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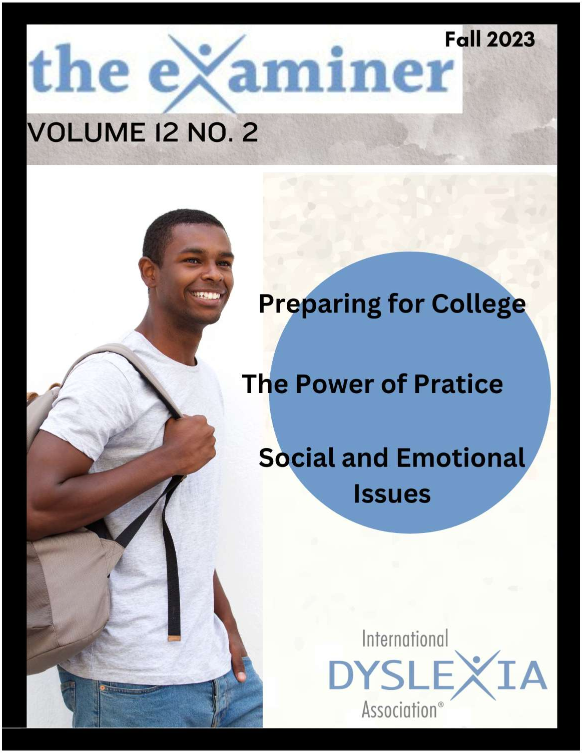

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KNOWLEDGE IS KEY TO SUCCESSFUL COLLEGE TRANSITION

By Elizabeth Hamblet

The transition from high school to college can be an exciting time, not just for students, but for parents, too. Unfortunately, it can also be a time of worry for parents of students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities (LDs) who are accustomed to providing their children with a great amount of support through the K-12 years of their education—both at home and at school, working with school staff and outside providers to make sure their child receives the appropriate interventions and accommodations. Knowing their role will shift from primary advocate to coach when their student starts college can cause parents some concern. Professionals, too, want to make sure their work contributes to student readiness for college by gaining the knowledge they need to make appropriate recommendations.

One of the most significant changes that occurs during this transition to college is that students will be managing themselves with different types of support and much less structure. The good news is, with the right preparation and knowledge, this aspect of the transition can be smooth. With an understanding of the changes they can anticipate during this transition, parents and professionals can make sure that students have the skills and self-understanding they'll need to be successful. It can seem overwhelming to start talking about college as early as the 8th grade IEP (Individualized Education Program) meeting, but if students hope to attend college, a plan must lay out the steps to gaining the skills and knowledge needed so everyone has the time they need to successfully navigate the transition.

Knowledge of Shifting Laws

While students don't need to know the intricacies of the shifts in prevailing laws as they transition to college, they do need to know that if they had an IEP, the accommodations they received through that plan were provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which does not cover college. If they had a 504 plan, Subpart E rather than Subpart D would apply, which is quite different.

However, no matter what kind of plan students have, it is not valid after they graduate from high school. This does not mean students will not get accommodations in college; however, they should not assume they'll get the same ones they had in high school.

Knowledge of the Disability Services Registration Process

One important change from high school to college is that the college is not obligated to seek out students with disabilities to offer accommodations. If students are seeking accommodations, they are required to register with the college's disability services office (DS) or appointed contact person. This process typically requires

- completing a form (online or on paper),
- submitting disability *documentation* (for students with dyslexia it is typically a copy of the most recent psycho-educational testing report), and
- requesting an intake appointment (required by some colleges) for DS staff to ask follow-up questions after reading the documentation.

Colleges cannot require students to register with DS. The choice is theirs. If they do not initially register and later change their minds and do so, it is important to know that accommodations are not *retroactive.* In other words, colleges will not adjust any grades already earned or allow students a do-over.

Knowledge of Potential Limits on Accommodations

Although students do not need to know the intricacies of the disability laws that apply at college, they do need to know how those laws may affect the accommodations available to them. On the positive side, colleges provide a variety of different accommodations across their programs (academic, housing, etc.) for eligible students. Some common accommodations include extended time for tests, testing in a room where distractions are reduced, and access to a spellchecker on exams. Accommodations such as these are provided for free.

Unfortunately, certain other accommodations, which are likely to be relevant to students with dyslexia and other LDs, do not have to be provided by colleges.

Colleges don't have to provide accommodations that

- create a fundamental alteration to their programs, starting with admissions requirements (that is, colleges do not have to be flexible with these for students with disabilities who have not taken a required course or whose scores are lower than that required for admission). This is true for graduation requirements, too (that is, colleges do not have to approve requests for course substitutions). Within classes, students are unlikely to get approved for modifications to assignments (for example, shorter papers or doing a presentation instead of a paper) or to tests (for example, having the number of choices reduced on a multiple choice test). Students may not be allowed to use a memory aid on tests, as professors are assessing their mastery of the material.
- provide a personal service. In a practical sense, this means colleges do not have to provide any kind of specialized support to students with disabilities. Students should not expect to meet with a learning disabilities specialist, executive functioning coach, or similar support person unless the college they choose has these supports. Some colleges have coaches and mentors available to all students. Some offer access to a LD specialist through DS for free, but it is possible that students will have to attend a college with a fee-based program to access any or all of these kinds of services.
- provide a personal device. For instance, if a student is approved for texts in an alternative format, the college must provide the format (for example, scanning a student's entire textbook) but it does not have to provide them with the text-to-speech software that would read it aloud to the student. That said, some colleges do offer software access for free.

More broadly, Section 504 states that accommodations need only provide "equal opportunity to obtain the same result "as their neurotypical peers but accommodations are "not required to produce the identical result or level of achievement for handicapped and nonhandicapped persons" (§ 104.42). In other words, students accustomed to having the option to retake a test for a better grade are unlikely to get this opportunity in college, unless professors offer the same opportunity to all students.

Other accommodations are not typically available, because colleges do not see them as necessary or appropriate. For instance, professors do not typically provide directions in oral and written form or email assignments to students. Of course, it never hurts to ask! It is possible such requests will be approved. (For instance, course substitutions do get approved at many colleges, though perhaps not for all students requesting them.)

Knowledge of Other Forms of Support

DS may not provide all of the supports students seek, but many colleges do offer the following services:

- general tutoring center
- writing center
- counseling center
- math or other specialized "help rooms"

Professors also hold what are commonly called "office hours" where they are available to answer questions. And, some classes have teaching assistants (TAs) who are more available to students and may be more helpful than regular tutors because they are familiar with the course content. TAs may hold extra review sessions before tests, and they may have helped to create the exams, which makes them a valuable resource.

Students should know that colleges expect *all* students to need help; this is why these supports are available. And, students who seek help are likely to be successful.

Knowledge of the Academic Environment and Expectations at College

For all students, the college environment requires adjustment. Classes meet less frequently than is typical in high school, and students are expected to learn more independently. They may have as much as a few hundred pages of reading to do each week, which means they will need to manage their time effectively, especially since deadline extensions are not commonly approved. Students will likely have to write long papers on their own, as professors may only want to see the final draft. (Tip: Students can bring earlier drafts to the writing center for feedback, and they can ask the professor or TA if they would be willing to review them, too.) Students are typically expected to spell and grammar check any work done outside of the classroom, too, or they can expect to have these errors counted against them.

Knowledge of Disability and Learning Strengths

Experts in transitioning from high school to college point to self-knowledge as one of the most important qualities students with disabilities can possess. In college, students will need to be aware of situations when they will need additional supports, so they can complete their registration with their college's disability services office (DS) and receive accommodations.

Some advocates prefer to use the term *learning difference* rather than *learning disability*. This preference is well-intentioned, but students should be aware that some colleges view *differences* as the norm in the population and only accommodate students who have a disability, as required by law. It may be helpful to get students comfortable with the idea that they have a disability (and that *disability* is not a negative term), so they will not be surprised or feel ashamed when they get to college. Another benefit to knowing how their disability affects their academic performance is that this knowledge helps students identify strengths and strategies that will assist them in completing academic tasks.

Let Knowledge Drive Academic Planning

While students are still in high school, planning should be informed by knowledge of the college environment. Even with helpful accommodations, students must be ready to do many things on their own. School-based teams, parents, and other outside professionals should consider who can provide the following supports to prepare these students:

- provide explicit instruction in study skills, such as time management, effective reading, test preparation, etc. Over time, reduce adult assistance so that by senior year, students are functioning as independently as possible.
- talk to students about their learning profile, asking them to provide their understanding of its impact on their performance and provide clarification where needed.
- check in with students over time to see if they find the strategies they learn and accommodations they use are helpful.
- help students become fluent in using technology for reading, notetaking, essay composition, and other skills necessary to succeed in college. Again, the goal is to make them independent.
- if anyone suggests waiving the high school's graduation requirements, discuss how it might affect the student's future college choices. The team should make sure everyone involved knows the potential impact of that decision.

Let Knowledge Drive College Search Considerations

Knowing that some accommodations may not be available and that some schools provide more supports than others, students may use this information to inform their college search. Depending upon what they seek in a school, they may want to add some items to their research.

They can look at disability services and other supports that are described on the websites of colleges they are considering, taking notes so that when they receive their acceptances, they can use this information to help them decide which schools offer the kind of support they seek.

They may want to check their graduation requirements to make sure that they feel comfortable that they can complete them without a substitution. Or they may want to apply to colleges that do not have such requirements.

If they think they'll need supports that go beyond the minimum, they may want to look at fee-based programs. If they schools that interest them don't offer one, students seek support through an off-campus or online tutor.

Final thoughts

Reading about all the changes to come may make the adults who care about students with dyslexia and other LDs feel anxious, but many students thrive at college. The information in this article is intended to empower parents as they support the students they care about to ensure that they to get the appropriate preparation for college.

The Office for Civil Rights offers several helpful posts on this topic:

Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities

Transition of Students With Disabilities To Postsecondary Education: A Guide for High School Educators

Auxiliary Aids and Services for Postsecondary Students with Disabilities

Dear Parent Letter from the (then) Office of the Assistant Secretary

Reference

Newman, L. A., & Madaus, J. W. (2015) Reported accommodations and supports provided to secondary and postsecondary students with disabilities: National perspective. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 38(3), 173–181. Available from https://doi:10.1177/2165143413518235

Elizabeth C. Hamblet has worked as a learning disabilities specialist in college disability services offices for two decades. In addition to working at a university, she is a nationally requested speaker on preparing students with disabilities for successful college transition. Hamblet is the author of *Seven Steps to College Success: A Pathway for Students with Disabilities* and a concise guide on transition, and her work has appeared in numerous journals and online platforms. She offers advice and information on her website at www.LDadvisory.com and shares resources on numerous social media platforms.

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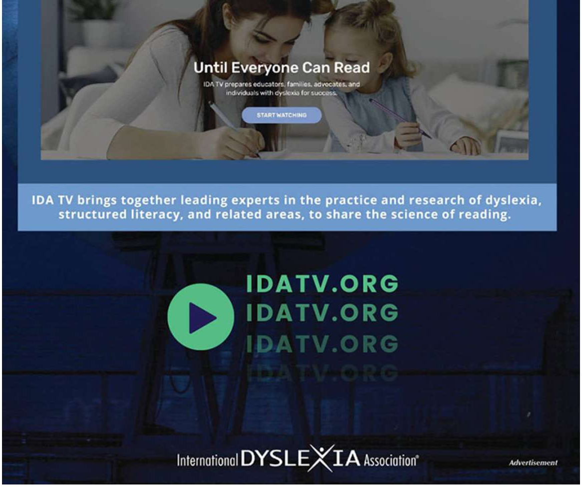
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PERSPECTIVES ON LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

The Power of Practice

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***Perspectives* on the Power of Practice**

“At a time when educators feel the pressure to cover the content rather than get kids to mastery, it is easy to lose track of what we know about the continuum of learning, with the unintended consequence of rushing, rather than ensuring, learning. In short, we haven’t elevated the role of practice for its significance in acquiring proficiency. We can lose sight of the full scope of Structured Literacy, namely what and how we teach. In the end, practice affords us a way to avoid the negative consequences of learning bottlenecks and ensure better reading outcomes for all.”

This excerpt on the role of practice in learning is from the introduction to the recently released issue of *Perspectives on Language and Literacy*, “The Power of Practice.” In this issue the theme editors, Nancy Chapel Eberhardt, Stephanie Stollar, and the other contributors capitalize on the issue’s digital format to describe and show with articles and links to “how-to” videos, discussions, and other online resources, how practice can improve instructional practice and learning outcomes. For example, one item featured in the issue is a panel discussion, moderated by Jill Lauren, on decodable text (see details below).

This issue will help teachers, families, and administrators understand the components, importance, and mechanics of practice. If you are member of IDA, you can access this issue of *Perspectives* at portal.dyslexia.org (select “Publications” from the “Member Resources” menu after you log in). If you are not a member of IDA, please consider joining IDA today to read the most current issues of *Perspectives* and access other useful resources.

Watch this video panel on IDA TV

Decodable Text and Early Literacy Acquisition —

Exploring the Impact

Decodable Text and Early Literacy Acquisition — Exploring the Impact

Anne Peiffer, *Dean of Foundational and Early Literacy,*
and **Blake Hand**, *Executive Director of Schools,*
Rockford Public Schools, IL

Robert Palazzo, *Principal,*
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Jasselle Cirino, *School-based Teacher Leader,*
and **Karen Josselyn**, *Literacy Coach,*
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Sheila Holland, *Literacy Facilitator;*
Yocum Elementary, Eldorado, AR

Holly Lane, *Associate Professor of Special Education,*
and **Valentina Contesse**, *Clinical Assistant Professor,*
University of Florida Literacy Institute

Moderated by Jill Lauren, Learning Specialist and Author, Whole Phonics

International Dyslexia Association
Perspectives on Language and Literacy, Summer 2023. Theme Editors: Nancy Chapel Eberhardt and Stephanie Stollar

KEY TAKEAWAYS

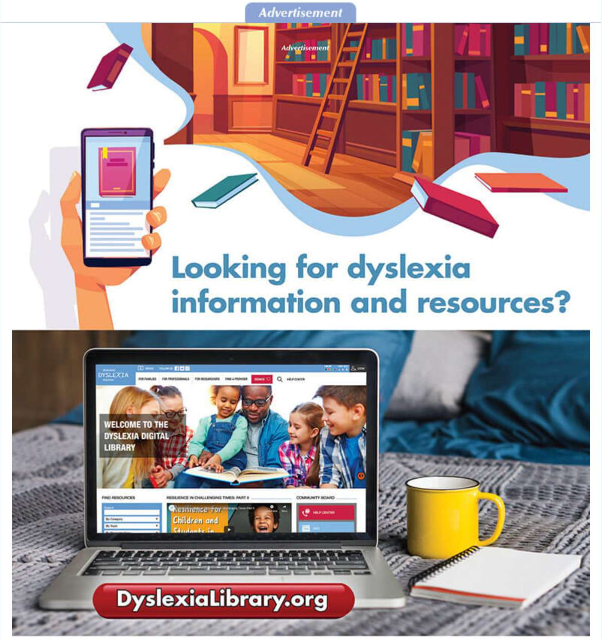
- Using decodable text provides a place for students to practice new phonics skills in a meaningful manner.
- "Quality" decodable text impacts students' motivation to read and reread, which in turn enhances literacy development.
- Small group instruction is a critical component of providing targeted instruction, and there are multiple ways to ensure that such instruction occurs each day.

The pendulum is swinging, and teachers throughout the country are reflecting on early reading instruction in new ways. Specifically, teachers are learning about research connected to beginning reading, and they are keen to implement programs that reflect evidenced-based practices. One aspect of such instruction, the use of decodable texts, is receiving increased attention. Teachers who have never used decodable text, books that explicitly provide opportunities to practice the application of sound knowledge to our written language, are doing so in large numbers. While implementing something new, teachers are often required by their districts to assess progress, and, significantly, many are noting improved reading scores and other positive impacts that demand our attention.

This session will review findings in four districts. Teachers will report their data based on the use of decodable text, as well as share other significant aspects of instruction that contribute to improved student progress. The evidence is clear: Decodable text plays a significant role in early reading instruction and students' acquisition of reading acquisition.

Moderated by ***Jill Lauren, MA****; Learning Specialist and Author; Veteran dyslexia specialist responsible for teaching dyslexic and struggling readers in public and private settings. Author of That's Like Me! and Succeeding with LD. Creator and Founder of Whole Phonics™, an early literacy publishing company dedicated to creating educationally sound, multiculturally diverse, and wonderfully engaging phonics-based material for beginning and struggling readers.*

Click to watch panel discussion!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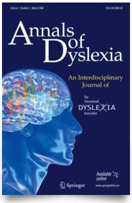
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- **Open Access! The ReadFree tool for the identification of poor readers: a validation study based on a machine learning approach in monolingual and minority-language children** *by Desiré Carioti, Natale Adolfo Stucchi, Carlo Toneatto, Marta Franca Masia, Milena Del Monte, Silvia Stefanelli, Simona Travellini, Antonella Marcelli, Marco Tettamanti, Mirta Vernice, Maria Teresa Guasti, & Manuela Berlingeri*
- A realist review of dyslexia pilot project research *by Brian Gearin, Jessica Turtura, Kim Anderson, Melissa Colsman, Samantha Durrance, Wendy McColskey, Joan Mele-McCarthy, Laura Schultz, & Karleen Spitulnik*
- What do classroom teachers of varying backgrounds know about English spelling? *by Ramona T. Pittman, Heesun Chang, Amanda Lindner, Emily Binks-Cantrell, & Malt Joshi*
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PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL ISSUES

David P. Hurford, Editor-in-Chief of Perspectives on Language and Literacy, interviews Dr. Daniel J. Shipp, President of Pittsburgh State University.

The next issue of *Perspectives on Language and Literacy (Perspectives)*, to be released later this year, explores the social and emotional issues faced by students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties. David P. Hurford, Editor-in-Chief of *Perspectives*, and one of the theme editors of the issue, recently talked with the President of Pittsburgh State University, Dr. Daniel "Dan" J. Shipp, about his experiences growing up with dyslexia, and how those experiences have shaped who he is today and his success as a college president. Watch the full video here.

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IDA FACT SHEETS ON ACCOMMODATIONS

IDA fact sheets are free, downloadable sources of expert information for every step of the dyslexia journey. We encourage you to print them, share them, and link to them from your website. Whether you are a parent, educator, researcher, or advocate, IDA's fact sheets are a great place to start.

If you read Elizabeth Hamblet's article at the beginning of this issue about preparing for college, you might be interested in IDA's series of fact sheets on accommodations, including accommodations when preparing for standardized tests:

- Accommodations for Students with Dyslexia
- Applying for Accommodations on College Entrance Tests
- Applying for Accommodations on Graduate School Entrance Tests

These fact sheets and more are available on the IDA website, the Dyslexia Digital Library, and our store. We encourage you to download them and share them with your colleagues. Let us know what you think. We want to provide the tools and resources you need to implement Structured Literacy for all students!

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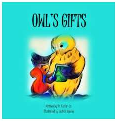
Owl's Gifts



A book review by Michael Ryan

The *Owl's Gifts* is a beautiful fable that connects children who have dyslexia with their inner lives and teaches them about themselves and the world. The author, Dr. Karla-La, is extremely insightful and has dyslexia herself. The artwork is beautiful, and the animal characters appeal to children.

The author's description of what it is like for Spruce, a squirrel with dyslexia, as he waits to read aloud, is beautiful. The increasing tension between Spruce and his laughing and joking classmates is spot on. The teasing of the other students demonstrates how teasing affects Spruce's self-image. Furthermore, the book shows how Spruce struggles with his feelings of being stupid and inadequate. Spruce daydreams to escape the anxiety and embarrassment of being required to read.

The owl represents a wise and caring adult who encourages the student. In my research, I found that such a caring adult is a critical factor in whether an individual with dyslexia can overcome the challenges associated with their dyslexia and become successful. With the encouragement of a caring adult, children feel understood. This understanding, with the proper knowledge and training, can be incredibly powerful.

Even before meeting the owl, Spruce demonstrates determination and self-discipline in trying to teach himself to read. And, although he benefits greatly from the owl's help, Spruce must work hard and still needs encouragement from others. He particularly needs the encouragement of his father, who also has struggled with dyslexia. Finally, after much hard work and encouragement, Spruce is able to experience the joy of reading.

The *Owl's Gifts* is a sensitive and insightful book that demonstrates that determination, self-discipline, and the help of a wise and knowledgeable adult can help someone with dyslexia be successful and enjoy the wonders of reading.

Michael Ryan, Ph.D., is a licensed clinical psychologist. He began his career as a Special Education teacher in a preventive program for dyslexic children. He completed his clinical training at Colorado State University and the Devereux Foundation. He developed one of the first college programs for learning disabled students at Colorado State in 1980. He was Educational Director of Larimer County Mental Health in Fort Collins Colorado. Since that time he has been in full-time private practice. Specializing in learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders. Dr. Ryan has lectured and published widely on Learning Disabilities, ADD, and Test and Measurement. He has taught at the graduate level at Aquinas College and has been on the Editorial Board of Annals of Dyslexia since 1985. He is the past Vice President for the International Dyslexia Association and the present President of the Michigan Branch of the International Dyslexia Association. Furthermore, he has been a consultant to the Governor of Michigan, the Michigan Department of Education and the Air Force Academy. Specialties: Dyslexia, ADHD, Psycho-diagnostics, Individual Psychotherapy and Group Psychotherapy

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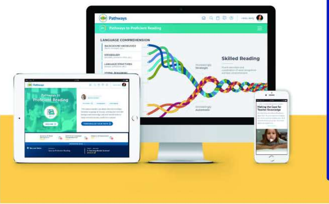

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- Literacy coaching
- Family engagement

Educators:
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- Complimentary web-based resources
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Families:
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- Information about dyslexia and related disorders
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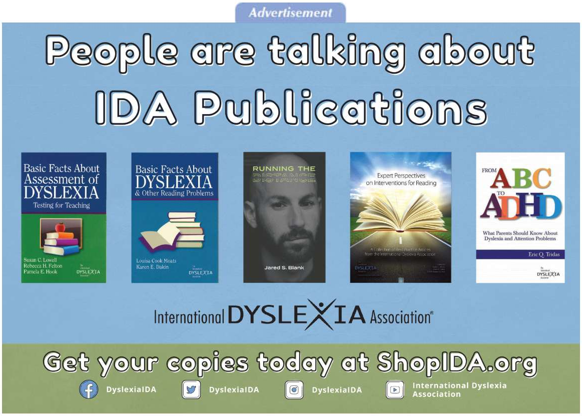
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