, learning frequently occurs in spite of inappropriate techniques and materials or other shortcomings" (119-120).

Teachers need to open their minds to the alternatives. I can name at least a half dozen professors who, though they never lowered their standards or bent any rules, went out of their way to see the world through my eyes. For example, when I first began attending the university I took a class called "Consciousness and Reality." The professor was demanding and stern and I thought him

unapproachable. But part of the problem was that I was new to the university and deeply frightened. In any event, as part of the take-home mid-term examination we were asked to give three examples of what Freud meant by "subconscious ego functions" and to explain each one in detail. So far in the class I had done fine on all of the multiple choice and short answer tests, but now, once again, I was being asked to write, and I felt certain that when the professor saw my writing he would say that I had no business being in college. I tried several approaches to the paper, but none of them worked. Finally, I grew so frustrated and anxious that I thought I would just have to quit the class. Then, as strange as it may seem, I suddenly became obsessed with the idea of writing a play, one in which I could employ the characters to incorporate and express Freud's ideas. I don't know why, but I could hear the dialogue as clearly as if I were eavesdropping on someone else's conversation. I worked on the play for days, with a passion for writing that I had never known. And when the play was done, I was exhilarated. But a day or two later, when it came time to turn in my assignment, I felt sick. How could I be so stupid? How could I waste my time on such pap? This professor was well known for being a stickler for detail, a taskmaster--he would think I had lost my mind.

On the day I turned in my examination, I included a little note to the professor asking him not to flunk me. I said that I had put a lot of work into the project, that I wasn't trying to get out of anything, but that I just couldn't seem to do that part of the test in the normal

fashion. I also said that I'd be happy to redo the test or to come to his office and explain, answer any questions he may have.

A week or so later the professor entered the classroom with a stack of test folders in his arms. He plopped them down on the desk in a pile, picked mine up (the only one in a bright yellow folder) and said, to the best of my recollection, "For the most part, I am very pleased with the work you have done. These examinations reflect a great deal of hard work, and I assure you that you have been graded accordingly. But there is one paper that I would like to bring to your attention."--and this is where I knew that I was about to be thoroughly humiliated by the educational system, once again--"This paper," he continued, waving my yellow folder in the air, "is one of the most creative responses to an examination that I have yet encountered, and I would like to take the time to read it aloud." I don't know exactly what was said after that because I was too dizzy--drunk, I think, from my first taste of academic success. I do know that the professor actually read every line, even adding a little falsetto to his voice for the female's role. When he finished reading, the class gave a rousing applause, and when the professor walked over and handed me back my folder, I felt as though I were being handed the Nobel Prize for literature. From that moment on, I knew that I was hooked on education, that somewhere deep inside me there was a unique and perhaps talented self struggling to get out, and that education was the only way to free that wonderful "genie" from its bottle. And, though I didn't get an A on the paper--there were too

many technical errors--that was the single most powerful sensation of success that I had ever known. I came away from class that evening absolutely convinced that from that point on I was going to do two things in college: write, and take risks.

If more students were treated as I was that night, if they, through education, were encouraged and shown how talented and creative they actually are (and we all can be) then I guarantee you that our dropout rate would soon shrivel to nothing. Unfortunately, experiences like mine seem to be the exception rather than the rule.

Clearly, classrooms and testing procedures do need reform. Goldberg, Shiffman, and Bender suggest that "the curriculum of institutions of higher education should provide multidisciplinary training for all students. Every skilled teacher should be able to recognize possible learning difficulties and be knowledgeable about early preventive measures as well as prescriptive teaching methods necessary to overcome learning difficulties. Or, as Enfield says, "We must see to it that teachers know how to teach alternatives" (19). And, reflecting James Berlin's philosophy about teaching composition, Lerner adds, "Clinical teaching requires the ability to understand the processing demands of the task and to compare these with the abilities of the student" (121). Waites says that (and this is almost universal among the experts), "the techniques and procedures should be multisensory, structured, and sequential, presented by a kind, firm, and understanding teacher who has been specially trained" (13). Many in the field of English composition, especially those



involved with basic writers, have been advocating similar methods for many years now.

"If educators cannot change the requirements or philosophies of the teacher training institutions," says Goldberg, "then the local school system must provide an ongoing program of inservice education and curriculum development. In other words, schools will not only need to teach children but also teach teachers" (182-183). However, as it stands today, "most present inservice programs consist of releasing teachers from their direct teaching responsibilities for 5 or 6 days during the school year. This approach has not effectively trained teachers in the area of the learning disabled. One sees a great deal of enthusiasm and interest generated but very little change or impact in the classroom" (182-183).

In terms of an educational prognosis for the dyslexic student, Critchley offers what he calls a "prognostic pentagon" of five favorable factors (summarized below) which may enable the dyslexic to succeed:

1. The higher the I.Q the better.
2. The earlier the diagnosis the better.
3. Sympathetic, enlightened and encouraging teachers and parents.
4. Highly trained teachers who exhibit warmth and understanding.
5. Sheer dogged determination, or as Critchley says, "guts," on the part of the student (9).

Most LD college students probably possess items 1 and 5. If they are lucky, they have experienced 3 and 4 at some time in their lives; however, it is rare for most LDs to receive early diagnosis, and, as Critchley and many other experts tell us, early diagnosis is an integral part of the LD's prescription for success.

Critchley goes on to say that, "I firmly believe that the rational remedy of developmental dyslexia is not psychotherapeutic nor optometric, but educational, and entails the early and judicious employment of intensive techniques on a one-to-one basis at the hands of a patient, sympathetic, and highly qualified teacher experienced in helping dyslexic children" (An Overview 10).

Margaret Rawson further supports the need for early diagnosis:

"If our school-age child reaches adolescence without diagnosis, or with no or inadequate treatment, he is probably in bad trouble, perhaps of several kinds. He is in desperate need of diagnosis and treatment, both educational and therapeutic, to stave off disaster or to reduce disability to manageable difficulty and free him for development. He has more to learn and to unlearn than if he had come to us earlier, but, on the other hand, his greater maturity, capacity for abstract thinking, and responsible motivation, appropriately used, can speed up his rate of progress" (Developmental 7).

This is probably why throughout the literature there are always examples of mature LD students who return to school with low-level literacy skills and within a year or two they are performing at college or near college levels. To see a student progress at such an astounding rate can be quite inspiring, but the more LD students I

meet, the more I am reminded that this speedy "recovery" is the exception.

For Rawson, difficult though it may be, it is never too late for the adult dyslexic to learn (Developmental 7). Johnson agrees: "It is particularly exciting to observe the high levels of achievement attained by some adult dyslexics. We, like Rawson (1968), have seen several go on to professional schools, but the residuals of the problems persist" (260). Johnson explains that "progress varies with the adults as it does with children. Our earlier clinical investigations indicated that some children made as little as six months' progress in a year whereas others made four years' progress in the same time period (Johnson, Blalock, and Nesbitt, 1978). The amount of success varies with motivation, effectiveness of instruction, intensity of instruction, and the severity of the problem" (259-60). Goldberg adds that "the prospects of remedial success are greatly improved if the children's learning disabilities can be recognized before they become enmeshed in a pattern of frustration and failure" (15).

In terms of education, for most dyslexic children that pattern of frustration and failure understandably begins with instruction in the learning of the alphabet. Imagine that I ask you to learn a new alphabet. I draw an A on the board and ask you what letter it is. You say, "A," and I respond, "Very good." Then I draw another A on the board and ask you, "What letter is this?" but this time when you say, "A," I respond, "No, you're not paying attention. This is a B." I would go on drawing A's on the board and, seemingly arbitrarily,

assigning different names to them. To you, of course, they would all look like A's, but your classmates and I would be there to remind you that you were mistaken. Imagine being the only one in class who could not answer correctly. How long would it take you to begin questioning your intelligence? How long before you gave up?

I used to think that learning the alphabet was some sort of magic trick and that I just hadn't caught on yet. Every time the teacher pointed to a letter and asked, "What letter is this?" and all of the children responded "Q" or "R" or whatever, I was astounded. It was no less miraculous than if they had all pulled rabbits from their hats. I used to ask the children around me, "How did you know that?" and they would answer, "Because that's what letter it is." It all seemed so easy, and yet so baffling.

Tanis Bryan tells us that dyslexics who reach adulthood without intervention often become victims of learned helplessness. Bryan says:

Studies show that normal achievers are likely to attribute success to internal factors, like ability and effort, and failure to factors like effort or task difficulty. In contrast, the learning disabled are less likely than normally achieving classmates to take credit for their success, to perceive success as related to their own ability, and they are more likely to attribute failure to a lack of ability. Failure is attributed to stable factors and success to factors other than their ability" (219-20).

Also, "learning disabled students appear to be particularly reluctant to take credit for their successes, opting for ease of task as an explanation. Moreover, learning disabled students are likely to

blame themselves, naming lack of ability, for their failures" (Bryan 222).

Certainly, I always blamed myself for my failures in school and felt that I had no real abilities, and if I were good at something I believed that it was because it was easy, either that or because the teacher liked me and therefore gave me a break. I even took this attitude with me to college, and it took quite a while for me to realize what an ugly, egocentric position I had adopted: How could I profess to have respect for a teacher and at the same time believe that they had compromised their standards in order to humor me? In so doing I was inadvertently putting down the very professors I admired most. Good professors rarely offer easy classes, and they certainly don't give anyone a good grade simply because they like them. That realization had a profound effect on me. It is one thing to put yourself down, from force of habit or whatever compels you, but quite another to put down those who have earned your respect. In this way I began to see that through hard work and study I was able to get A's in some of the toughest classes that the university had to offer. I was forced to see, if not from concern for myself then for those I admired, that I could succeed, even at subjects as difficult as English. (When I was diagnosed as dyslexic, the one subject I was ardently advised to stay away from was English.)

Undoubtedly, as so many experts point out, early detection and remediation are two of the best weapons against dyslexia; however, it is far too late for millions of individuals to benefit from early

detection. There are millions of LD children and adults going undetected and untreated daily. Therefore, Critchley is only partly correct when he says that "the rational remedy of developmental dyslexia is not psychotherapeutic" (An Overview 10). For those who have experienced a history of failure and frustration, psychotherapy coupled with remediation may be their only hope.

In his essay, "Issues in Concurrent Psychotherapy-Remediation," psychologist Stephen Migden unites the therapist and the teacher in order that both might be of maximum value to the dyslexic student. Migden cautions that "for the child undergoing concurrent psychotherapy-remediation, there is often a double blow to self-esteem that must be weathered. This youngster, who is often quite intelligent, knows that he or she is having difficulty in at least two major areas of human functioning" (Cicci, vol. 33, 277). In addition, as Bryan points out, "While it may well be that constitutional factors contribute significantly to learning disability, the exclusion of personality and situational factors from consideration may well sabotage our efforts to understand and intervene" (228).

In keeping with Bryan's comment, some researchers tend to spend their time debating over whether dyslexia should be classified as a cause or a symptom, as if the two were separable. Harriet Hollander, Chief Psychologist at Rutgers Medical School, comments:

Criticism has focused on the failure of research investigators, who advocate the concept of a causal link, to take into account the salience of environmental factors, such as poverty and family disorganization (Glueck and Glueck, 1970; Andry, 1971; Offord, 1978). Compared to

the impact of these factors, Murray (1977) argues that learning disabilities occupy only a small piece of territory in the causal map" (232).

Here, I find myself at odds with Murray. As an adult I have managed, through warm and supportive therapy and teaching, to overcome a great deal of the brutality and trauma of my youth. I have grown to be a self-sufficient adult, a kind and loving husband and father, and a contributor to society. But still I am constantly struggling with the ongoing problems of being dyslexic. Sometimes, especially as a teacher, I am so frustrated and angered by my inability to organize, to attend, and to grasp the subtleties of the English language that I feel the situation is hopeless. And, even though I know from experience that, as Richard Graves points out, grammatical analysis and composition are not one and the same (193), I still feel terribly inadequate as an English teacher because I do not understand English grammar. I love teaching. But as it stands today, I often feel that I am an English teacher who is desperately in need of an English teacher, someone who can straighten out this jumbled mess of grammar and punctuation. There is no doubt about it, overcoming dyslexia is my most significant challenge now. If indeed, as Murray says, learning disabilities occupy only a small piece of territory on my causal map, that territory had best be charted "Heart and Soul."

Though my problems with dyslexia continue, even though I can read and write quite well, I still believe that most dyslexics and other learning disabled people, if they are to have any opportunities

for success, must concentrate on becoming literate, first and foremost. Otherwise, one's opportunities are so limited as to be almost non-existent. As has been stated several times in this paper, knowledgeable teachers are the best means available for most LD students to reach literacy (knowledgeable being the key word here). In the following chapter, we will look at what teachers and others who are concerned with the learning disabled have to say about teaching reading and writing to LD students.



### What Teachers Teach Us About Dyslexia

I have devoted a good deal of this paper to describing a condition that few educators (or others, for that matter) know anything about. My reasoning is simple: the more you know about your enemy, the easier it is to defeat him. As Mina Shaughnessy points out, if students (and teachers) are to progress, their "work must be informed by an understanding not only of what is missing or awry but of why this is so" (6). To date, we may not know *exactly* why dyslexics have such severe problems with reading and writing, but we certainly know more than enough to proceed. So the question now is, how might the interested teacher help these individuals? There are several opinions on that subject.

First of all, as Rawson says (and so many others agree), "The diagnosis is clinical; the treatment is educational, not 'cure' but rather a way of learning and living matched to the individual's whole personal configuration" (Diversity 22). Richardson reminds us: "We all know that the educational approach best suited to each child is that which recognizes his strengths, weaknesses, his 'learning type'-- that is true for all children, but it is critically important for the child with learning disabilities" (3). And Shaughnessy adds that "programs are not the answers to the learning problems of students but that teachers are and that, indeed, good teachers create good programs [and], that the best programs are developed *in situ* , in response to the needs of individual student populations" (6).

And what are the needs of the dyslexic? First of all, the evidence is overwhelming that any successful approach designed to treat dyslexics will, as much as possible, be structured, systematic, sequential, cumulative, thorough, multisensory, and it will appeal to the intellect as a guide to comprehension in practice. It will also be highly supportive, flexible, and adapted to individual needs (Diversity 27).

### Reading

Though some English teachers may feel that it is not in their domain, reading is the first subject which must be addressed by most LD students and their teachers. Ong says, "There is no way to write unless you read, and read a lot" (41). Mike Rose points out, "Reading and writing are intimately connected in ways we are only beginning to understand. Furthermore, even if they weren't, a major skill in academic writing is the complex ability to write from other texts--to summarize, to disambiguate key notions and useful facts and incorporate them in one's own writing, to react critically to prose" (328). Also, Rose continues, "It seems to me that we have no choice but to begin--and to urge the scholars who have sequestered themselves in segmented disciplines to begin--conceiving of composition as a highly complex thinking/learning/reading/writing skill that demands holistic, not neatly segmented and encapsulated, pedagogies" (328).

Psychotherapist, Stephen Migden adds this about reading:

"Reading, even the minimal reading of picture books, provides a socially acceptable outlet for the controlled

gratification of drives, drives which, if uncontrolled, would disrupt the educational process. In other words, reading allows for a type of sublimation and in that way contributes to latency organization. Conversely, one who is unable to read is deprived of this important outlet, this important means of sublimation and tool of latency organization" (Dyslexia and Psychodynamics 114).

And of course, logic (as well as many experts) tells us those who cannot read well certainly cannot hope to write well.

Basically, the major problem dyslexics face when it comes to reading--and this is widely documented among the experts--is their inability to decode the language. Dyslexics have extremely poor phoneme-grapheme skills and, as Richardson tells us, "To try to learn to read without understanding the phonemically regular relationships in our language is to place a tremendous burden on the learner" (18). In fact, their "inability to decode unfamiliar words is a major factor that impedes the reading process . . . when the dyslexic subject encounters an unfamiliar word, he/she appears to make a wild guess on the basis of partial cues. Frequently, the misread word does not fit the context and the subject is obliged to go back and recheck the word" (Aaron and Phillips 46). This is why Johnson tells us that "the ability to decode multisyllabic words in isolation is a major problem for most dyslexics" (255). However, "The level of reading comprehension of these subjects is invariably higher than their rate of reading level." Still, "Since decoding has not become an automatized operation for these subjects, they tend to be ponderous readers" (Aaron and Phillips 47). Something which Johnson touched on earlier might prove useful here:

Adult [dyslexics] tend to use their background knowledge when reading. This can be demonstrated by asking them to read both familiar and unfamiliar material. For example, a college student read unfamiliar material at approximately a third grade level but performed much better when asked to read an article from a psychology journal. She was interested in the topic and made good predictions because of her background knowledge" (Johnson 256).

Obviously, reading (and writing) lessons which incorporate and appeal to background knowledge should prove much more fruitful. Again, this is suggested as a starting point for dyslexics, a way to cultivate their interest. As their skills improve so will their ability to read and write other, perhaps less interesting but certainly more challenging, materials.

Manis, Szeszulski, Holt, and Graves found that when dyslexics were compared to normal readers, the dyslexics proved to have a significant deviation in phonological skills (spelling to sound translation and phonemic analysis). Their "data support the view that most developmental dyslexics have a specific language disorder involving some aspect of phonological processing" (139). And they conclude: "Our data support Frith's (1985, 1986) and Snowling's (1987) contention that the majority of dyslexics have a phonological deficit in either reading or oral language, or both" (151). Certainly, the evidence indicates that any successful reading program designed for LD students will incorporate phonics and some form of structural analysis.

Like most other basic writers (BW), dyslexics have many troublesome problems with derivational suffixes, such as the "s" which denotes 3rd person singular in verbs and the plural in nouns, or the comparator "er" inflection and "est" superlative inflection of adjectives (See Shaughnessy, 190 for a complete discussion of this problem). Aaron and Phillips feel that this is true, at least for those dyslexics who speak but don't write well, because "the dyslexic subject tends to bypass the phonological code entirely and rely on only a direct semantic route. Consequently, those morphemic units that are semantically empty and have to be processed in some phonological form are likely to be poorly handled or lost" (51). This supports the assertion that conceptual material is not easily learned. These are language constructs of concepts of plurality, degree, or time rarely identified in concrete terms. The case studies provided in the Appendix of this paper also support the idea that these constructs are extremely difficult for LD writers. Still, while this may be the case for some, given the complexity of the problem, it is doubtful that this is the only source of word-class derivations for dyslexics, or even the major source.

Szeszulski and Manis report that:

Currently there are three disparate views regarding the role that phonological and orthographic processes play in the word recognition problems experienced by developmental dyslexics. The most prevalent view is that impaired phonological processing is the primary source of reading difficulties among developmental dyslexics, and results from numerous investigations indicate that dyslexics, as a group, do experience

significant deficits in phonological coding (e.g., Olson et al. 1985; Snowling 1987; Szeszulski and Manis 1987)" (182).

As Catts points out, "Clinically, dyslexic individuals are frequently observed to demonstrate difficulties encoding or representing speech sound sequences in memory. For example, upon hearing a new word, dyslexics often need multiple presentations of the word before they can accurately and consistently produce it" (54). Szeszulski and Manis found this deficit to be so pervasive among dyslexics and their families that "the most striking finding in the familial comparisons is that at least one parent in every family in the sample has a phonological deficit" (190). They also caution that "the severity of the deficits shared by family members classified into the combined phonological-orthographic subgroup suggests that these individuals have basic processing problems over and above their phonological problems" (190). In any event, Catts continues, "dyslexics have been shown to perform less well than normal individuals in the short-term recall of lists of letters, words, digits, and sentences" (55). And "dyslexia also appears to be associated with problems in retrieving phonological information from memory" (55). This is probably because, as Berndt tell us, "the generation of a phonological code when reading is necessary for the maintenance of information in working memory while the sentence is analyzed (Caramazza, Berndy and Basili, 1983)" (64). "Thus," Berndt continues:

When interpreting a written sentence , J.S. [one of her dyslexic subjects] can gain access to lexical representations and semantic information from long-term memory, but to compute the syntactic relations among

those major lexical items he must convert the graphemic representations into a phonological code, store this information in working memory, and analyze it syntactically. Since he cannot generate a phonological code, J.S. is unable to perform the syntactic analysis . . . . When sentence meaning depends critically upon the syntactic elements that cannot be maintained in working memory--the grammatical morphemes and word order information--he will fail (Berndt 65).

This is one reason why dyslexics tend to compensate for their decoding deficit by developing a strong sight vocabulary. Also, this helps to explain why dyslexics tend to produce more ambiguous sentences than non-dyslexic writers. In fact, as the case studies provided in the Appendix clearly show, ambiguity is one of the most apparent flaws of dyslexic writing. However, like Renee or Barth, the dyslexic writer often remains oblivious to the problems, or, like Jeanie, they may be aware that a problem exists but have absolutely no idea of how to correct it.

Obviously, as the case studies show, it is extremely difficult for the dyslexic to recognize actual syntactic ambiguity as well as irony, and therefore, editing their own writing for ambiguity becomes nearly impossible. As Janet Emig tells us:

The medium then of written verbal language requires the establishment of systematic connections and relationships. Clear writing by definition is that writing which signals without ambiguity the nature of conceptual relationships, whether they be coordinate, subordinate, superordinate, causal, or something other (89).

Unable to form systematic connections and relationships, we find, as Bartholomae tells us, that "a writer will stick with some intermediate

system if he is convinced that the language he uses 'works,' or if he is unable to see errors as errors and form alternate hypotheses in response" (307). And in fact, some dyslexic writers, such as Barth, will argue quite forcefully that their writing makes perfect sense just the way it is, and that you, as the reader, are just not getting the point.

Haines and Leong feel that "readers must: (a) decode written symbols to sound, (b) have recourse to the *internal lexicon* or the internal, abstract, mental dictionary to extract meaning from the printed word from semantic memory and (c) incorporate this memory into their language learning system" (67). This is why Richardson feels that the best methods for teaching LD students are those that "emphasize the direct, structured instruction of decoding via phonics. The teaching proceeds slowly in small steps, is sequential, provides immediate feedback, and is multisensory in its presentation. In each case there is much practice and review until the skills become automatic, thus freeing the student to concentrate on understanding" (14).

According to Richardson, "Hinshelwood was the first physician to advocate a specific instructional approach for written language disorder in children" (8). But it was "Anna Gillingham and Bessie Stillman [who] went to the simplest sound-symbol relationship of our language, putting it together in a logical, mathematical fashion" (Enfield 13). "The Gillingham technique advocates teaching the sounds of the letters and then building these letter sounds into



words, like bricks into a wall. Many educators associate this method with the familiar 'phonic' or 'sound' technique. The difference lies in the fact that the Gillingham approach is based on the close association of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements" (Goldberg et al 155). Indeed, based on what the experts report, the so called Orton-Gillingham approach to reading is by far the most successful method of teaching dyslexics to date. Three primary groups: Orton-Gillingham, Slingerland Institute, and the Texas Scottish Rite Hospital (which offers training films at cost to schools and non-profit organizations) all practice this method, or slight variations there of, and all report being very successful. These techniques are highly structured, and they generally require a good deal of effort and dedication on the part of the student and teacher. Students enrolled in these programs are often expected to attend five lessons a week for a minimum of two years. For the interested teacher, training in all three of these methods is available in the southern California area.

Still, as effective as the Orton-Gillingham multisensory approach appears to be, one must remember that it is not a panacea. As Johnson cautions:

One does not simply give the adults a test battery and plan a program of remediation. One must be sensitive to their hopes and fears as well as their goals. We are neither overly optimistic nor pessimistic and generally begin remediation on a three-month trial basis to determine whether the adults want to continue and to obtain some data regarding progress and prognosis. It is our feeling that no one should engender false hopes for a 'quick cure' among a group of sensitive people who have already experienced repeated failures.

Nevertheless, adult dyslexics can make significant gains in reading and writing" (251).

### Writing

When it comes to writing, the literature indicates that there are several problems found in the written compositions of dyslexics, and the learning disabled in general, which bear examination. Many researchers who have studied the compositions of the learning disabled have found "evidence of depressed performance on the part of the students with learning disabilities that did not diminish (relative to performance of typical learners) with age or years in school" (Newcomer and Barenbaum 579). Some studies even tell us that "the gap between writers with learning disabilities and typical writers appears to widen with age" (Newcomer and Barenbaum 583). But these studies must be considered inconclusive, if for no other reason than that they are rarely longitudinal in nature.

Before accepting that the compositions of LD writers systematically get worse as time goes by, I would wish to see the teaching methods employed, and I would want to observe the teachers and their methods over a reasonable period of time. What is far more likely is that the students discover, over several years of failure due to inadequate teaching techniques, that they are not good at writing and therefore they give up.

Mike Rose comments, "How flat some of our remedial courses feel. And how distant the eyes of too many of our students. We sometimes take this flatness, this distance as signs of intellectual dullness. They are more likely the signs of boredom, humiliation,

even anger" (337). This, in my experience, is certainly true even as I write these words. At the community college where I work, some classes which are supposed to be geared exclusively for at-risk remedial writers are "taught" by people who do nothing more than set these writers at tables, hand them workbooks, and say, "Good luck." The students complain, but nothing gets done, so they leave even more disillusioned than when they came in. And the administration could, apparently, care less about these remedial students, students who are, however, returning to school in unprecedented numbers. Likewise, the learning disabilities center is largely a highly disorganized paper shuffling office, where students come in reading and writing at very low levels and leave a year or two later doing the same. The people who work there mean well, and they give valuable moral support, but they have little or no idea of how to really be of help. In my opinion, if schools truly wanted to be of service to the learning disabled, they would hire well-trained composition and reading instructors and teach the students how to write and read. But unfortunately, the current trend appears to be to dump the teachers and buy computers. Computers are fine, as a supplement, but they cannot and will not replace teachers or the authentic classroom experience, where students have the opportunity to exchange ideas and to develop a sense of comradery. LD and other at-risk student populations need interaction with others. They need, perhaps for the first time in their lives, to become a part of the

group, to express their opinions and receive a response, and, above all, to develop a sense of self-worth.

Ong tells us that when we teach writing, "Like it or not, we are teaching a technology, for not only print, but also writing itself is a technology--a matter of tools outside us and seemingly foreign to us, which we nevertheless can interiorize and make human, transforming them and enhancing our own thinking and verbalizing activities in the process" (46).

Troubled though our writing may be, to date, I have seen nothing which would indicate that dyslexics cannot learn to write *if* they are taught in a manner compatible with their own learning style. (And this is indeed a field ripe for exploration.)

As Leonore Ganschow from the Department of Educational Psychology at Miami University (Oxford, Ohio) tells us, the most promising system of remediation [for dyslexics] in composition involves a well structured, systematic approach including a five stage writing process and involving modeling, rehearsal, direct instruction, and continual clarification of objectives (Cicci, vol. 34, 271-284). However, given the current state of our educational system, it is highly unlikely that the average LD student has received this type of instruction, unless, of course, he or she is enrolled in a progressive program.

In any event, according to the literature, the major problems encountered by dyslexic writers include spelling, word usage (grammar), style (punctuation and capitalization), fluency, and

cohesion, or in other words the same sorts of problems that Shaughnessy and her cohorts have encountered. For that matter, given the population she was dealing with, I think it prudent to assume that Mina Shaughnessy worked with and taught a large number of LD students.

Short stories by dyslexic writers (though research has focused much more on their expository prose) are most often criticized for lacking "certain of the critical components of stories (such as setting, characters, conflict, and resolution) [just what one might expect from people who don't read] and were classified as less sophisticated compositions (e.g., descriptions)" (Newcomer and Barenbaum 583). Also, dyslexics' stories "often contained extraneous ideas, confusing words or unclear referents that interrupted the meaningful flow of the stories and made them difficult to read" (583). And, as some *may* see in the brief sample of Thomas Edison's writing (provided earlier in this paper) and the case studies of other dyslexics found in this paper, dyslexic writers appear to show a marked "inability to retain an overview of the purpose or direction of the composition, and a tendency to set down any thought that occurs to them, indiscriminately and often inappropriately" (583). Perhaps that is the case. Or perhaps, as Ong says, "Our students from oral or residually oral cultures come not from an unorganized world, but from a world which is differently organized, in ways which can now be at least partly understood" (44). In any case, without guidance, dyslexic writers do seem much like novice writers who read "the

assignment over and over until some key word [strikes] an associative chord and [reminds] them of a topic on which they [have] something to say" (Flower & Hayes 97).

Furthermore, a variety of studies tell us that dyslexic writers don't plan their compositions well (do any basic writers?). I personally doubt that most dyslexic writers plan their compositions at all. I know I don't. We are holistic thinkers, and more often than not we rarely know where we are going until we get there (*if* we get there). Then, and only then, can we look back and see all of the little details of the journey. That doesn't really strike me as being so very different from the way many non-LD writers proceed, but again, I think it is a matter of degree. Unfortunately, before concluding a writing assignment, we (dyslexics) often spend many frustrating hours writing about completely unrelated material, frantically searching for where we are supposed to go. This highly unstructured, hit and miss approach to writing is usually quite exhausting and often depressingly unproductive. Again, Renee is a good example of one who puts forth an inordinate amount of energy only to find her papers being "trashed." This type of "disorganization" is one reason I feel that the structure imposed by the so called writing process helps to introduce order into a procedure that, at least among dyslexics, often resembles chaos.

Not surprisingly, several researchers report that the compare/contrast format appears to be highly problematical for most LD writers (see Jeanie in the Appendix), and that LD subjects "had

difficulty with planning that appeared related to an inability to sustain their thinking about a topic or to employ strategies for a self-directed memory search. Their inadequate retrieval strategies left them unable to produce multiple statements about a topic."

(Newcomer and Barenbaum 586). As Rose tells us, the compare and contrast method of writing puts tremendous demands on basic writer's organizational skills as well as excessive strain on the writer's "cognitive resources and linguistic repertoire," so much so that "error might well reemerge" (322-323). And he goes on to explain that, "Error, in short, is not something that, once fixed in a simple and clean environment, will never emerge again" (323).

In any event, I am again reminded of my anthropology class, where I was presented with highly interesting writing assignments that stimulated numerous thoughts and ideas, so much so that they would literally pour into my mind in what soon proved to be a veritable flood, until I found myself (as Murray pointed out earlier) drowning. And, like the shipwrecked swimmer who is desperately trying to save some treasured possession, I soon felt that I must let go of my ideas or sink. And as for the compare and contrast mode of writing, though I have learned to use it, it reminds me of trying to learn to juggle with six balls instead of just three. For most dyslexic writers, the compare and contrast mode of discourse presents far too many details to think of at one time. Dyslexics must be encouraged and allowed to master material in small, sequential increments before attempting more complex assignments.

Again--and it bears repeating here--as Enfield tells us, when it comes to education:

We are so singular in our perspectives. We swing from one alternative to another, looking for one perfect approach rather than putting several alternatives in place. Somehow we must accept the fact that we learn in different ways and that we can indeed identify the learning behaviors that cluster, and that we do have alternative instruction for those clusters of learning profiles (14).

I know that many in the field of composition agree wholeheartedly with the statement above. But often it is more difficult than we think to implement such a notion. For instance, there are "antiquated" and unpopular methods of composition instruction--and this is likely to earn me some boos and hisses here--which oddly enough might work well with some dyslexics, namely, the modes of discourse--narration, description, exposition, and argument--and also (heaven help me) the five paragraph essay along with its dictum: tell me what you are going to tell me, tell me, and tell me what you told me. Allow me to explain: . As we know, most dyslexics have an extremely difficult time marshalling their thoughts, putting them into any coherent order or form. Dyslexics also tend to be holistic thinkers; they do much better when they know exactly where they are going and how to get there. Significantly, Graves, Montague, and Wong found that "subjects wrote qualitatively better compositions after hearing simple reminders about the components of a good story during the planning period . . . . In effect, students were being told not to forget to include the basic components of a story (a setting, a



problem, a character, a plan, and an ending) in their compositions" (Newcomer and Barenbaum 583).

This improved performance is not surprising. Flower and Hayes have pointed out repeatedly that good writers must have goals, and they theorize that basic writers would fair much better if they "had a richer sense of what they were trying to do as they wrote" (101). Furthermore, they continue, "Our guess is that the poor writers we studied possess verbal and rhetorical skills which they fail to use because of their underdeveloped image of their rhetorical problem" (101).

I believe that imposing a specific form on some LD writers-- though it is not necessarily a natural form of composition nor should it be taught as such--may help to dictate a pattern of development, a method of procedure, a boundary or borderline that one must not cross. In that way, the five paragraph essay, for instance, might present the dyslexic writer with "containers" in which to plant their too rapidly sprouting ideas. And, like separating peas from the pod, you can always look back into the containers to assess whether or not you have been successful, and if not, why. I realize that this argument is dated and even offensive to some (certainly to Robert Connors, whose work I wholeheartedly respect), but I am not suggesting that we revert to (or continue, as the case may be) this line of instruction with the general population. I am merely suggesting that, because of the unorthodox way they process information, it may prove helpful with some dyslexic writers. To

borrow the words of Frank D'Angelo: "My experience in teaching composition leads me to believe that nurture, at least in the beginning stages of developing a mature style, is better than nature, that a cultivated plot of ground is better than an untended garden" (199). Certainly, with the exception of heuristics such as freewriting, this holds true for most LD writers.

After their extensive search of the literature which deals with LD writers, Newcomer and Barenbaum concluded: "We are presented with a picture of writers whose compositions are marked by irrelevancies, redundancies, mechanical errors, early terminations, and a lack of organization and coherence" (587). Furthermore:

Metacognitive probing shows that they do not think in terms of using text structures when planning their compositions and that their thinking processes are highly intercorrelated with their production and comprehension. Not surprisingly, students with learning disabilities write what they think about, and their thoughts about writing are described as being qualitatively inferior and as focusing on structural factors or irrelevant details. As was true of their attempts to write narratives, they appear unable to develop or maintain a sense of the whole composition, or a clear notion of the purpose of the piece. Thus, they have little idea of what to include or omit, or of when the composition is completed" (587-588).

The authors conclude that the bulk of the research illustrates the pervasive nature of learning disabilities "and confirms that the deficiencies that exist in the planning, drafting, and revising processes are independent of mechanical deficits. Writers with

learning disabilities simply do not think thoughts that result in coherent compositions" (590).

Whether Newcomer and Barenbaum know it or not, their thoughts about the essays of dyslexic writers are as dated as the feather quill C.C. Thach used in 1898 to scratch out the following:

It is difficult to believe, at times, that many of the writers of college entrance papers are English-speaking boys. In the most mechanical points of execution--in handwriting, spelling, punctuation--a large number are deficient to an appalling degree. They have no vocabulary; words do not appeal to them, or have for them the least significance....Unity or coherence of thought is seldom exhibited. Long chains of unrelated ideas are tacked together in a slack-rope sentence....Paragraphing is seldom attempted, unless after the fashion of one student who systematically indented the lines in blocks of five (St. Martins 340).

My point is not that LD writers are *exactly* like "normal" beginning writers, whatever that is. But I believe that you can see many similarities. Furthermore, I think that it would behoove each and every researcher of dyslexic or LD writing to first become familiar with English composition theory. They may, in that way, save themselves further embarrassment.

### Conclusion

It is absolutely amazing how difficult it is to stop old habits and old ideas from ruling (or is that ruining?) my life. I grew up feeling like an idiot child, and I still carry that repulsive, wounded, cowardly kid with me every day of my life. Someone in authority says to me, "You can't do that!" and my first response is to agree--automatically. But something wonderful has happened to me over the past few years: I've learned to fight back. It may take me a day or two, or perhaps even a week, but I go away and think about the problem, sort out my thoughts, and then I come back ready to fight. It's not like the old days when I gave up on college for *fifteen years* simply because one misguided professor told me that I didn't belong there. Since that time I have, in print and in person, met the most extraordinary, courageous, wonderful people. Most of them have been teachers, and many of them have put their faith in me. And guess what? Some of that has rubbed off.

When I first read the line, "Writers with learning disabilities simply do not think thoughts that result in coherent compositions," I got depressed. For several days I could not get that line out of my mind. And I actually went around berating myself--Who did I think I was, trying to be a writer, and worse yet, a teacher of writing (I still can't untangle the rules of grammar, or spell "eefishant" without looking it up). In other words, I was buying into the myth--just like Newcomer and Barenbaum did--the myth that says LD people and

basic writers and anyone else who doesn't learn Our Way is too stupid to learn. But after thinking about it, it seemed to me that in a way I had come full circle in this paper. I began this thesis because a handful of teachers told me that there was no such thing as dyslexia. And I found myself nearing completion of that same paper with a group of researchers telling me that dyslexics and others like us could not think well enough to write. In other words, one way or another some people seem determined to sweep this very real issue under the rug.

I believe that it is human nature, at least at times, to want to run away from the things we do not understand. But as Mina Shaughnessy tells us, "By underestimating the sophistication of our students and by ignoring the complexity of the tasks we set before them, we have failed to locate in precise ways where to begin and what follows what" (301). That's a little bit like being in a state of chaos, isn't it?--much as our current educational system is. And no one, certainly not a teacher, wants to think of themselves as being in a state of chaos. Shaughnessy adds, "But as we come to know these students better, we begin to see that the greatest barrier to our work with them is our ignorance of them and of the very subject we have contracted to teach" (302).

Certainly, the most difficult thing I have to deal with as a teacher is my own ignorance. And I sometimes want to quit the profession because I just don't know how to help other people learn. Shaughnessy says:

"Baffled, the teacher asks, 'How is it that these young men and women whom I have personally admitted to the community of learners cannot learn these simple things?' Until one day, it occurs to him that perhaps these simple things--so transparent and compelling to him--are not in fact simple at all, that they only appear simple to those who already know them, that the grammar and rhetoric of formal written English have been shaped by the irrationalities of history and habit and by the peculiar restrictions and rituals that come from putting words on paper instead of into the air, that the sense and nonsense of written English must often collide with the spoken English that has been serving students in their negotiations with the world for many years" (299).

I think many teachers, even if they don't talk about it, often feel the way I do: There's just too much to know, too much to do, too many people in need. Newcomer and Barenbaum, and countless others, seem to want to give up on writers who have extraordinary problems. It is as Bartholomae tells us:

When a basic writer violates our expectations, however, there is a tendency to dismiss the text as non-writing, as meaningless or imperfect writing. We have not read as we have been trained to read, with a particular interest in the way an individual style confronts and violates convention. We have read, rather, as policemen, examiners, gate-keepers (304).

What Newcomer and Barenbaum failed to consider during their investigation of LD writers was that thoughts, in themselves, are rarely (if ever) clear until we write them down, and manipulate them, work with them, sweat over them. After all, "Writers don't *find* meanings, they *make* them" (Flower and Hayes 92).

Janet Emig "notes that writing allows us to have our ideas immediately available for review and re-evaluation, a process that can lead us to reconsider and refine our ideas, i.e., to learn what we think by writing" (Odell 103). And James Reither even goes so far as to say that "writers do not need to know what they are talking about: they can learn what they are talking about as they compose; they can write their way out of their ignorance" (142). (Much as I am attempting to do in this paper.) So what in the world *are* "thoughts that lead to coherent compositions"? I think I know exactly what they are: a myth.

Flower & Hayes say that "the myth of discovery implies a method, and this method is based on the premise that hidden stores of insight and ready-made ideas exist, buried in the mind of the writer, waiting only to be 'discovered'" (92). And this "mythology of discovery doesn't warn the writer [or in this case, researcher] that he or she must often build or create new concepts out of the raw material of experience; nor does it tell the writer how to do it. And yet, this act of *creating* ideas, not finding them, is at the heart of significant writing" (92-93). So how, then, are dyslexic writers ever to form coherent thoughts without being taught the invaluable tool of writing?

Rose warns that "'thinking skills' must not be taught as a set of abstract exercises (which, of course, they will be if they are not conceived of as being part of writing), but must be intimately connected to composition instruction. Otherwise students hear one

more lecture on isolated mental arabesques" (327). But for the LD student it is much worse than that. LD people who do not learn to read and write are almost certainly condemned to a lifetime of drudgery and despair, of unfulfilled dreams and unrealized potential.

In terms of teaching methods, we know that LD students respond well to direct instruction, provided by warm and patient instructors. LD students also need extra time and hands on, controlled practice involving sequential steps and immediate feedback. And, perhaps more than anything else, LD students need to experience success, preferably on a regular basis.

That I know of, no systematic method of teaching writing to the learning disabled is available at any college in this country, even though the need is great. This does not, however, mean that we lack the necessary technology to help the vast majority of learning-disabled individuals become proficient writers, even though some would have us believe that that is the case.

In his highly informative essay, "Where Do English Departments Come From?" William Riley Parker offers this bit of consolation to the beleaguered English departments across our nation, "The teaching of English is a Johnny-come-lately--a fact that has some relevance to any answer given the question 'Why can't Johnny read?' Our research and criticism are old; our jobs are new."

I would take solace from the foregoing statement if, and only if, so many people weren't rotting in prison, and lying homeless on the streets, and dying right this minute simply because they cannot read



or write. But perhaps I put too much faith in the power of education and what we already know about instruction in reading and writing.

Gere's historical biography of composition shows that as often as not, attention is devoted to problems in writing which are measurable. When the problems arise from a variety of influences and are manifest in diverse ways (as dyslexia is), scholars and teachers are pressed to do more than suggest things that worked for one student or another (Perspectives on Research & Scholarship in Composition). So perhaps the challenges presented by dyslexia are too great for us. In fact, perhaps the challenges of education in general are too great for us. At the moment, it certainly appears that way: "According to UNESCO, the U.S. ranks 49th among 156 United Nations member countries in its rate of literacy . . . a drop of 18 places since 1950" (Facts). Perhaps, if we asked nicely, the leading 48 countries, all of which have just as many (per capita) learning-disabled students as we do, would be willing to share a little of their know-how with us, the poor "newcomers."

Though she does not directly address the issue, I believe that Mina Shaughnessy would have labeled dyslexia as a "pedagogically empty" term. At least that's how she refers to words such as "handicapped" and "disadvantaged" (Errors 4). (And she doesn't seem to buy into the Johnny-come-lately theory at all.) Shaughnessy didn't sit in a laboratory and invite a few children in every now and then to be probed and prodded so that she could then dispense her vast knowledge to those below (and I'm not denying that a lot of

useful information has come from these sources); she rolled up her sleeves, got down to it and invented ways to teach people how to read and write. She didn't profess to cure them, only to teach them. The rest was up to the individual. As Ellis and Kozal and so many others tell us, literacy is the key to the kingdom. The problem is, the Keeper of the Keys doesn't seem to want to share.

Teachers like Shaughnessy change lives, plain and simple. And I have been blessed by their company many times. And that is exactly why I can read and write today. No fancy programs. No high-tech training. Just teachers. Warm, caring, patient, resourceful teachers.

Had I been her student, I think that Shaughnessy would have taught me to write, just as I'm sure she taught so many other LD students. Her methods exemplify what the experts call for: structured, systematic, sequential, cumulative, thorough, multisensory, appealing to the intellect, supportive, flexible, and adapted to individual needs. Shaughnessy is gone now, but there are other such classes and teachers.

A few quarters ago, I served as an intern in such a class: Carol Haviland's English 95. Carol is an intelligent, friendly, supportive person who doesn't mollycoddle anyone (that's the last thing dyslexics need), but she is there for you and with you all the time. Her class begins with instruction in what I think of as the greatest writing asset that the LD writer could ever ask for, the computer, or more accurately, word processor. She instructs students in a very

structured, yet flexible writing process which involves pre-writing, writing, sharing/responding, revising, editing and evaluating. Which is exactly the way I learned how to write (freewriting was particularly helpful in allowing me to learn to express my ideas without worrying about all the rules). Her students are expected to be there, to participate, to work alone as well as in groups, to do research, to open up and freely discuss their writing problems (and sometimes, if they wish, personal problems), thoughts, ideas, goals, etc., so a sense of community soon develops in Carol's class. Students are steadily and sequentially taught to identify and correct, in the context of their own writing, mistakes of grammar, style, punctuation, but these things are taught after, and only after the students are allowed to discover their own voice. In Carol's class, correcting errors is just one part of a process which focuses on the more important goal of learning to express yourself and taking pride in what you have to say.

Carol's students are also assigned thought provoking and pertinent topics which are bantered about verbally before pen touches paper (or in this case, finger taps key). This, of course, gives the LD student an opportunity to involve and utilize more of their senses in the writing process. And, under Carol's watchful (and sometimes protective) eye, students listen to and critique each other's work. Other than the time limit (the nine week quarter), which is much too fast for the beginning dyslexic, Carol's class

provides just about everything that most beginning writers, including dyslexics and other LD students, might need.

If such a class were run on a continuous, open-ended basis, with lots of tutorial help readily available, I think that most LD students could learn to write there. I know that I would have. Of course, since LD students do not always process information in the same way that others do, it would be advisable to train the entire staff in multisensory teaching techniques. Also, since LD students do better when they are reminded of where they are going with their compositions, and since they seem to do much better when they know exactly what is expected of them, I think that it is very important for the teacher to demonstrate the craft of writing. As Winston Weathers says, the teacher who does not "write and perform as a master stylist creates an amazing credibility gap" (191). My writing teachers were also writers, and they all had the courage to share their work, just as everyone else did. They proved, through example, that indeed, "The teachers struggle amidst the chalk dust can become the student's education" (Weathers 192).

In today's world, learning to read and write becomes more and more an issue of survival, not just for individuals but for entire nations. Though dyslexia affects people from all walks of life, all racial and ethnic and religious groups, those who are clearly most afflicted by it, and less likely to overcome it, come from the fastest growing segment of our society, the lower socio-economic population. Yet being born LD is in no way a life sentence. LD students can and

do succeed in college and life. Studies of college success rates for LD students at highly selective colleges and universities such as Dartmouth, Harvard, Cornell, Amherst, Brown and other Ivy League institutions--places where professors often express shock that "they," the learning disabled, even managed to get in--indicate a high success rate for all those identified as learning disabled (Pompian and Thum 276-284). And why are they so successful? The answer to that question is likely to be, just as you might suspect, that these students, disabled or not, are often among the most privileged in world. Most have attended elite private schools all of their lives; their families have been supportive and made sure that their children have had "constant exposure to museums, concerts, extracurricular lessons and travel, private tutors and time together working on creative projects at home" (Pompian and Thum 279). Also, all of these schools, whether they have a specific program for dealing with the learning disabled or not, tend to be highly supportive of their students. And, as Margaret Bruck tells us, "high levels of family support and understanding, adequate intelligence levels, and adequate intervention programs may dilute the association between childhood learning disabilities and educational achievement" (258). (If I were Margaret Bruck, I would have substituted the word "will" for "may.")

Many studies suggest that with adequate treatment--primarily early identification and appropriate intervention--learning disabilities need not be a lifelong handicapping condition. As Katrina

de Hirsch states in Language and the Developing Child, "Our present-day knowledge is sufficient to clear the way for preventive work. We are undoubtedly able to pick out those youngsters in kindergarten who are liable to turn into dyslexic children" (86). Badian, McAnulty, and Duffy found it possible to predict dyslexic kindergarten boys with 98.2% accuracy, and they suggest that "Brain Electrical Activity Mapping may prove to be a highly accurate predictor of dyslexia in pre-school children as well as others" (167). de Hirsch states emphatically that "Exposing these particular youngsters to a different educational approach would eliminate much of the later-developing frustrations and disabilities" (97). So why, exactly, don't we do that?

As I said in the beginning of this paper, dyslexics are people with a neurological disorder which prohibits--not stops!--them from learning the language. As nearly as I can tell, if we take what we know today about teaching basic writers--and some people speak of this as if there were a famine of knowledge, while I perceive a veritable feast--and apply it with sincerity, honesty, warmth and patience, most LD students *will* learn to read and write. Like me, they'll probably be painfully slow in some areas and have gaps in their education, but they'll manage.

Goldberg and his colleagues say, "The ultimate goal is to extend the capacity of regular education personnel (teachers, administrators, and associated personnel) to accommodate a broad range of individual differences among students in order to prevent learning

failure" (182). And of course, there are many wonderful teachers of English composition (far too many to list here) who are advocating very similar programs. That doesn't seem so very much to ask for, really, considering the potential benefits. Did I mention that Winston Churchill, Harvey Cushing (father of neurosurgery), Dwight D. Eisenhower, William James, John Lennon, and Auguste Rodin were all dyslexic? Indeed, the world has been greatly enriched by a mere handful of dyslexics. One can only speculate as to how it has been diminished by the unconscionable waste of millions of others.

Adult dyslexics will undoubtedly need some special help, especially with their self-esteem. As Goldberg points out, "Not expecting to be in control of learning, the learning disabled may wait to be rescued. Given the belief that one is not in control of one's destiny, that increased effort will not help one face adversity, there is no reason to seek alternate strategies when faced with difficulty" (227). For me, success as a student is and has been, more than anything else, an act of will. For the dyslexic, who has often learned from kindergarten or before that he or she is not very bright, it may take a monumental effort to develop that sense of will. Rollo May tells us, "When we analyze will with all the tools modern psychoanalysis brings us, we shall find ourselves pushed back to the level of attention or intention as the seat of will. The effort which goes into the exercise of the will is really effort of attention; the strain in willing is the effort to keep the consciousness clear, i.e., the strain of keeping the attention focused" (220). And, as we well

know, many LD students find it nearly impossible to keep their attention focused.

Experience tells me that reading and writing enable us to think clearly, to, as Mike Rose points out, summarize our situations, to disambiguate key notions and useful facts and incorporate them in our own lifestyles. When we can read and write at meaningful levels we have the tools to get on with our lives. We are no longer held prisoner by our circumstances or our inability to reason. But until then, many who are illiterate will continue to fester and hate and boil over into all segments of society. I remember far too well how I used to feel about people who had money, or what I perceived of as money (and that might be symbolized by something as innocuous as a new car). I thought people who had money were the enemy. I thought that they had everything handed to them--all of them. I could not read or write or think or reason clearly enough to realize that many people have earned their wealth, that they have worked hard for what they have. I used to think that anyone who had a reasonably nice house, like the one I live in today, and drove a new car, was rich. That type of limited thinking, coupled with feelings of hopelessness and despair, is extremely dangerous. Today, people are pulling other people out of their cars and shooting them. Why? I think I know why.

I've been trying to help a dyslexic friend of mine with her reading and writing. She was raised in one of the worst ghettos in the United States, and she still carries scars, both figuratively and



literally, from her upbringing. Not long ago we had a disagreement centered around being rich and being poor. She said, in one of her essays, that poor people can sometimes become rich but that rich people *never* become poor. I pointed out that that just wasn't true, and I said that many former rich people had in fact killed themselves because they lost all of their money, during the Depression, for instance. She replied that those people had not really lost *all* of their money, that they had been reduced "to one yacht instead of six," and that to them having only one yacht was the same as being poor. No matter how I argued or tried to persuade her, she could not see that the rich do sometimes become poor. As Walter Ong tells us, "In a primary oral culture, intensive analysis is not practiced, and not even thought of" (42).

At first I got angry with my friend, but then I realized how much I used to think like her, before I learned to read and write. She is, in fact, very much like I used to be, and I left our conversation feeling more than a little saddened, as well as frightened for all of us. Her version of the truth scared me. James Berlin says:

Rather than truth being prior to language, language is prior to truth and determines what shapes truth can take. Language does not correspond to the 'real world.' It creates the 'real world' by organizing it, by determining what will be perceived and not perceived, by indicating what has meaning and what is meaningless (57)

What frightens me is that there are millions of people out there who do not read and write, hopeless people who think that we, the literate, are the enemy. And, to further complicate the problem,

Janet Emig tells us, "Unless the losses to learners of not writing are compellingly described and substantiated by experimental and speculative research, writing itself as a central academic process may not long endure" (91).

One of the main reasons that I wanted to learn to write was so that I could reach people with my words, tell them what I had learned from experience--that you cannot raise children in poverty, ignorance and brutality and expect them to grow up and be all right, and that almost anyone, given a helping hand, can succeed. I was so naive, so under-read, that I had no idea that people already knew that. I just assumed that when they heard about all of the unnecessary misery out there, they would do something about it; they would teach people how to read and write.

Today, I am more than a little disillusioned with our educational system, which more often than not moves with all of the compassion and intelligence of a machine. In many ways education is a fraud. Still, I will forever feel indebted to a small group of dedicated instructors for what they have done for me. Thanks to them I am now an active participant in life. They have provided me with the necessary skills to realize my potential. And what I do is finally up to me. That is personal power. That is freedom. That is true democracy.

As H.G. Wells so aptly noted, "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe." Adult basic writers, including those who are LD, are, in most cases, those who

were condemned from birth to become the voiceless, powerless people of our society. Ironically, those who were for so long subdued by circumstance and general apathy now, through those same circumstances, threaten to engulf our world. Today they spill out of the ghettos and barrios and rural slums in raging, violent hordes, attacking whenever and whomever they choose. We stand by in awe and fear of their indiscriminate, spewing hatred, and we wonder-- Where did we go wrong? The answer to the problem is, of course, education, honest and just education. Mina Shaughnessy comments:

The work is waiting for us. And so irrevocable now is the tide that brings the new students into the nation's college classrooms that it is no longer within our power, as perhaps it once was, to refuse to accept them into the community of the educable. They are here. DIVING IN is simply deciding that teaching them to write well is not only suitable but challenging work for those who would be teachers and scholars in a democracy (302).

In Prisoners of Silence Jonathan Kozol says:

To awaken people to intelligent and articulate dissent, to give voice to their longings, to give both lease and license to their rage, to empower the powerless, to give voice to those who are enslaved by their own silence--certainly this represents a certain kind of danger. It is, indeed, the type of danger which a just society, or one that aspires to justice, ought to be eager to foster, search out and encourage. If this is a danger which our social system cannot plausibly afford, then we may be obliged to ask ourselves if we can possibly afford this social system (31).

Whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, the race between education and catastrophe is being run daily by millions of people,

people who are, no matter what we label them, educable. What we as a society must decide is will the winners cross the finish line with diplomas, or guns?

As a dyslexic English composition instructor (which is surely an oxymoron), I struggle daily with my feelings of inadequacy. There is so much that I don't know about English, and teaching. Still, I hope that what I lack in knowledge of the subject matter is made up for in other ways: being dyslexic has taught me a great deal about patience and compassion. And, while I may not know that much about English, I have learned more than I ever dreamed possible. I know, for instance, that Hal got away from the giant clam, and his brother escaped the evil warlords, and, improbable as it was, Johnny finally did learn how to read, and write. In fact, in another sentence or two Johnny--the very same Johnny who couldn't learn to read or write or do his multiplication tables--will finish writing his thesis. If someone like me--the former class dunce--can do that, what might all of those other "useless" kids out there do, if we would just teach them how to read and write?

## Appendix

### Case Studies

Note: All five of the students cited in this paper have been diagnosed by learning specialists as having the specific learning disability known as dyslexia. All are of average or above average intelligence, and all were diagnosed within the last three years. The subjects were chosen at random in as much as I asked the first five bonafide dyslexics who walked into my office in the learning disabilities center to allow me to use their papers. All agreed.

## Jeanie

Jeanie is a community college sophomore. She is in her late thirties; she was born and raised in poverty and is struggling desperately to escape the cycle of indigence that has seemingly engulfed her entire family, most of whom live a communal type of existence and rely primarily on welfare for their subsistence. Jeanie is bright and articulate; she is able to tell a story with little or no trouble and often with a great deal of humor, yet when it comes to writing that same narrative on paper, her storytelling abilities rapidly deteriorate.

In the following essay, written for a freshman college English class (which she subsequently passed with a C), Jeanie compared and contrasted the short story and the film version of "The Grandstand Passion Play." (The film was titled A Christmas Story.) :

## A Christmas Story

The story and in movie I found that the plot of the store were different. The main subject in the movie was how Ralph wanted a Red Rider B B gun for Christmas. In the story it talk most lee about the Hill billies next store.

In the movie and the Story, Ralph was nearated. it he was the oldest boy in the family. he had a Lille brother named Randy. Mother and Father. In the store it decrib the hill billies what the father Look like in the movie you neve saw the Father

In Both it tell you about all the junk in the back yeard, and about the dogs who love to tearirize Ralph father but left everone els along.

There was Zascration in Movie and in Story about How Many dog there were

In the Story the Bumpuses were moon shine movie Nothing about it.

The food was difference in the movie for Christmas dinner they had tuckey and in the story they had ham. in Both The dogs Came in and ate there Christmas denner. and the dogs grolld and fight over it and it was gone in scounds.

in the story they ate the dog ate easter dinner.

The bullies were the same in movie and show they scard all the kids and would pick on the grup of Kids coming home from school.

The one boy was short and would act big because the other boy was a big Kids and would Stand by the little boy who would do his talking for the

In the movie & story the father stub his toe in the middel of the night after making Love to his wife The Boys here them. The parents turn on the Radio thing it will drown out Father voice.

in both the father useds bad Lang- in the movie the boys helping his dad change the tier and the dad put the lug nuts in the hub cap and knoks it out of the boy hand and the boys uses the F\_\_\_ word the father tell the mother scream and washes hes mouth with soup. And Ralph pick up the word from his Father but blams the Shoulder boys. the mother calls Mrs shouler and tell her that Ralph siad he heard it from her son. You could here the boy get a wippen over the phone. the boy doesn't know why his mom wippen.

in the movie Ralph day dreams a lot not in the Story. In the end of the movie Ralph get his Red Rider B.B. Gun for Christmas

in the movie father gets a lamp of a leg not in the story

in the story the hill billies move away. The move the bill billies stay Ralph Shoot his gun and the mom tell him not to shoot any animals the dad said shoot the dogs.

The two were very different I enjoy both of them I think I would like to read the whole book. I enjoy the movie it had lots of funny things happening. The language I was disappointed in. I don't like Kids to use words Ralph used. But it was a good move.

### Observations

One of the things I like best about Jeanie's writing is that her ideas and enthusiasm for storytelling shine through. She likes good stories, and while discussing this paper with me and verbally recounting the events that took place in both the movie and the written narrative, she had us both laughing so hard that we cried.

Unfortunately, when Jeanie begins to write, much of her humor and clarity of thought disappears. When asked to read the paper aloud, Jeanie immediately recognized some of her mistakes, but by and large she displayed a tendency to read the paper as she intended it to be, filling in and smoothing over the trouble spots (Bartholomae points out that this is common among basic writers). Jeanie knows that the paper has problems, but she has no idea of how to fix them.

One of the first things I noticed was, of course, the phonetic or erratic spelling. When Jeanie reads her paper aloud, she pronounces many of the misspelled words correctly, i.e., story for store, movie for move, and narrated for nearated; but other words are pronounced just as she spelled them. She says zascration but she means exaggeration, and the same thing goes for lille (meaning little)



and wippen (meaning whipping). Jeanie spells these words the way she has internalized them, and, even though she is perfectly capable of pronouncing the words correctly, five minutes later she will return to her original pronunciation.

For me, the most difficult thing about reading Jeanie's paper is that it seems to have been written in some form of shorthand, a series of ideas jotted down to later jog her memory. And indeed, as Jeanie first read her narrative aloud for me, she was perfectly capable of expanding and of filling in most of the gaps. On the other hand, while Jeanie acknowledged that there were problems, she also felt that the paper was pretty good as is. In her mind, the reader should be able to understand what she has written. In fact, she came to me expecting help with only a few minor changes. She was quite surprised by all of my questions, and, though at times clearly frustrated by my lack of understanding, she was willing to spend several hours with me, over a period of a few days, as I transcribed her more complete verbal explanations. I apologized to her for my lack of understanding, but I also explained that in some ways readers (myself included) are like children: they need to be taken by the hand and led through the paper; otherwise, they become bored or lost.

Jeanie would benefit from an Orton-Gillingham style reading program, as well as a writing program that featured most of the skills we discussed earlier. Small writing assignments which force Jeanie to explain how to do something step by step--tie a shoe or put

together a recipe, for instance--might also prove helpful. Jeanie needs to see that readers are not always able or willing to fill in the gaps in her writing.

## Renee

Renee has just finished all of her requirements for an AA degree. She is in her early forties and, though feeling extremely harassed by all of the work, is delighted to be in school. She is warm, friendly, and outgoing (though she denies this) and has proven to be an extremely popular student. For the past few semesters, Renee has worked as a math tutor and is held in high esteem by her tutees. Renee is hyperactive, and, at least at times, her speech and writing become very confused. Sometimes, especially when she gets excited, it is difficult to keep up with Renee's intended meaning.

Renee was born in a small farming community in northern California, where her mother worked as a laborer in the fields. But when Renee turned six years old, her mother and siblings moved to South Central Los Angeles in order to be closer to relatives. Renee says that it was a terrifying experience to leave the peace and solitude of the country for what would soon prove to be the nightmare of the inner city. She recounts being harassed and chased home by local children, and, with tears in her eyes, she tells how her mother decided to lock her out of the house, saying that it was a tough world and Renee would just have to learn to fend for herself.

In the following essay, Renee recounts for her sociology class some of her frustrations centered around being dyslexic, and writing, and she also recalls her first encounter with me in the learning disabilities center, where I work as a tutor:

## Feelings

I am dyslexic, and some of the emotions that I have experienced, stronger than others, were debilitating, conflictive, and frustrative.

Academically, dyslexic people are easily aroused emotional people with little control, especially when it comes to their academically studies and capabilities. Emotions are feelings that a person encounters.

Debilitative emotions are feelings that prevents a person from functioning effectively. Fear of a written assignment that was given in class at [school] one semester was preventing me from writing my assignments.

The first assignment was no problem. Even thou I was displeased with my punctuations I was pressed for time, I had to turn my paper in. I was more concerned about contents and sequences than I was about punctuations.

Maybe that's why I panic when I asked the receptionist, a week befor my paper is due for an appointment with an english tutor. I stood in shock, mouth nearly meeting my chest as the receptionist told me that there were no english tutors avaiable for a week. I panic. But I rejuvinated when I saw an english tutors leaving the library. I stopped them in thier tracks. I told them that I was desperate. That it was very for an english tutor to proofread my paper for meaning of the message and sequence than punctuations, befor I turned it in. They were also pressed for time. But they gave me the sign of approval. I survived the debilitating emotions that were going to hinder me from turning my work in on time.

My next assignment was difficult, but interesting. Not that my third assignment was not difficult, because it was, or interesting, but because every paper that I wrote was trashed. My interest conflicted with my reasoning, with my beliefs, and the validity of my topic sentence.

It took five, six pages of hand written papers, before I successfully came up with a topic sentence and narrow it down to six pages. If it were not for my motivation and the support that I received from significant others, I would have been a repeat offender. I would have had to retaken the class. Another emotion was dealt with and solved.

But it took my fourth paper being tossed out that caused so mush frustration that I cried my heart out for two hours. I thought that I was crying my heart out because my self-esteem was so low that I

was feeling sorry for myself. I was that feeling sorry for myself, I was feeling frustration. I was frustrated because I saw the project being simple. So why was I having such a difficult time with this simple project? At the learning center, we have a dyslexic person to help with many subjects, mainly to proofread are papers. This person is dyslexic. He presently wroking on his thesesis for his masters. english was very difficult for him. That's why he chose english for his major. He told me of his struggle and frustration being dyslexic date all the way back to elementry school. How the teacher would hit him with a ruler because he didnt know the answer. He was about the same age as I was. This person had me laughing so hard that my tears of frustration became tears of laughter. I never experienced his emotions while I was in school. The only emotions I experienced where how forgetful I was. At school my external enviorment was quiet emotionalist. Once school let out, it became a war zone. You fought by force not choice. As far back as I can remember I have never been called on in class. And if I were, I would not knew the answer.

By the six grade reading became difficiut. By the seventh grade math was impossible. By the eight grade and on were "D", just passing. You know the irony of the story is in all of my school days I never took home a book. All through elementry, we had to leave our book inside our drawer. By the time I reached the next level in school, I left them in my locker. We very seldom had home work. I never wrote any paper until I took english at [college].

For the first time I realized why I felt debilitating, conflicted, and frustrate. I did understand so I could deal with. I was brain dead after my three session crying for two hours and laughing for an hour. It was like five oclock anyway. I gave our discussion much thought. The next morning, I got up at five. By six-thirty, I had written my fifth paper, not knowing if it was to get trashed our not.

To my amazement it was not trashed and very few correction. As the tutor said, "writing is difficult for you," "What are you going to do?" As I was laughing and crying at the same time I said, "I guess there is not left for me to do but keep trying

### Observations

Obviously, Renee is a sensitive and courageous person, one who is willing to expose her inner feelings and to explore her emotions on

paper. She has a fairly good vocabulary, but unfortunately she often uses words in the wrong context, or she confuses the parts of speech or verb tenses. Unlike Jeanie, when asked to read her essay aloud, Renee reads it almost word for word and shows little or no awareness of the problems. Though Renee claims (and agonizes over it) that she has no idea of what a sentence is, she obviously has a good sense of how to group words together. The larger problem for Renee seems to be what Newcomer and Barenbaum referred to earlier as "extraneous ideas, confusing words or unclear referents that interrupted the meaningful flow of the stories and made them difficult to read" (583). Certainly, Renee's ideas are well worth reading, and she has an abundance of things to write about. But she needs work on her grammar, syntax, and organizational skills. Like so many dyslexics, Renee could benefit, both in her self-esteem and school work, from understanding sentence and paragraph structure and the underlying logic behind them. As it stands today, Renee is trying to build her skills in English on an awfully shaky foundation.

## Carrie

Carrie is a college sophomore. She is in her early twenties, petite, and attractive. But her demure exterior belies a fierce, scrappy and at times extremely belligerent nature. The first time I met Carrie, I was sitting in on a class designed to help LD students learn to read. I introduced myself at the beginning of the class, told the students that I was also LD and that I was there trying to learn how to help other LD students. An hour or so later, though I had done nothing but sit quietly in the back of the class, Carrie stood up and loudly objected to my being in the room. She told the teacher that she should "throw his [my] ass out." She said that I didn't belong there, and she also told the teacher that she had damn well better do as she requested because she (Carrie) paid her (the teacher's) salary. Carrie is like that--very volatile. But she is also a lost and lonely individual who wants to be accepted. We have made peace with each other, and she now delights in telling everyone how she hated me on sight the first time we met.

Carrie reports growing up in an alcoholic household. Her mother and father fought constantly and her father often beat her mother up. Carrie says that in retribution her mother had a host of boyfriends, and sometimes she would take the kids and run away from her husband for weeks at a time. Carrie began taking drugs at a young age (provided by her brother)--self-medication is a common occurrence among dyslexics--and she says that she learned from her family that it was okay to lie and cheat. The following excerpt is

from an essay Carrie wrote for a college awareness class designed to help LD students succeed. This sample begins in about mid-essay:



## THIS PAPER IS ON DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

.....

In school I was not learning like other kids for my age. So they test me for a learning disabilities. Well they were right so it made it harder for me in school. So instead of going to school, I went to parties and got high and I forgot all my problems I was having with my mom and dad and school. And with a learning disabilities our self-esteem go down and you do not care about anything or anyone. But most of all you do not like yourself. So you do anything to make yourself feel better about yourself. And it worked for a while but that goes away after a few months. And when it goes away you feel worse than you did before you started. Having a learning disabilities is hard to deal with at such a young age. So you do things to make you like cool to others like doing drugs or not going to school. When I was doing drugs I tried to kill myself many times for reasons unknown to me right now. Sometime I would like to do it to this day. But what will I prove to everyone. That I am a fake. And I want to make it in life.

And now that I am an adult my mom and I are just the same as ever. It has gotten worse with me now that I am an adult and not a child. All the problems they have they yell at me to get all their frustration out. They tell me that I was a mistake and that they do not love me.

My sister is following the same pattern that my mom did. I hope through this class to stop the cycle that the family has gone through all these years.

I would like to have a family of my own. I would like to bring them up knowing that I love them and respect how they are. And let them make their own mistakes in life and learn from them.

The only way to stop the circle of dysfunctional families is to talk about what is going on in the families.

This class has helped me a lot with my life and family. I hope to keep learning about dysfunctional families.

I learned a lot about myself and what my boundaries are. So no one can run all over me.

Thank you.

## Observations

I was taken with Carrie's essay just as it is. It is heartfelt and honest and relatively free of problems. Carrie says that she doesn't understand verb tense, and her essay reflects that that is a correct assessment. She also has trouble with number and person, paragraphing and organization. When asked to read aloud, Carrie corrects many of her mistakes without realizing that she is doing it. The essays that Carrie writes for her other classes, the more academic essays, generally give Carrie more problems than this personal essay did; still, by and large, Carrie seems very close to becoming a good writer. Because she is hyperactive and highly distractible, as well as overly self-conscious, Carrie would benefit from one-on-one instruction. She also expresses a desire to understand more about the basic rules of the English language.

## Barth

Barth is just completing his sophomore year in college, though over the years he has amassed in excess of one hundred units of lower division work. He is an art/liberal arts major and has, until recently, taken classes that appeal to him and steadfastly avoided those which he feared, like math, for instance. He is in his mid-thirties, very bright, articulate, inquisitive, and he loves to talk, which he does with gusto.

Barth says that he did fine in school (no one, including himself, knew he was dyslexic at the time), except he was always in the slow reading group. He came from an upper-middle class family that was very supportive and noncritical. He says that though his mother and father had their disagreements, he never heard them raise their voices to one another or their children or be abusive in any way. When there was a problem in the family, they talked things out.

The following is an article which Barth wrote for his own interest and one which he hoped to have published in a learning disabilities newsletter:

(No Title)

Some subjects are hard, but if your LD, school the left brain style of learning can really confuse you. LD people tend to spend a majority of their time studying.

The "TEST, extended time, notes, deep breathing, etc." You wait with bated breath for the Grade. You find out that your grade is a C. You feel elated but then it hits you that you must study smart.

You think to yourself, I have a learning disability and a C is a good grade, a C is a passing grade and you will do better.

The point that I'm going to make is this don't use your LD as an excuse. Except that you will need to study smart and think positive, while studying for your next test.

All the excuses in the world will not get you that A. Sitting in the library for two hours a day won't work either. Excuses just put off reality be real to yourself and think of your options? Did I take to many classes this semester and should I drop a class now or wait? One possibility is to drop the classes soon as possible so that you can spend more time on your other classes. The second alternative is to stick it out until the 14th week and then drop the class. The latter option is a good idea because you can build a skeleton to hang your information on for next semester.

The only excuse is the excuse to learn. Slow down, knowledge is not going to be gone tomorrow you are better off to choose an option than an excuse. An excuse is never a possibility or dropping out of school is no alternative either. Good luck, study smart, relax, and don't forget to laugh.

### Observations

Barth, much like his writing, is very fast. In both speech and writing he has a tendency to skip over points and overly condense ideas without making sure that the reader or listener has made the necessary connections.

Even though he has completed all of his lower division English requirements, including English composition (English 1A), Barth still has difficulty getting his thoughts straight on paper. When asked to

read this article aloud, he did so without detecting any errors, and, in fact, he made it sound much better than my eye did. In turn, when I read the article to him, as written, he was instantly aware of many of the problems, but not how to fix them. This essay became much more readable with the addition of a little punctuation, some connectors, and a bit of clarification and expansion of ideas, which Barth and I worked on together. However, Barth needs help with the basics. He needs a class such as Carol Haviland's, so that he can both internalize the basics and begin to see the effect his writing has on others. Barth is so bright and eager to reach an audience that I'm sure he would benefit from peer editing and working on group projects.

## Jackson

Jackson is in his late thirties. He attends the community college in hopes of learning to read and write well enough to get a good job (he is currently living on welfare), though he doesn't know what that job might be. Jackson has a drug and alcohol abuse problem, and he has been in jail several times for various offenses. He left school in the eighth grade and only recently returned. He says, "All they ever did for me in school is teach me that I'm stupid, and I already knew that. So what the hell good were they doing me anyway?" The following is a response to my request that he tell me something about himself:

(No title)

ny name Jackson and goal is learn to read and write so i can get a good job so my famly be proud of me I was born california in 1955 i got in drugs. at that time i was a big man. I changed ny life a round I stop doing drugs. it took a trip to Virgina. for me to get my life back together. but the system won't help me. to get ny life together. in between that my brother took ny girls inocents away.

## Observations

As mentioned earlier, Jackson has had far less formal education than the other students cited in this paper, so, under the circumstances, this short, personal essay does not strike me as being all that bad. However, based on the other writings I've seen, and after listening to him read, I think it safe to say that this paper does not accurately reflect the depth of Jackson's writing problems. In fact, this is the best paper I have seen from Jackson. Spelling, punctuation and capitalization seem to be the main problems here.

But a more serious problem begins to show itself, especially near the end of the paper, and that is that Jackson's ideas are about to take off in any and all directions. Indeed, that is one of Jackson's major problems with writing. He simply cannot stay on one subject for more than a few lines at a time. Jackson would benefit from an Orton-Gillingham based reading program and some one-on-one or small group writing sessions. Unfortunately, his chances of receiving that type of education are slim. Meanwhile, he sits in his GED class day after day feeling lost and wondering what to do next.

Note: With the exception of Jackson, each of the students cited in this paper has completed the necessary requirements in English to receive an AA degree, yet none are, without the aid of tutors, any more proficient in English than you see here. This may, at first, seem like negligence on the part of their instructors, but I assure you that is not necessarily the case. These students have learned to utilize the services of the college, and they often go from tutor to tutor collecting editorial suggestions until their final drafts are fairly clean.

Mike Rose says, "Some students may leave our classes writing papers that aren't as clean as some of us would like them to be, but at least these students will hold conceptions of composing that will foster rather than limit growth in writing" (327). I hope that is the case here, but at the same time, I know that we can and should be of much more service to these people while they are with us.



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