The Challenge of Dyslexia- Dispelling the Myths
By Linda Luebker

Have you ever thought of reading as a gift? It is one that many take for granted. Take a moment right now and try to imagine what life would be like if you could not successfully read or write. I have, only because God has placed some very special people in my life who do struggle with reading and writing; they have dyslexia.

This gift of reading is given to most kids in their first years of formal education. But some kids do not learn so easily. However, the tools are available to give this wonderful gift even to those who do not learn to read "normally". Most people just don't know about it.

So what is dyslexia? Dyslexia is a highly heritable learning disability that affects 1 out of 5 people and is the most common learning disability. Because it is so prevalent, there has been a considerable amount of research done on dyslexia. The word dyslexia is derived from the Greek "dys" (meaning poor or inadequate) and "lexis" (words or language). Dyslexia is not the result of visual problems; people with dyslexia do not see words or letters backwards. Dyslexia is characterized by problems in expressive (speaking and writing) or receptive (listening and reading), oral or written language. This means it can manifest itself in problems with reading and spelling, directionality, sequencing steps in a task, rote memory of non-meaningful facts, time concepts and time management, spatial organization, and math difficulties. This covers many areas that we rely upon daily to function. But remember, the public school system by and large has chosen not to address the situation. Can you imagine going through our public school system not being able to read and write? Is it any wonder that up to 80% of juvenile justice offenders have dyslexia?

Dyslexia has been shown to be clearly related to neurophysiological differences in the brain. The right side of the brain controls our creativity and visual ability while the left side controls language. Normally, the left hemisphere of the brain is larger than the right. However, with dyslexics, both hemispheres are the same size, not because the left side is smaller but because the right side is larger by ten percent. Additionally, the outside layer of a normal brain does not have nerve endings. Dyslexics have 40 - 250 nerve endings in the outside layer of the left half of their brain in language areas. Also, normal brains are ordered nice and neatly while dyslexics have unusual, random "wiring". These differences clearly affect the way that a dyslexic person can learn to read. That's right. A person with dyslexia can learn to read. Let me explain.

The lower right and left parts of the brain is the visual center of the brain. Regular male readers use only the lower left-brain while regular female readers use both lower sides of the brain. The dyslexic reader, male or female, does not use either lower portion of the brain. MRIs have been used to show that the dyslexic reader uses different parts of their brain to read and the portion that is used is inconsistent from person to person. Although this unique brain architecture and unusual "wiring" make reading, writing and spelling difficult, most people with dyslexia are gifted in areas controlled by the right hemisphere.
of the brain, such as: artistic skills, musical ability, 3-D visual-spatial skills, mechanical ability, vivid imagination, athletic ability, math conceptualization skills, creative, and more. Many famous people with dyslexia are gifted in these areas.

What is commonly taught in the public schools and even in the medical field is to just focus on the child's strengths and just get them through the educational years. What most parents, teachers and doctors don't know is that because of their unique brain structure, dyslexics just need to be taught differently. Reading failure resulting from dyslexia is highly preventable through direct, explicit reading instruction specifically designed for dyslexics. Dyslexic people learn best by involving all of their senses: visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic. Moreover, early intervention is essential. Since dyslexia is identifiable, with 92% accuracy, at ages 5-1/2 to 6-1/2, it is possible to effectively diagnose and provide the early intervention that is necessary. Some public school systems are addressing dyslexia with great success.

(You can learn more about dyslexia at www.dys-add.com)