



In the words of.....

Dr. Linda Siegel



A learning disability is a difficulty in reading, spelling, writing, and/or mathematics, in spite of average or above-average intelligence. Most of the young people living on the street have undetected and unremediated learning disabilities. Many adolescent suicides are a result of undetected and unremediated learning disabilities. Many of the people in prisons have dyslexia and other learning disabilities.

It is possible to detect these children at risk for reading difficulties at the beginning of a child's school career and to provide remediation to prevent problems from developing.

In a collaborative project with the North Vancouver school district, I have conducted a study to show that we can detect the children at risk for learning disabilities reading difficulties and can provide a school-based classroom based intervention to help them.

This is a summary of the results of a seven-year longitudinal study. We conducted some brief tests of language, memory, and phonological awareness skills (the ability to hear the sounds within words, to recognize words that rhyme, and to recognize which words start with the same sound) when the children entered kindergarten. When the children were in kindergarten, we found that 25% of the children for whom English was a first language were at significant risk for reading difficulties. We found that almost 50% of the children who had English as a second language were at risk for reading difficulties.

With appropriate intervention, we found a dramatic improvement. Only 5% of the children still had reading difficulties at the end of Grade 1 and by Grade 6 that number was reduced to 1.5% for each group. The children with English as a second language were reading and spelling as well (sometimes even better) as children who had English as a first language

The schools used a program called Firm Foundations to help teach children important phonological awareness skills and the sounds of the letters. The teachers also read stories to the children and introduced them to new vocabulary through interesting activities. For example, the children baked cookies in the shape of letters and, in addition to learning the letter and its sound, enjoyed eating the cookies. The children participated in many activities to develop their language skills, including reading and writing stories, acting out stories, playing games with words. The schools also used a program called Reading 44 to teach reading comprehension skills and the interpretation and understanding of text.

More information about the programs used in the North Vancouver School District is available at the following web site: www.nvsd44.bc.ca.

The results of this study show that it is possible to detect the children who are at risk for reading difficulties early, to provide a classroom based intervention to help most of the children, and to provide a good learning environment for children who have English as a second language. We can prevent many of the social problems in our society by recognizing the children who have difficulties early and providing appropriate intervention early in their school career. Not only will we provide a better environment for our children but we will also save the unnecessary expenses and heartache that social problems produce.