

Provides information and solutions for childrens reading and learning problems.

My Child's Not Learning to Read in School! What Can I Do?

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Introduction

The remarkable journey that led to writing this book started with a simple question from one of my students.¹ In 1990 I'd accepted a job at Watkinson School, an independent, college-preparatory day school for grades 6 through 12 in Hartford, Connecticut. Watkinson had developed a special niche in the local private school market. It accepted average to above average students, but it had developed a strong academic extra help department. Thus, it also accepted a slightly larger than average number of students with learning disabilities or who needed additional academic support. Watkinson developed a special approach to the educational process and many students who were struggling at other schools could do well there with extra help.

Students came to the "Learning Skills" teachers for assistance with reading, spelling, writing, organization and overall academic skills. I was working with two students, editing a paper they were writing for their 7th grade English class. Serena² had spelled the word "apple" incorrectly as "appel".

"You know," she stated, "I can never remember which way it's supposed to be."

"Yes. It's spelled 'le' not 'el.'" I didn't realize I was breaking at least one rule of good teaching, by telling her the answer rather than asking her a question that would lead her to the answer, but it was still pretty early in my career.

Then Serena asked the magic question that started the journey. "How can you tell whether it's 'le' and not 'el'?"

"You know, that's a good question. There must be some rule or something. I don't know why it's that way. But maybe some of the other teachers will know."

I proceeded to seek out all the teachers in the English department and asked the question: Why is it a-p-p-l-e and not a-p-p-e-l? No one knew if there was a rule, and while they were polite, they seemed

¹ Because learning problems are not gender specific the gender of pronouns is alternated randomly.

² Student names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

disinterested in finding out if there was one. I didn't blame them. Most English teachers wanted to teach literature, and expressed no interest in teaching spelling to students who should have learned it already.

I stopped trying to figure out the answer to that question and kept on helping students with their work. It wasn't the kind of issue to keep anyone up at night. Correct spelling of one common word was of no importance in the larger scheme of things--helping students learn, get their work done, and do better in school. What was so discouraging was I felt all that I was doing was just helping students get through their courses. I wanted to teach them the skills they hadn't already learned. There was no magic wand to wave to solve the specific problem of each student, and I didn't expect that there would or should be. But it seemed that there should be a good, logical, systematic way of teaching these students the skills they'd missed so they could be independent and wouldn't need services any more.

I didn't realize that Serena's practical little question was actually addressing a tiny piece of a broader question that had significant implications for millions of people. Further, little did I know there was an answer, and it would come to me by way of "Read to Succeed."

I first encountered the "Read to Succeed" program early the next year when looking for volunteer work. A friend of mine knew the director of a really interesting adult literacy program, "Read to Succeed." It was jointly sponsored by the Metropolitan Hartford YMCA (Downtown Branch) and the *Hartford Courant* newspaper. I went there one evening a week and started working with the students. Within a couple of months, the director, Elaine Cheesman, asked all the volunteers to come to a Wednesday evening special training session. What she said was very specific regarding how the lessons with the adults were to be conducted. I asked her a couple of questions, and at the end of the workshop, she asked me to stay after everyone else left. She needed a new night supervisor for the program. She asked, was I certified and would I send her a resume?

In the early 1990's, Hartford was experiencing an economic downturn which affected Watkinson School's admissions--fewer students were applying and I'd already been shifted from full time to part time, so the prospect of a second job was appealing.

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I soon learned more about teaching reading than I knew existed. With extensive reading and self-education, but no graduate degrees, Elaine had developed a structured program that used a research-based method of teaching the students how to sound out words, how to spell words, and how a tutor was to correct student errors. She read carefully chosen materials, consulted with the Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) and carefully tracked the progress of the students. She discovered these research-based methods for helping these students learn to read and developed a program which ran almost totally with volunteers--Elaine and I were the only paid teachers. The sole requirements for volunteer tutors were that they pronounce words clearly, be able to say individual letter sounds, read nonsense words correctly, learn the standard lesson plan and correction procedure, and never read a word for a student.

We had a full and active program. Students came from urban and suburban neighborhoods and from all ethnic groups. About half had a high school diploma and about half didn't. Some students were married, some single, and many had children. Most had a reading level below 3rd grade, but some could read at the 5th or even 6th grade level. A few had taken some college courses and a couple even had graduate degrees. But all had one thing in common: their reading and spelling skills were weak and did not meet their needs. Many had turned down promotions because their reading skills were so deficient.

Students were required to come for two hours a day, Monday through Thursday. For one hour they used computers with a comprehension based reading program. The rest of the time they received individualized tutoring in how to sound out words.

Elaine discovered several things. First, virtually every student had attended school until they were at least 16, even most of the Caribbean Island immigrants, who had to pay for their education. Virtually no one was unschooled. So why were they unable to read? Elaine quickly realized that virtually all of them were learning disabled, specifically dyslexic. They all had trouble reading or sounding out unfamiliar words. The process of sounding out unfamiliar words is called "decoding."

Second, she learned that while nearly everyone made progress, (we tested the students every 6 months) a few stagnated. So, she decided to test how smart the students were. She obtained the *Test of Non-Verbal Intelligence* (TONI). It was a simple, reasonably accurate IQ (Intelligence Quotient) test. While not acceptable for schools, or formal assessments, it was for Read to Succeed, an excellent screening device. As she was beginning to suspect, the students who were not progressing, while in the “average” range of intelligence, were extremely close to the line that separates normal from below normal.

We made the heartbreaking decision to drop these few students from the program. Keeping them was offering false hope. From that point on, new students applying to the program were tested. If their TONI score was too low, it was unlikely that our program could help them. We subsequently learned that about half of the students who applied to Read to Succeed had TONI scores below 80. Scores this low mean that the individuals were below average in intelligence.

Third, Elaine learned that the recommended text for teaching reading to learning disabled students was a “linguistic” series of nine books called *Let’s Read*. (“Linguistic” refers to teaching using the structure and meaning of language.) The problem was that it was mind numbingly boring. In most books of this series, the left-hand page was a list of similar words (rat, fat, cat, sat, mat, tat, bat) *ad nauseum*. Book 1 is 80 pages of three letter words with just “short a” (like in ‘cat’), and the other texts don’t get any better. The right hand page was filled with sentences like, “A fat cat sat at a mat.” And later, “Stan had jam in a bun.” (*Let’s Read*, Book 4.)

We decided that we should find a better text. Then, Elaine, in her wisdom, decided to consult with our students, and they taught us something. One woman clutched the *Let’s Read* book to her breast and said, “Please, don’t take this away from us.” We were both dumbfounded. When Elaine asked her why, the student told her that yes, the books were really boring and childlike, but it was the first time in her life that she successfully read anything. She was learning to read and making progress. If we got some other books, she might not learn to read.

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From that instant we realized that the *Let's Read* texts were the best thing available and the test results showed that what we were doing was working, so we decided to keep the series in the Read to Succeed program--with one modification. We divided the students by their test results on the TONI. Those who had scored higher than 95 on the TONI were given different texts--first *Reading from Scratch* by Dorothy van den , then *Angling for Words* by Carolyn Bowen. A year or two later, we finally settled on Barbara Wilson's *Wilson Reading System* for the smarter students. Ten years later, I still use all these texts.

The adults who'd scored below 95 on the TONI stayed with *Let's Read* and were perfectly happy. As far as many experts were concerned, *Let's Read* is a brilliantly conceived text series and nothing is better for young students or severely reading disabled students. Too bad if it's boring. If someone learns to read using a boring text, it's still thrilling.

We knew things were going very well when Elaine announced in the annual report she had to submit to the YMCA and *Hartford Courant* that the *average* reading gain per student was *five years*. In other words, a typical adult student who came to Read to Succeed with a reading level at or below 3rd grade would be reading five grades higher in 12 months. This was accomplished with only volunteer tutors and two relatively novice professionals.

After a couple of years working nights at Read to Succeed, I decided that what was working for adults could be applied to my students at Watkinson School. I explained to my supervisor (Downey Knapp) what was happening at Read to Succeed and that I wanted to start using the Read to Succeed system with the students at school. She enthusiastically agreed and we tested some of them using the same assessments that we were using at Read to Succeed. Then she started assigning me students with weak reading and spelling skills. In less than two years my part time position became overtime.

For seven years, at Watkinson School, I tutored between 6 and 9 students per day, mostly in individual sessions, then left school at 3:15 and dashed to downtown Hartford and Read to Succeed three nights a

week. There I worked with students and trained the volunteer tutors how to teach the students to read.

During this time, I would occasionally encounter teachers from other schools. Most of these teachers taught 4th through 8th grades. They expressed concern about some of their seemingly bright students who had problems reading. These teachers complained that they believed that other methods would work for the students in their classes who were struggling, but they weren't being allowed to explore other options. One educator friend sat with me in my kitchen for four hours while I explained the specific methods. She told me that when she was in college and taking reading courses the professors told her that the English language was so irregular that it was at best only 50% phonetic. In other words, don't bother to teach students how to sound out words because it's a waste of time. Nothing could be further from the truth.

After seven years several things in my life changed, and it was time to leave Read to Succeed, but I continued tutoring reading at Watkinson School. Most students were middle schoolers, but nearly every year at least one student in every grade, 6 through twelve, was on my roster. I'd also begun to tutor a few private students during the summer, and once I left Read to Succeed, parents requested that I continue working with their children after school started.

Within a year my schedule was even more full. Parents would call and ask me to teach their child to read. They'd heard about me from some other parents, from Read to Succeed, from psychological therapists or educational psychologists who were also seeing one of my students, or from the local chapter of the LDA. Now I tutored four days after school till 8 at night and still parents kept calling. It was impossible to say no. The number of students increased and the only way to fit them in was on Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings. I had to shift from one-hour sessions to 45-minute sessions so an extra child could be squeezed in each day.

It was crazy, but these students were not learning to read in school. Most of them were pretty bright, some exceptionally so. Many were "identified" as needing special education. All of them had dyslexia, or

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also had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and all of their parents told essentially the same story.

The parents had believed or suspected that their child had trouble reading from early in the child's schooling. Sometimes the school was helpful, but more often the school refused to admit that the student had a problem. Whichever case, whether the child got help or not, whatever action the school took was not working to address the child's specific need(s). The child still lagged behind her peers in reading and it was affecting many, if not all areas of school performance. It almost became a litany: My child hates school; he feels bad about himself; she thinks the teacher can't help her; he's not learning; she's falling behind; he seems very smart but is about to fail 6th grade; the teacher doesn't think she has a problem; he comes home and cries every day; we paid an expert a lot of money for this testing and it shows that there's a learning problem, but the school still won't do anything.

They came from nearly every school system surrounding Hartford and nearly every private school.

It seemed that every time a parent called, I was saying the same things to them over and over. And this also became a litany: The school doesn't really understand the nature of the problem; they don't know how to handle these students; your child needs a specific type of instruction for which the teachers aren't trained; the school doesn't have or hasn't used the right diagnostic tests; the school won't tell you what you need to know because it makes them look bad or makes them legally responsible; the administration hasn't sought out the right training for the teachers; or they have to keep a close eye on their special education budget.

Most parents felt extremely frustrated and some had already consulted a lawyer. Most commented that over the years they believed that the school came to see them as "difficult." And they all added, "I don't care anymore. I just want what's best for my child."

The parent would bring the student to me and after a short evaluation, it was clear that most were reading two to three grades below their peers. Some were reading on grade level, but they were the brightest ones who should have been reading two to three grades above their peers. Once they were taught using methods that worked for them

and finished the systematic, sequential, phonics-based curriculum, all of them could read at their intellectual level--average students were on grade level, smarter students, for the first time were reading above grade level.

Over the last 12 years or so, the State of Connecticut has done a reasonably good job of mandating better, research based, reading methods in the elementary grades, but not all schools have fully adopted the system.

Elaine left Read to Succeed, but until August, 2003 maintained a part-time, volunteer position as teacher and "Director Emeritus," which allowed her to continue working with the adult students one day a week. She received her Doctorate in Special Education from the University of Connecticut, and teaches workshops for school systems in Multisensory Structured Language Education (MSLE), the methods she adopted. Some teachers, mostly special education teachers, now use the methods and their students improve consistently.

After 11 years (4 of those years of teaching 12 hours a day), I left Watkinson School, but continued tutoring private students at home. I've learned that there *are* good systems to teach these children how to function, thrive and become independent academically. It's not that I'm an unusual teacher, it's that I've been blessed with the opportunity to learn methods that work.

So why write this book? Connecticut has a reasonably well-funded educational system which is acknowledged as one of the best in the country. If families in Connecticut are having difficulties convincing schools to adopt methods that work with these reading disabled children, there likely are many more families across the country experiencing the same difficulties.

The reason to write the book is to validate the experience of all the frustrated parents I can't reach personally. The goal is to help parents by describing various reading disorders, outlining methods and strategies for working with the school, advise parents on getting appropriate testing, give information to explore alternative options for these students, and help parents educate themselves so they can get through this process.

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The book is also written for those teachers and administrators who are seeking more effective ways to teach reading disabled children to read and spell.

And, yes, Serena, there is a reason why it's "apple" and not "appel" or even "appal." The answer is imperfect, but it's better than no answer at all. It's because there is a group of words which follow a pattern of a consonant with "le" at the end like in apple, rifle, bundle, candle, table, and sizzle. (See Appendix 3 for more information on linguistic structure.) It's interesting that sometimes the simplest questions have a profound influence on our thinking and our lives.

Chapter 1: What are the First Indications?

1.0 Do You Suspect That Your Child Has a Learning Problem?

Why do you suspect that your child might be having difficulty in school? Does he resist going to school? Does she come home crying? Does he complain about the teacher? Does she say she hates school? Does he say the teacher hates him? Has this been going on for a long time? Or, do these signs sound more familiar? Does she have trouble saying the words printed on the page? Does he make frequent incorrect guesses? Does the teacher send home notes or call with minor or not so minor concerns about classroom behavior or peer relations?

Whatever the basis of your suspicions, you believe that you need to take action—and so, you want to go talk to the teacher, but you are not certain how your concerns will be received.

Before discussing the interactions you may have with your child's school, it would be helpful to know what are the four common reasons why a child has difficulty learning to read. Across the general population approximately two out of ten children will experience trouble learning to read. Some of them have trouble sounding out words, which is commonly called "dyslexia." Some will not learn because they are not "tuned-in" to the learning process due to attention problems, referred to as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD. A few will not be able to benefit from school because of a combination of these two conditions. And, sadly, a few will not be able to understand what they read because they lack the intellect. These children often have good social skills or even specific talents. However, their brains lack the ability to make sense of the sound symbol relationship or they cannot remember what many words mean nor can they recognize or sound out most words. It is also important to realize that in addition to these four main reasons for reading difficulties there may also be other psychological or biological reasons a child may have trouble learning to read.

It will be helpful for you to know and be able to face these possibilities; not to diagnose the problem yourself, but so you can work

with the school to ensure the best educational opportunities for your child based on his or her needs.

Thus if your child is having trouble learning to read, he or she is most likely to have one of these four problems: dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (commonly called ADHD or ADD), a combination of dyslexia and ADHD, or a lower intellectual ability.

1.1 What Is Dyslexia? A Simple Explanation

The child who is dyslexic will have trouble sounding out words, recognizing words she already knows, or reads in a halting, slow or “disfluent³” manner. Perhaps in kindergarten, or before starting formal schooling, a child might have trouble naming letters, learning the alphabet, or the sounds the letters make. One 2nd grade student looked at the word “wag” and said, “dog.” He thought the letter ‘w’ made a ‘d’ sound. He believed that because of the name: “Double u” began with a ‘d’ sound—he was associating the /d/⁴ sound in the word “double”.

He also did not have a consistent idea of which vowels made which sounds, so he had to guess and usually guessed incorrectly because he had no clear understanding of the sounds. After five or six months of phonics based lessons, he’d come to better understand the relationships between letters and sounds, but still needed much more work to really begin reading at his potential. Then, his family moved to another state and he attended a school for dyslexic children where he made good progress.

Another student, who came to Watkinson School in 6th grade, was Kenny, as mentioned in the Introduction. He seemed extremely bright, told wonderful fantasy and science fiction stories, and even at this early age showed astounding talent in art. However, he only read at about a 3rd grade level and, while he did realize that the letters represented sounds, he had a very incomplete knowledge of the sound/letter relationship. His “decoding” (sounding out) skills were extremely

³ “Disfluent is a term of educational jargon. It means “not fluent,” but it probably won’t be found in a dictionary.

⁴ When letter sounds are noted, they are written in slash marks: the letter ‘d’ is pronounced /d/.

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weak. He had attended another private school through 5th grade and despite the small class size and individual attention, he made little progress with reading. The teachers kept saying that he would catch up later. His mother felt extremely frustrated with the school's methods, and Kenny felt constantly stressed and often came home crying.

His mother told me after Kenny and I had been working for several months and he'd begun to show progress, "You have no idea how many hours we worked just trying to teach him the alphabet--we drew letters in the sand, used felt, blocks, plastic and sandpaper letters. We cut them out together and traced them over and over. I thought he'd never learn it."

Later, when he entered high school, she had him tested by a pediatric neurologist for intelligence and learning disabilities. She felt that he needed a "diagnosis" of a learning disability so he could take college entrance tests without time limits. The results showed that he was average intellectually, and we both felt something was wrong with the results. We just could not believe that he was only of "average" intelligence and didn't feel better until the first of his College Board tests came back when he was in 10th grade.

Although Kenny and I had not worked together since he'd finished 8th grade, his mother almost chased me down as I crossed the school parking lot. She was exultant! Kenny scored in the top five percent nationally on the PSAT's. Still later, she called to say that he was accepted as an early decision student to a small, but prestigious, liberal arts college and that his essay had been considered quite outstanding by the admissions department. (This school was not noted for having a program to assist learning disabled students.) When we had started 7 years before, Kenny could not write a complete sentence that made any sense.

Kenny's story is important for several reasons. First, Kenny had trouble learning the alphabet and sounds of language (phonemes). This is a primary indication of dyslexia, or a reading disability. Second, although Kenny clearly showed signs of a reading disability, his elementary school did nothing to appropriately address it. This shows that schools may not be effective in teaching reading and writing skills to every child, even bright ones. Third, even highly involved and caring

parents may have difficulty finding the right resources to help their child. Kenny's mother searched for years to find the right educational solutions for her son. Fourth, if a child who seems bright is not learning, then something specific and appropriate must be done to remedy the situation.

Kenny is one of the fortunate children who eventually attained success in school, however, his early years were filled with unnecessary tears and frustrations for him and his parents.

1.2 What Is an Attention Deficit and How Can It Affect Reading?

This topic generates much controversy. Despite thousands of research studies on the topic, many educators and parents do not understand this disorder. Further, the popular press sometimes sensationalizes the results of a single study but does not fully explain the implications leaving the public with a misunderstanding of different treatments for ADHD. Some of the students who are considered to have ADHD may not always appear to meet the diagnostic criteria⁵ that causes them to be continually distracted and distractible. Many of these children will have little or no difficulty reading.

The individual students with ADHD who do have difficulty reading, however, might manifest it in a number of different ways. He may read quickly, stumbling over and guessing--sometimes wildly--at unfamiliar words. She may read a passage perfectly, but, when asked what it was about, have only a vague notion or even no idea what she read. Or he may even have a fairly good idea what the passage was about, but miss critical details. Since many comprehension questions require a student to analyze and combine information gleaned from a passage, he will get a number of questions wrong. Often, especially in the lower elementary grades, this is not severe enough to alert teachers, or sometimes even parents, until the child is seriously behind.

⁵ The American Psychological Association produces a "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual" or "DSM," which lists symptoms, signs and rules for diagnosing psychological conditions. The latest edition of this is referred to as the DSM-IV. More on the DSM and ADHD in Chapter 3.

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Annie, a 4th grader, is one child who had an undiagnosed problem with sustaining attention. Her mother called to say that she seemed to be having trouble with reading. The school told them it was not enough of a problem for the school to be able to do something about it, but if the parents wanted to give her a little outside extra help with a tutor, it would be a good idea.

Annie came for a simple evaluation that many dyslexic students take, but showed none of the typical signs of dyslexia. Still, she was having trouble with her reading, so she began coming for lessons. It soon became evident that she did not always have clear comprehension and her vocabulary seemed below that of a 4th grader. While she read most simple words quite well, when she came to a longer, complex multi syllabic word, she just rushed over it, often jumbling it and saying some word that made no sense. When asked to go back and look at the word more carefully, she would, on closer examination, be able to say the word correctly without misstatements or hesitation. In fact, her decoding skills were perfectly adequate, however, she demonstrated a lack of attention to the details of the letters printed on the page. This lack of attention is characteristic of ADHD.

Her mother and I had several long conversations about Annie's learning difficulties. Was it that she had an unusual deficit in language comprehension, or was it something else? Other students who had a diagnosis of ADHD read much the same way Annie did—they just rushed over words, missing the details, thus not learning new words from context. Also, she was very “chatty,” often changing the subject and interrupting instructions but in a cute and charming way. Could her problem be ADHD?

Annie's mother was familiar with the problem as Annie had a younger sibling who was hyperactive and was taking medication. However, Annie didn't fit her mom's concept of an ADHD child, nor did she fit the school's profile, either. She was a polite and appropriately behaved, popular little girl, who tried her best, but didn't seem to be able to follow written instructions and was always asking questions. Her questions were actually developing into a problem because she asked so many; her continual questioning of her teacher to

re-explain things disturbed the flow of the lessons. This took the teacher's time away from other students or the whole class.

The teacher finally told her she could only ask a limited number of questions. Thus, the issue her mother wrestled with was this: was Annie's problem understanding instructions and other written material due to her not paying attention or was it related to some undiagnosed difficulty with learning language? She appeared to be listening and trying to understand. Wasn't she paying attention?

After the family consulted with an educational psychologist and a pediatric neurologist, Annie's mother told me that Annie would be trying some of her brother's medication. The doctors felt that a "trial run" of the medication might answer some questions about her functioning and help her learn better. If the medication worked, then it would be obvious, if it didn't, then ADHD wasn't the problem. Gradually her medication was increased, and when we worked together there were significant changes in her behavior. She talked less, made fewer distracting, unrelated comments and could remain focused productively on a task for much longer than before. In addition, her reading multi syllabic words improved significantly.

When Annie began 5th grade she continued taking medication. By this point Annie was presumed to have ADHD, like her brother. Within a few weeks both her family and the school began to see important changes in her ability to learn and remember new information and follow written instructions. The medication also continued to make an incredible difference in her tutoring sessions. She interrupted less frequently and stayed on task even longer. She began to acquire new vocabulary and concepts she had missed out on during grades one through four.

1.3 Can a Child Have Both Dyslexia and ADHD?

The student who has a combination of dyslexia and attention problems (whether the child is diagnosed with ADHD or not) often is identified as having problems earlier than other students. This is a "double problem" (also known as "co-morbidity") that affects areas other than reading, and may influence nearly every area of the curriculum as well as behavior and peer interactions.

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One student who was greatly affected by this type of problem was Janie. She was bright--her IQ testing showed her to be in the top 20% of students, but she had problems almost since day one in school. She was the biggest child in her class so the other children made fun of her, she was annoying, demanding, dependent on the teacher for attention, and she didn't learn. Everything the school tried was a failure, and Janie was a failure, too. The school diagnosed a learning disability, so they knew she had dyslexia, which affected her ability in every verbally based subject, and she had trouble with math, too. However, no one realized that in addition to her dyslexia, her learning was being affected by ADHD. Her mother called me when Janie was in 5th grade, saying that she and her husband were giving up on the public school system and applying to a small, supportive private school, but one not specifically designed for students with learning disabilities. Janie's parents hoped that a small, nurturing environment would help her learn.

After working with Janie for a while, it became clear that she was masterful at avoiding learning. She had developed avoidance as a survival strategy: she was so anxious about being held accountable for any learning that she just created disruption after disruption and distraction after distraction to avoid having to be called on to perform any academic task. Even one-on-one sessions with her were unproductive. She was so polite in changing the subject to other interesting, but irrelevant topics that it was impossible to keep her on task. Before the middle of her 6th grade year, it was clear that the private school experience was a disaster. It was a disaster partly because she was not learning and partly because she had created the same social problems at the new school that had plagued her at her old school. Today she is in a different school with more consistent and intense structure. In addition, she is receiving four times the number of hours of instruction in the same reading and writing methods that I employed. She is doing extremely well, making the honor roll every term. Here, the key to Janie's success was a tightly structured school setting and intensive instruction in phonics based reading methods.

1.4 What if a Child Is Below Average in Intelligence?

Students with a below average intellect (i.e., low IQ) present an especially heartbreaking situation. It is highly unlikely that these children will learn to read. These individuals lack the ability to learn to sound out words or associate printed words with meaning. Some might learn to read at a 3rd grade level, but will never attain an age appropriate reading level.

Many of the students with a low IQ will be labeled as “mentally handicapped” and qualify for special education services through the school and additional programs via the local Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC). However, there are a number of individuals whose IQ is not low enough to “qualify” to receive services. To be labeled mentally handicapped, a child must show not only a low intellect (as defined by an IQ below 70), but also show slow development in the area of social skills. There are people who have a lower intellect, but demonstrate no difficulties with social interaction. They often have normal abilities in areas other than intellect. They can be responsible, athletic, socially well adjusted, and creative. In other words, they are normal in every way except they have difficulty learning information related to academics. Thus, they are not considered mentally handicapped.

Different school systems have different ways of dealing with these students. Some of these children are labeled as “developmentally delayed,” and they can receive special education services. However, in many school systems, unless a parent or interested mentor advocates for these students, they will likely fall through the cracks.

There were several adults at Read to Succeed who could not learn to read. One, Leon, 55, was admitted to the program after we’d started giving the TONI IQ (Test of Non Verbal Intelligence) tests. He scored a 51 IQ, well below the cut off point of 85 set by Elaine, the director. However, when interviewed, Leon told us he was married with two children. He’d supported his wife, and children as they attended college. He’d worked at the same company doing factory work for over 25 years. The company had tried to lay him off several years before he came to Read to Succeed, but he’d obtained legal services and got the company to hire him back. Elaine and I just could not believe that with

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such a combination of common sense and drive, Leon was incapable of learning to read. There must be something wrong with his IQ test results.

He was admitted to the program and started in *Let's Read*. He made his way through the three letter consonant-vowel-consonant words, then into the single consonant blends. However, he could not read words that contained more than four sounds or letters. When working with him, it seemed as if his brain could not, literally, put two plus two together. He could look at "end" and say it, then look at "lend" and say it, and he could even look at "blend" and say it--as long as the three words followed each other in sequence. But given a grouping like "land" to "blend," his responses were slow, hesitating and frequently wrong--he appeared to be guessing blindly. He just could not make any further progress and we had to drop him from the Read to Succeed program.

Leon lacked the intellectual ability to put words together, recognize words printed on the page and could not understand what the words meant. He had many capabilities as a father, employee, and husband, but he could not learn to read.

1.5 What Hope Is There?

While individuals with lower IQs may not ever be able to really read, there are solutions to the learning difficulties for dyslexic or ADHD students and students with a combination of those two problems. For the students of lower intellect, probably the best thing to do is to teach them survival vocabulary and give them good vocational training similar to the programs designed for the mentally handicapped. These individuals often have abilities in areas outside academics and they need to find a way to express these talents and to earn a living.

Dyslexic students can learn to read up to their intellectual level given appropriate instruction. In addition, ADHD students can also try medication and receive appropriate classroom structure. The key lies in finding the best way to achieve these goals for your child.

Remember, the Federal government passed a law requiring every school district to provide a free and appropriate education (FAPE) to

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every child. It is up to parents to work either inside or outside the system to ensure that their child's educational needs are met.

The chapters that follow will address dyslexia and ADHD in greater depth and discuss some of the educational and social controversies, implications and solutions. If the school does not seem to be meeting the needs of your child, it's important to have the information that will allow you to work with the school to ensure appropriate instruction.

Provides information and solutions for childrens reading and learning problems.

My Child's Not Learning to Read in School! What Can I Do?

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