Triple R Teaching

Hello, Anna Geiger here, and my book is almost out! I'm so excited to be here with you and talk to you about dyslexia.

Before I do that, I want to share a quick endorsement for the book from the wonderful Virginia Quinn-Mooney. She's a moderator for What I Should Have Learned in College, she's the host of The Science of Reading Happy Hour, and she's an amazing teacher. She very generously read an advanced copy of the book, and she had this to say.

"My own science of reading journey is a lot like Anna's. I put a lot of hours into self-education. I wish this book was available when I started. It's established that students learn to read best when their teachers follow a strong scope and sequence and provide direct systematic instruction. Teachers learning about the science of reading need the same. Every page and chapter of 'Reach All Readers' equips teachers to best serve all students. As a SOR geek, I couldn't put it down. As a dedicated practitioner, I will return to it often."

Thank you so much, Gin, for reading the book and for sharing your feedback.

Let's talk today a little bit about dyslexia. When I was a classroom teacher, dyslexia was one of those words I'd heard of, but really didn't know anything about. I probably thought that kids with dyslexia see words backwards, which is a pervasive myth that just won't go away. I thought that dyslexia was rare, that it was something too complicated for me to understand and something I couldn't do anything about. I've learned a lot since then.

It's very interesting that many parents of kids with dyslexia have actually brought the science of reading into the mainstream in terms of people talking about it now, and people want to know what their schools are doing with explicit, systematic instruction. It's because many kids with dyslexia were not served by balanced literacy. Balanced literacy is not explicit and systematic enough for kids who are struggling with word recognition, specifically kids with dyslexia.

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that leads to difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition. Kids with dyslexia struggle with spelling and decoding, and they may struggle in spite of strong instruction.

Dyslexia occurs on a spectrum, so for some kids on the low end of the spectrum, they could get really good systematic instruction and you may not even know that they have dyslexia. Whereas on the other hand, we may have some students who receive very good instruction, but they still need extra support because they need a lot more repetitions and a lot more scaffolding and breaking things down.

There are different estimates for how prevalent it is. Dr. Sally Shaywitz, I think she goes up to 20%, and that's the highest one I've seen. I typically see more around 10%. It really depends on how you define it and where you put the cutoff points. But in general, let's say about 10% of our student population has dyslexia. Even 10% is a lot of kids. If you have a class of 20, then probability-wise, two of your students could have dyslexia.

As classroom teachers, we all have a responsibility to understand what dyslexia is. To be clear, dyslexia is neurobiological, so it's a brain-based learning disability. It is hereditary, so a lot of families where the parents had trouble reading, the kids have trouble reading, and maybe because they both have dyslexia.

Dyslexia is often called a surprising disability because we often see it in people who don't seem like they would have a reading problem. Their oral language may be very good. Their comprehension of what's read to them may be very good, but they struggle with getting words off the page.

When I look back to my teaching experience, I can definitely think of students like that. Unfortunately, I didn't know what dyslexia was and I didn't know how to help them, so instead I just had them read more. But these kids need a lot more than just reading more. They need explicit instruction in the code.

Something else I assumed as a teacher was that, well, if my students have dyslexia, that's not even something I can handle. There's nothing I could do about that. But when a teacher understands the science of reading - what we know from research about how we learn to read and what best practices are for the different key areas like phonemic awareness and phonics, and when a teacher understands the science of learning - how to break things down, how to avoid cognitive overload, how to provide scaffolding and feedback, then they are equipped to teach students with dyslexia.

Now, that does not mean that your regular classroom instruction will be enough. If they have more severe dyslexia, then they may need additional instruction in Tier 2 or Tier 3. They need more and better instruction. By better I just mean more repetitions, more explicit teaching, more breaking it down.

As a teacher, the more you understand about the science of reading and the science of learning, the better able you are to teach all the students in your classroom, including those who may have dyslexia.

My book "Reach All Readers" will equip you to reach all the readers in your classroom. I break down the research in all the key areas, provide practical ways to apply it, and then in the final chapter, chapter 11, I talk about MTSS. This is a system that you can use to determine what your students need to learn and when, and how you can support students, including those with dyslexia, who need extra help using school-wide systems for providing intervention.

I'm really excited that this book is almost out! If you haven't pre-ordered yet, you can do that through Amazon, Thriftbooks, Barnes & Noble, any other place that you can buy books online. Thanks so much for listening, and I'll talk to you next time!

That's all for this episode of Triple R Teaching. For more educational resources, visit Anna at her home base, themeasuredmom.com. And join our teaching community. We look forward to helping you reflect, refine, and recharge on the next episode of Triple R Teaching.