

Education is about reading or it is about nothing at all. Reading for our society is the gateway to all the rest of education. If you cannot read efficiently by the end of fourth grade, that gateway is every bit as closed to you as the building itself is to a wheelchair-bound student without a ramp.

And here's the proof: once a dyslexia-minded child hits 5th grade, 504s and IEPs become less about learning to read, and focus instead on compensating for the fact that the child cannot read efficiently enough to access learning without reading. We basically tell these kids to just sit back in their wheelchair and let us construct one ramp after another for them, until at 18, we release them into a ramp-less world. And there is nothing but a stubborn refusal to adapt that prevents us from teaching these wonderful, creative, spirited children to read in the first place.

If a child never went to school, and lived in a non-print environment, he would still walk, talk, eat and function as a normal human being, but **he would not read**. Our brains are hard wired specifically for walking, talking, working and socializing, but they are **not hard wired to read**. Reading is literally imposed upon our brains from the outside in, and **must be taught**.

if a dyslexic child does not read, and lives in a place where no one reads, he isn't sick or handicapped in any discernible way. No medical doctor would find any cause for alarm. But put that same child here, in our world, and his illiteracy becomes more profound the older he gets. Dyslexia is clearly an educational issue, and our educational system must acknowledge that fact, or acknowledge what they are CHOOSING by not acknowledging it: to relegate an entire segment of our population to an ineffective education not because THEY cannot learn, but because WE refuse to learn and apply what all the research and experience says about *HOW they learn*.

We accept the fact that those we hire to teach our children need to be educated themselves in the skill of teaching; they are already instructed in the tools of the trade which are effective for the 60% of the kids who learn according to that basic model. Once we have acknowledged that teachers must be skilled, how can we then deny that they must be skilled to teach all learning types? Why do we not insist that they be trained to reach that remaining 40%, those kids who can learn to read, but who need a different technique?

Once we affirm that Dyslexia is indeed an educational issue, the schools training our teachers will have to fall in and train them accordingly, which will result in more effective, **appropriate** teaching of these kids. With a

simple change in wording here in Topeka, you have the power to flick that first domino in a long chain-reaction leading to all these children actually receiving that **APPROPRIATE** education they've been promised.

16 years ago, we were told by an educational psychologist that our son would probably never be able to read, and we needed to plan accordingly. Instead of writing an "educational plan", we put him in a private school that was more enlightened, at great personal expense to us, because we believed that his learning to read was fundamental to his functioning in this world. I trained to be his tutor and worked with him for three years.

Last week, he transferred a bit late into an upper level Finance class at college. His first day in class, the professor asked if anyone had read the Berkshire Hathaway Annual Report that he'd assigned. Joe was the only one to raise his hand. He had read it, not for the class, but on his own when it was first issued. My severely dyslexic son, who was never supposed to read, has above a 3.4 GPA his senior year in Finance with no accommodations whatsoever, and has become what our public educational system claims to aim for: he has been prepared for **further education, employment and independent living**. (20 USC 1400 (d). Educating dyslexic children is not a question of IF; it is an issue of **how**. We know **how**. We have proven **how**. Our schools must be told to implement that "**how**" as well. As representatives of the people of Kansas, it is imperative that you enforce the mandate to provide all our children with the free and **appropriate education** our nation's educational policy mandates.

Barb Orsi