

Solving the Problems of Dyslexia (Reading Disability)

In their recent book, *The Dyslexia Debate* (Cambridge University Press, March, 2014), Julian G. Elliott and Elena L. Grigorenko have proposed that we abandon the term dyslexia because it has outlived its usefulness. They note many difficulties with the definition and use of the term. They outline the inequities in the manner in which the term is applied and the interventions and accommodations that are available. These points are very important ones and clearly worthy of consideration.

However, abandoning the term will not solve the serious challenges that the field faces. These problems are as follows:

1. The term *dyslexia* is vague and ill defined. It is used in many different and often inappropriate ways.
2. Dyslexia is sometimes defined in terms of the discrepancy definition (IQ score – achievement score).
3. It is typically the case that a long and expensive test battery is required for the identification of dyslexia. Because of this requirement, interventions and accommodations are denied to families and individuals who cannot afford this testing.
4. There is an undemocratic and inequitable distribution of resources in regard to individuals experiencing reading problems.
5. Classroom instruction in reading is often woefully inadequate.
6. Intervention for reading difficulties is too little and too late. Children at risk for reading difficulties are not identified at a young age and are not provided with interventions that would reduce the likelihood of later reading difficulties. Students with reading difficulties at any level are not properly identified. Adults with reading problems cannot get assessments of, and interventions for, their difficulties because of the costs and the lack of availability.
7. Existing types of intervention are often haphazard in that they are not well planned and not well executed.

There are solutions to these problems:

1. Dyslexia or a reading disability is defined as a severe difficulty with accuracy and/or fluency or reading words and/or pseudowords. There may also be difficulties with spelling, writing, and reading comprehension. If we advocate for this definition, then it will remove much of the definitional chaos.

2. The discrepancy definition, that is, using a large difference between IQ scores and reading achievement as a definition of dyslexia, should be abandoned. We have ample evidence that individuals with reading problems and high IQ scores (the discrepancy definition) do not differ from individuals with reading difficulties whose IQ scores are not significantly higher than their reading scores. In addition, IQ scores do not predict the ability to benefit from remediation. This issue is a real one; many jurisdictions still use the IQ test and the discrepancy definition.
3. Considering the definition of dyslexia, all that is strictly necessary are measures of accuracy and fluency of word and pseudoword reading. Measures of reading comprehension, spelling, arithmetic calculation and mathematical problem solving may be helpful in planning interventions. Measures of cognitive processes do not contribute to the definition and are not necessary for appropriate interventions.
4. Extensive psychological testing is expensive and not affordable for many families. Yet individuals are denied access to interventions and accommodations without this testing. Appropriate assessments should be used as described in #3.
5. Teachers need to be trained in appropriate interventions, including but not limited to, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, syntactic, morphological, and orthographic awareness.
6. Assessments to identify children at risk for reading problems need to be instituted.
7. A response to intervention (RTI) model should be widely used. The essential components of this model are frequent monitoring of progress and intervention provided as soon as it is necessary.

Merely getting rid of the term dyslexia without addressing these problems will not solve the serious issues that society faces in regard to individuals with reading problems.

It is important to deal with the basic issues outlined above without arguing about the term dyslexia.

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