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Book Review

Overcoming Dyslexia: A New and Complete

Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at any Level

Book by Sally Shaywitz, M.D. (2003)
New York: Alfred Knopf

This book, without too much jargon, demystifies dyslexia for teachers, parents, administrators, and specialists. Much of the writing is directed at parents who suspect or know that their child has a reading disability. Sally Shaywitz, debunks some myths and provides specific information that parents can use to help their children become readers.

Bringing us up to date on the history of dyslexia, Shaywitz explains misconceptions about the "word blindness" disease, as it was once called, which implied some sort of difficulty with vision. Some of those errant notions persist today, with teachers thinking dyslexia is when children reverse letters or can't see print clearly, and as a result read slowly. Recent technology allows us to view the function of the brain during the act of reading, revealing that dyslexia is closer to "sound blindness." Dyslexics find it difficult or impossible to hear and manipulate phonemes, the smallest parts of speech. Shaywitz also explains that phonological abilities are not related to intelligence and

are, in fact, quite independent of intelligence.

The highlight of Shaywitz's research is the understanding that dyslexia is no longer a mysterious disability and can be overcome if parents and educators intervene early with explicit instruction. Of particular interest, she describes how the neurological activation of pathways involved with dyslexia are now observable through functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) and other less sophisticated testing.

Shaywitz explores, in Part 1, the early history of diagnosing reading problems, biases that have crept into the evaluations of reading disabilities, and how dyslexic children are treated in schools. In Part 2 she presents new theories about identifying and treating dyslexia. Part 3 offers practical advice and exercises to help children to become better readers, and Part 4 focuses on overcoming the disability. The epilogue includes commentary from dyslexic readers who've become successful, including John Irving, Charles Schwab, and Wendy Wasserstein.

Shaywitz offers clues to identify early those who are likely to have difficulty learning to read. She lists reading-related skills parents should look for when observing their young children reading aloud. Older students who are dyslexic may have learned to mask the extent of their reading problems. While methods to identify at-risk children and dyslexic young