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## DYSLEXIA: Myths and Facts

By Leah Schlager

Why is it that for some children reading just seems to come naturally, the next step on the continuum of development — as expected as speaking, running or playing — while for others it is slow laborious work, boring, confusing, difficult, and sometimes unattainable?

Dyslexia, long thought of as a disability which causes children to invert or confuse the order of letters, is now defined as any unexplained inability to read.

One out of five children is diagnosed with reading problems. That amounts to 20 percent or 10 million children in the United States and statistically almost as many girls as boys. These numbers run across the social, racial and economic spectrum.

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## NO LONGER SILENT: SPEAKING OUT AGAINST SCHOOL BULLYING

By Marla Atkins & Leah Schlager

*May 21, 1998: Three sixth-grade boys had a "hit list" and were plotting to kill fellow classmates....*

*April 20, 1999: Two teenagers wearing long, black trench coats opened fire in a suburban high school in Littleton, Colorado....*

*May 8, 2003: A group of female high school seniors in Northbrook, Illinois were caught on tape hazing junior girls. The young students were forced to eat dirt, fish guts, and pet food and beaten up so badly that....*

*Sept. 19, 2003: ...in Bellmore, N.Y.... three young players were allegedly sodomized by three older players with broomsticks, pine cones and golf balls—part of a hazing ritual....*

By the time school hall bullying and adolescent harassment become headline grabbing tragedies—we all find it quite easy to differentiate them from what we regard as typical “kids will be kids” behavior.

Amidst the horror and disbelief that our children are ca-

**“When you feel like there’s no one who cares about you or can help you, all you can do is lash out.”**

pable of these vicious, cold, seemingly planned acts of violence, and usually against one of their own, we wonder “Where...how did this happen?” “Did anyone (parent, teacher) realize...see this

coming?” “Were there signs?” “Could this have been averted?”

Bullying differs from other types of negative behaviors in that it is

- aggressive and intentionally harmful,
- carried out repeatedly over a period of time, usually between two specific individuals or groups and
- characterized by an imbalance of power— one more powerful and the other more junior or vulnerable.

Results of the first nationally represented survey on the frequency and consequences

of bullying among American children revealed that 30 percent of students in grades six through ten are involved in

moderate or frequent bullying—as bullies, as victims, or both. Approximately 60 percent of boys characterized as bullies were ultimately convicted of at least one crime by age

Cont'd on page 3





## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Joseph Geliebter, Ph.D.

Our last issue focused on Understanding Autism and reviewed the latest developments in both assessment and treatment of this disorder that has reached epidemic proportions. For example, myths about autism, such as the “refrigerator mother”— a parent who fails to attach to the child — were replaced with research revealing biological and neurological origins.

Research has also validated the view that the brain continues to develop throughout our life span. Even so, the brain is never as receptive as during early childhood and critical developmental periods. These findings are gratifying for those of us who have been dedicated to early intervention programs.

We continue to be both gratified and proud of the growth of our own Early Intervention Program, Netcare. Every day our therapists are proving, one child at a time, that “With a little bit of reality, dreams become possible.”

Our feature article focuses on a troubling and growing issue in our schools and neighborhoods-Bullying. I recently attended a mental health conference in which an expert on this subject emphasized that without the bystander or the audience, bullies would not be empowered to inflict pain on their victims. That is all the more reason that schools should seriously consider workshops and develop a no-tolerance policy where both staff and students sign an anti-bullying contract.

Consistent with our mission, Comprehensive is proud to be on the forefront of the latest findings and research in the field of education. Educating parents, children, and continuing to expand the education of our affiliated professionals is a primary goal of our newsletter. We welcome feedback from our readership.

Sincerely,

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# READING COMPREHENSION WORKSHOPS

by Arnold Samet



Margaret Jo Shepherd, Ed.D.

Today, we know all that we need to know about how to teach reading. We just need to do it! That was a key message to the participants in a Reading Comprehension Workshop, delivered as part of Comprehensive Network’s workshop series.

The workshop was delivered by Margaret Jo Shepherd, Ed.D., renowned reading expert, Professor Emeritus at Teachers College, Columbia University, and Director for Special Education at the Center for Social and Emotional Education

Dr. Shepherd summarized bottom line conclusions culled from more than four decades of Federally-sponsored research performed at university reading centers.

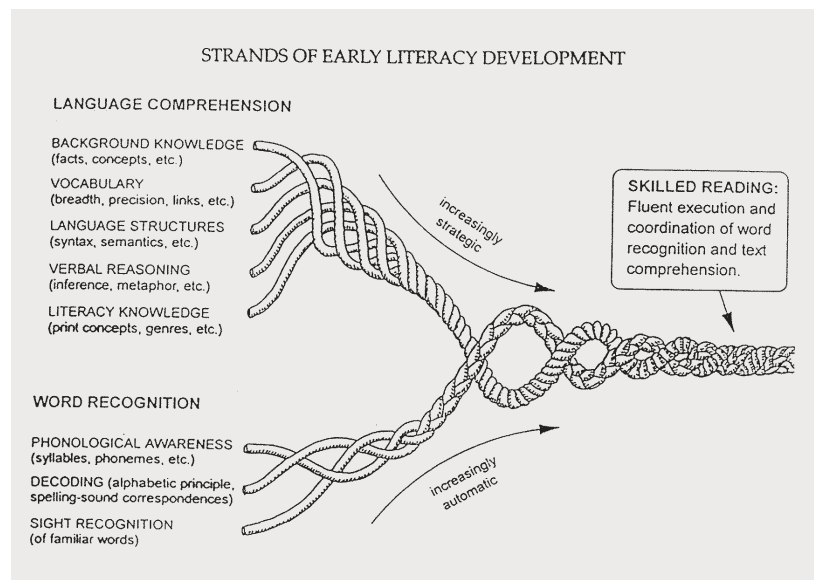
- Reading and comprehension skills are proven to be vital to combat

poverty and to empower individuals to lead successful lives.

- We understand how various skills are developed and integrated in good readers.
- We can teach these skills effectively - to all types of students - including those with learning disabilities.

Decades ago, comprehension skills were thought to be secondary to basic decoding - and they received too little attention in reading education. But since research demonstrated the need for emphasizing comprehension, it has increasingly become a priority in both teacher training and educational practice. “Reading is a conversation between the reader and the text,” however, it is a meaningless exercise if the reader does not comprehend what the text is telling him. Therefore, it is important to nurture comprehension as early as possible, as this is essential for developing overall communication, language and thinking skills. How? We begin by reading to pre-school children, to foster interest, vocabulary and experiences. In later grades, we use teaching methods which prep children to anticipate ideas in the text, process them during reading, and digest them after reading.

Dr. Shepherd will repeat the workshop on Monday, June 21, when she returns from Afghanistan, where she is a consultant on Curriculum and Teacher Education Development to the Ministry of Education in Kabul.



*BULLYING...Cont. from Page 1*

24, compared to 23 percent of boys who were not characterized as bullies; 40 percent had three or more convictions by age 40.

Adults often see but dismiss the manipulative power and influence of cliques. They may see the isolated child, a schoolyard fight, even tears, but shrug these off as typical childhood experiences—an all too accepted rite of passage that supposedly all children must undergo.

However, studies have found that children who are bullied are five times more likely to be depressed than other children and are more prone to suicide. It is also not surprising to learn that 71 percent of the attackers

***Usually bullies have no empathy for their victims, so his tears, pain or depression motivates the bully to continue rather than desist.***

had themselves experienced severe and long-standing forms of bullying—persecution, threats, harassment, verbal abuse and physical attacks.

“This is for all the people who made fun of us all these years,” Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold said laughing as they fired semi-automatic weapons and set off pipe bombs, killing 12 fellow students, a teacher and finally themselves. Once the initial shock wore off, peers said they weren’t surprised. “With all the animosity between the various social groups at Columbine, something like this was bound to happen. It must have been hell for them....”

For many people, the word “bully” conjures up not only a great deal of anger, but also terrible long lasting memories of humiliation, embarrassment and pain. Ms. America, Ms. Erika Harold, recalls being bullied in the ninth grade. “It started out with people calling me names, and then it got worse. They threw things at me, they vandalized my house, and they sang nasty songs about me in the hallways and classrooms. It got so bad that I felt like I was in danger physically.”



*A bully can spot a victim a mile away. Children who are targeted most frequently seem to be those with low self-es-*

*teem, few friends and who cry easily. Most victims are different in some way—and a bully easily spots and uses this. Some victims may have a disability or are poor at sports.*

*They may be short or overweight, dress or speak differently—or just new to the school. Usually bullies have no empathy for their victims, so his tears, pain or depression motivates the bully to continue rather than desist.*

A bully may victimize someone because he thinks it will make him more popular with the “in” crowd or it may make him appear tough, someone not to be messed with. In addition, it may gain him the attention he craves. Sometimes bullies are jealous of the victim, or they themselves had been bullied to the point where they lash back—an act of desperation.

***30 percent of students in grades six through ten are involved in moderate or frequent bullying—as bullies, as victims, or both.***

“When you feel like there’s no one who cares about you or can help you, all you can do is lash out,” said a student, referring to the harassment aimed at Harris and Klebold by the Columbine school jocks.

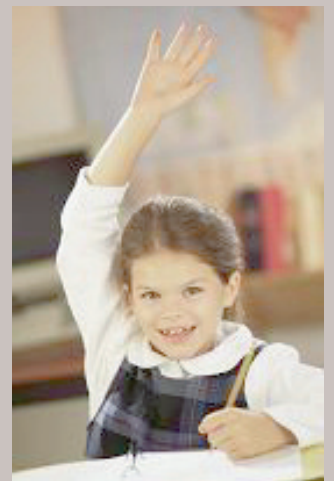
Since bullying often takes place when adults are not present, and the victims are fearful to tell anyone that they are being bullied, it is difficult to identify the victims. However, there are some non-verbal signs for parents and teachers to look out for. For

*Cont'd. on page 4*

## NEWSNEWSNEWSNEWS

*by Nancy Bruno*

BiNet, Inc. is a proud participant in the NYC Department of Education’s “No Child Left Behind” program. It is our first year as an approved vendor providing supplemental education services to eligible students in NYC Public Schools. BiNet’s unique and customized tutoring programs focus on the individual educational needs of students through one-on-one or group instructions. Our team of tutors, professional educators, and program administrators are dedicated to the common goal of helping students achieve academic improvement and scholastic success.



**BULLYING...** *Cont. from Page 3*

instance, a child might resist going to school and feign headaches or stomach aches. Parents and teachers may notice a child becoming withdrawn, cling, experience changes in sleep or appetite. Some children will have difficulty concentrating or become non-communicative. Some blatant signs such as clothing that is repeatedly damaged or “lost” or unexplained bruises and cuts are also often missed signs.

Because no one deserves to be bullied, schools need to have strategies in place to provide the safest school environment possible. Anti-bullying strategies seem to work best when there is collaborative effort between the teachers, parents, and students. An important first step is to create an anti-bullying policy and specific rules against aggressive and harmful behav-

***Because no one deserves to be bullied, schools need to have strategies in place to provide the safest school environment possible.***

iors with specific consequences set up for those students who break the rules.

In New York City, 13 more schools have been added to the list of “dangerous schools,” and a proposed revision to the disciplinary code includes a new category that specifically makes bullying, stalking and threatening punishable offenses. In February, Mayor Bloomberg added 150 police personnel to the 12 most violent New York City schools.

Creating an anti-bullying school culture demonstrates a commitment to the prevention of bullying and makes a potential victim feel less alone in his predicament. Conflict-resolution skills, role playing and class discussions are essential to sensitizing children to feel the pain and isolation of the victim and to providing victims with skills and possible solutions — thereby possibly preventing a minor accident from escalating into full scale harassment and eventually tragedy.



## UPDATE: ONE MORE PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

Leah Schlager

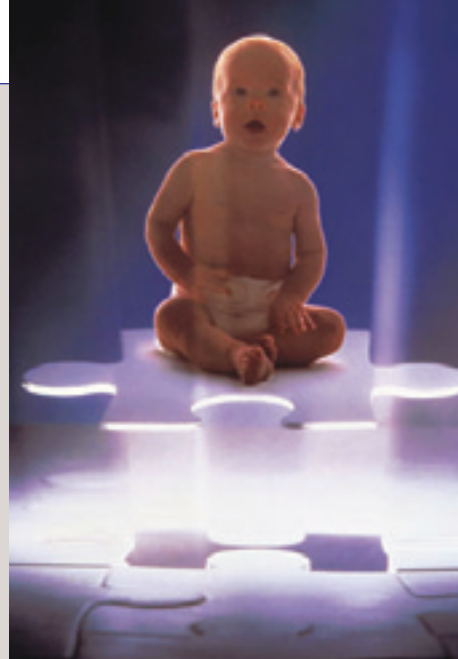


The controversy regarding the apparent rise of autism is still being debated. (Experts now suspect that one person in 160 lives with some degree of autism. That's three to four

times the rate estimated in the 1970's.) The question persists—are the numbers of cases rising or are parents more aware and doctors more adept at diagnosing the disorder?

Previous studies had revealed that a large percentage of children diagnosed with autism have abnormally large brains for their age. A recent study, published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, found that children diagnosed with the autism disorder were born with smaller than average heads which grew from the 25th percentile to the 84th percentile in the first year. This disproportionately rapid growth appears to be an early predictor of the disorder that may not be manifest until the child is two or three

***An autistic child may have an adult-size brain by the age of four or five.***



years old. And although the growth rate slows significantly after the first year, an autistic child may have an adult-size brain by

the age of four or five.

These findings still do not reveal much about the causes of the disorder, nor do they offer possible treatments. However, they do suggest that the disorder is developmental and can be traced back to infancy and not a sudden onset due to environmental stimuli or vaccines — as had been previously suspected.

(Newsweek, “Predicting Autism,” July 28, 2003)

To read “Putting The Pieces Together: Understanding Autism” and “Autism: A Mother’s Story,” log on to [www.comprehensivenet.com/newsletter.html](http://www.comprehensivenet.com/newsletter.html)



**To receive follow-up articles on the topics included in the newsletter, to contribute an article or express an opinion, or to receive the newsletter by e-mail contact Leah at [lschlager@comprehensivenet.com](mailto:lschlager@comprehensivenet.com)**

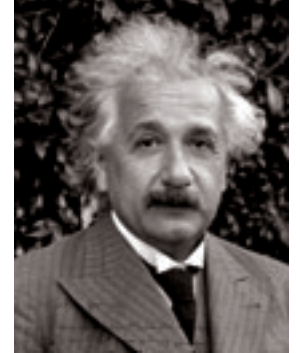


DYSLEXIA ... Cont. from Page 1

Without remediation, these children will rarely read easily and fluently on their own, will have trouble with spelling, handwriting, attention skills, and learning a foreign language. These difficulties can have a negative impact on self-esteem.

However, these same children often have a higher level of thinking processes and excellent conceptualization, comprehension and reasoning skills. They tend to think more creatively and learn through meaning rather than rote memorization. They have the ability to get the "big picture," to think outside the box. They are able to simplify information and excel in problem solving.

# "What do these personalities have in common?"

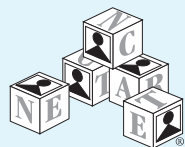
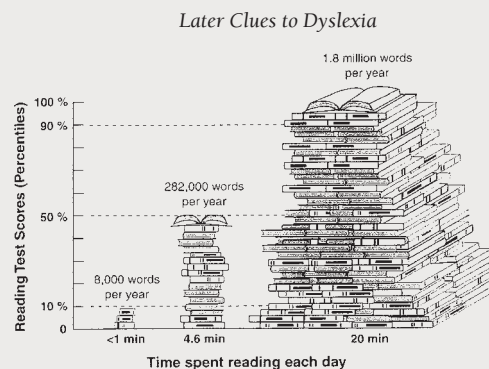


Some notable dyslexics — though not all officially diagnosed — include: Leonardo Da Vincy, Galileo, Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Albert Einstein, Winston Churchill, George Patton, John F. Kennedy, Nelson Rockefeller, Charles Schwab, Walt Disney, Agatha Cristie, Jules Verne, Rodin, John Irving, Tom Cruise, Wendy Wasserstein, Mozart, Beethoven, John Lennon, Quentin Tarantino, etc.

Look for our upcoming Newsletter for a comprehensive review of the most recent studies on dyslexia and evidence-based treatment methods.

*Poor readers tend to avoid reading at all costs with the result that, statistically, they take a year to read the same amount of words that good readers read in 2 days.*

(Sally Shaywitz, M.D. *Overcoming Dyslexia*, Alfred A. Knof, New York, 2003) p.107.



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