school success
for kids with
Dyslexia
& other reading difficulties

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Contents

Introduction

N O academic skill is more vital than the ability to read (Edmonds et al., 2009). Without reading skills, the chances for an individual's academic and occupational success are limited (Lyon, 1998b). As proof, we merely need to engage in a rudimentary investigation to discover that reading disabilities have a tremendous social impact.

A research study conducted by the Pew Research Center indicated that at the end of 2007, more than one in every 100 adults was confined in an American jail or prison (Pew Center on the States, 2008). According to figures gathered and analyzed by the Pew Public Safety Performance Project, in total, approximately 7,300,000 United States citizens were either in jail, in prison, on probation, or on parole. Translated, that is one out of every 31 American adults (Pew Center on the States, 2008). Additionally, the United States has 5% of the world's population but 25% of the world's

prison inmates (Loury & Western, 2010). Why is this information significant in terms of reading? Because further research demonstrates that three-fourths of those incarcerated have not graduated from high school and a staggering 70% are functionally illiterate and read below a fourth-grade level (Barton, 2011). These figures are a clear indication that reading instruction in American educational institutions is problematic.

This is directly related to the nature and structure of American educational institutions where inadequate instruction in phonemic awareness and basic spelling rules leads to the development of inadequate code-breaking skills, which translates into the creation of a disability in basic reading skills.

A disability in basic reading skills is primarily caused by deficits in phonological awareness, which is independent of any achievement capacity (Lyon, 1998b). More clearly stated, reading disability has no connection with learning capacity or intelligence. Further, deficits in phonological awareness can be identified in late kindergarten and first grade using inexpensive, straightforward testing protocol, and these deficits can be remediated using a systematic approach to breaking the English code. This book takes that systematic approach and breaks it down for parents and teachers, while presenting some basic information on dyslexia and other reading difficulties and general strategies that can be used to improve students' reading skills.

How to Use This Book

The primary objective of *School Success for Kids With Dyslexia and Other Reading Difficulties* is to provide parents and teachers with goals and a structured approach that will meet the needs of students requiring either primary instruction or remediation in the decoding and encoding of the English language.

This work provides a systematic and forensic approach to mastering the English language and a solid foundation for reading, writ-

ing, and spelling skills for students who are struggling with language acquisition. With this forensic approach, students can be shown the phonetic nature of the English language and the proper structure of the written language.

This book was written for use by dedicated parents and by teachers, educational specialists, language specialists, and mainstream or special needs English departments. If a departmental approach is used, it is recommended that the department nominate one individual, preferably one who is trained in the Orton-Gillingham approach, to evaluate the appropriateness of its application and to make determinations concerning its continued usage. This guide should be presented at the pace determined by the presenter, whose determination should be based solely upon the mastery level of the student.

The system herein has been organized to provide fluidity of information to ensure success. Concepts that build upon other concepts have been placed accordingly. Although some of the presentations may seem repetitious, this commonly utilized method enhances the students' exposure to foreign concepts and fosters mastery.

I am aware that throughout this book, I have included information that crosses the line into the arena of speech pathology. I do this in order to familiarize those who have not had the exposure to speech pathology that I have received over my 27-year career. The information that I have gained over this period of time has served to strengthen my grasp of the articulation process and its inseparable relationship to phonemic awareness. In order to pass this information on to struggling students so that they may receive the full benefit of language remediation, parents and teachers themselves must become familiar with the process of articulation and its inseparable relationship to phonemic awareness. The phonemic details that permeate this book will serve as this resource.

You will find as you progress through this work that there are no cute little animals, funny faces, games, or anything else to distract the student from the task at hand. This curriculum is not designed to entertain. With this book, I merely seek to explicitly and systemati-

cally teach the intrinsic relationship between sounds and the symbols that represent them in the English code.

As we proceed with helping remediate the language and reading skills of our students, remember the words of the novelist Marcel Proust, who wrote:

> "The real voyage of discovery
> consists not in seeking new landscapes . . .
> . . . but in having new eyes."

Let us move forward and develop our new eyes.

The Development of Reading Skills

T H E most fundamental responsibility of schools is to teach students how to read (Moats, 1999). The development of reading skills obviously serves as the gateway to the world of printed information, as reading serves as the major foundational skill for all school-based learning (Lyon, 1998a). Most, if not all, of the informal education that we receive is accomplished without the use of printed material. Historically, the oral tradition was the foundation of the informal education process and continues to remain so. However, school presents a different situation—formal education in school requires the ability to read printed material. Through the development of reading skills, we prepare ourselves for our journey toward learning the material that must be mastered during the formal education process.

Many proponents of "whole language" education feel that because humans learn to speak their native language through immersion, the act of read-

ing follows a similar pattern and exposure to the printed word leads to the development of reading skills. This reasoning bears a false truth value. A great deal of care and attention to detail must accompany reading instruction, because reading is quite different from speech.

In speech, the listener is provided with many clues as to the meaning of the words presented by the speaker. Intonation, pitch, cadence, and body language all provide context clues that assist in the comprehension of auditory signals. Further, according to the innateness hypothesis, children are equipped with a blueprint for the innate principles and properties that pertain to the grammars of all spoken human language, called *universal grammar* (Fromkin, Hyams, & Rodman, 2002). Barring neurologically-based developmental delays, children do not require explicit instruction to master the spoken language. Universal grammar aids the child in the task of constructing spoken language. Additionally, through stages in oral communication, a speaker learns from the surrounding linguistic environment the proper cadence, pitch, and intonation associated with the successful display of language ability as well as the rules of grammar that are language specific. This presents speech as a natural process (Fromkin et al., 2002).

Reading involves a quite different presentation for a couple of reasons. First, written language is a relatively recent human construct. In the evolution of writing, we have designated symbols to represent the sounds of spoken language. We have, in essence, created our own code. The sound-symbol correspondence that has been developed for the English language is called the *English code*. Students must absolutely understand the sounds of our language and the symbols that represent them. Our spoken language has a code, and written language, as a representation of spoken language, therefore must also have a code. The code for written language is more complex because most visual and auditory cues must be inferred based upon two-dimensional symbolic representations called *punctuation*.

Although universal grammar was specified for spoken language, written language is of a different construct. Education, based upon its modern manifestation, is founded upon mastery of the written lan-

guage. Just as children learned the rules for spoken language through oral communication, they must learn the rules for written language. In order to read, a student must be able to translate the written symbol to the corresponding sound that it represents. To spell, students must be able to translate the sound to the appropriate written symbol that represents it. This knowledge is called *sound-symbol correspondence*. The ability to make this translation is called *phonemic awareness*. Reading, or decoding, involves sound-symbol correspondence and phonemic awareness, neither of which is a naturally occurring process. Further, students should be taught not only the phonemes (sounds) and graphemes (letters) associated with the language, but also the myriad of spelling rules governing usage and application. For example, when choosing between using "ai" and "ay," for graphically representing the / ā / phoneme within a spoken word, the rule depends upon the location of the long vowel phoneme within the word. If the long vowel phoneme / ā / appears in the middle of the word, we use "ai" (e.g., "rain," "chain," "pail"). If, however, the long vowel phoneme / ā / appears at the end of the pronounced word, we use "ay" (e.g., "day," "pay," "stay").

Second, the two key components of reading, which do not manifest themselves in speech, are *word identification* and *concept imagery*. Word identification involves recognizing that words are a systematic string of individual graphemes or letters. Each individual sequential combination represents a different word. Students must be able to string together the individual phonemes or sounds the letters represent to produce these words. This is the essence of decoding. The other half of the reading puzzle involves comprehension of the meanings behind the sequential combinations of letters, or words. Concept imagery allows students to visualize the item or process represented by the words. Students who have weak word attack skills (word identification) will stumble and stammer as they attempt to read the printed language. Those weak in concept imagery (comprehension) may read with prosody but will not understand what is read.

To understand the impact of word identification and concept imagery on the reading process, one merely needs to be reminded that the printed language is a code for spoken language.

Word Identification

Every spoken language has a class of vowels and a class of consonants (see Chapter 4 for more information; Fromkin et al., 2002). The essence of decoding, as mentioned earlier, is to translate the written symbol to the corresponding sound that it represents. Additionally, a student must string together the individual sounds or phonemes to produce a word. Sound-symbol correspondence is paramount. A student must recognize the symbol, and he or she must have knowledge of what the symbol represents. Take a look at Figure 1. Read it out loud.

The overwhelming majority of us cannot decipher what we see in Figure 1 because we do not recognize the symbols. Even if we did recognize the symbols, do we know what sound or sounds each symbol represents? This is knowledge that we must have, as we must be able to string the sounds together in order to produce a word. Now, try reading the passage in Figure 2.

Languages, written and spoken, have grammars that govern their construction (e.g., subject and verb, interrogatives). All grammars contain rules of a similar kind for the formation of words and sentences (Fromkin et al., 2002). In the example in Figure 2, even though we recognize the symbols, we are unable to string together the represented phonemes into words. Note that we have a mixture of alphabetic and numeric symbols. The sequence "hrt5n," for example, is inconsistent with how our code manifests.

Concept Imagery

In the final figure, Figure 3, each sequence of symbols manifests in the fashion to which we are accustomed in our language. Note that we have a capital letter at the beginning of each sequence and punctuation at the end. What separates the two sequences is that we have comprehension of the meanings behind the sequential combinations

ӿҨҩҪҒҒᚺᠵ�andᏔᏟᏟᄋᏉᏒꞈᏜ᠖ᚷ᠖ᎠᏔᏭᏔᏘᏔᎤᏉᏑᏩᏭᏳᚼᏐᏔᎻᚻᏊᏁᏉᏍᎷᏢᎾᏟᎾᏟᎪᏔᏔᎩᏂᎾᏔᏠᎧᏉᏇᎤᎤᎦᎤᏔᏤᏌᎧ
ᎢᏓᏂᎫᏪᏆᏍᏟᏼᏙᎧᎻᏭᎷᎺᎮᎾᎾᏉᎵᎾᎤᏉᏝᎲᎶᎷᎱᎾᎩᎦᏐᎲᎻᏎᏓᎥᏋᏴ᳝ꞦᏎᎯᏌᎳ
ᎶᎾᎠ

Figure 1. **Try to read this out loud.**

Jn hrt5n fjjnm wedc ddn djdunasp jjumsn kk,l sueyhh ssfd. Kooplp een-
bddvc, ury, urrjqq haas nikko ;pplo nsx kkiedd ido dppp9 kkdd dd. Yyt, u.

Figure 2. **Now, try reading this.**

1. Tol neddim az nilp ju klyr geed voj serfew molg aq ik loi me. Huy
   ge, wys.
2. Mary had a little lamb. Its fleece was white as snow.

Figure 3. **Two examples of sequences of symbols.**

of letters (words) in sequence #2. We are able to "pull meaning from the print."

For additional clarity, concept imagery is the ability to form an image in the mind's eye based solely upon sensory input, whether visual, auditory, or tactile-kinesthetic. It represents the ability to take the next logical step toward comprehension. For example, if I say that the animal I am thinking of has whiskers, four paws, a tail, and says, "meow," you envision a cat. You formed an image in the mind's eye based solely upon the sensory input. Students with strong word identification and poor concept imagery skills may read beautifully. Yet, ask them what they have just read, and they will respond with "I don't know." Academic language therapy is the proper treatment for weak word identification. To address weakness in concept imagery, I recommend that parents investigate the curriculum *Visualizing and Verbalizing for Language Comprehension and Thinking* by the Lindamood-Bell Learning Process company.

The National Reading Panel

In 1997, the United States Congress asked Dr. G. Reid Lyon, Chief of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health, to appoint a 14-member panel of experts to determine the effectiveness of various approaches to reading instruction. The criteria for the selection of individuals for the panel included the ability to be completely objective as the panel researched and evaluated more than 100,000 different reading programs and methodologies. Better stated, no member of the panel could have any investment, financial or otherwise, with any reading methodology or program. The National Reading Panel Report (Learning Point Associates, 2004) condensed several decades of scientific research and showed that effective reading instruction should address five critical areas, labeled as the five pillars of reading. They are:

1. phonological awareness,
2. phonics,
3. fluency,
4. vocabulary, and
5. comprehension.

Phonological Awareness/Phonics

To begin, many believe that phonological (phonemic) awareness and phonics are the same thing. Nothing could be further from the truth. Phonemic awareness is the awareness that words are composed of sequences or strings of individual sounds called *phonemes*. Phonemes are the smallest parts of sound in a spoken word. For example, the word "at" has two sounds or phonemes, / *ă* / / *t* /. The word "dog" has three phonemes, / *d* / / *ŏ* / / *g* /. Even though the word "box" has three letters, it has four phonemes, / *b* / / *ŏ* / / *k* / / *s* /. As evidenced by the word "box," phonemes are completely separate entities from the symbols that we call letters of the alphabet or *graphemes*. A grapheme is

the smallest part of written language that represents a phoneme in the spelling of a word. A grapheme may be just one letter such as "t" or "d" or several letters such as "aw" or "eigh." Graphemes represent the phonemes in written language.

Students must have the ability to identify and visually imagine the number, order, and identity of sounds and letters within words. These abilities underlie accurate word attack, word recognition, reading fluency, and spelling. Children who have phonemic awareness skills are likely to have an easier time learning to read and spell than children who have few or none of these skills. Weakness in these functions causes individuals to add, omit, substitute, and reverse sounds and letters within words while reading and spelling.

The five key skills that serve as the foundation of phonemic awareness are:

- **phoneme replication:** the ability to repeat a sound that one hears;

- **blending:** the ability to join a string of phonemes together to create a word;

- **segmenting:** the ability to break a word into its individual phonemes;

- **substitution:** the ability to replace a phoneme with a new phoneme, creating a new word; and

- **rhyming:** the ability to find words with the same rhyme[1].

Phonics, on the other hand, is the study of the predictable relationship between the phonemes or sounds in our language and the graphemes or letters that we use to represent these sounds. The purpose of phonics instruction is to teach children the sound-symbol relationships and how to use those relationships to read words. To achieve this, pho-

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1   The *onset* is the beginning of the word, usually consisting of consonants. The *rhyme* (rime) is the rest of the word without the initial consonant structure (i.e., single consonant, consonant digraph, or consonant blend). For example, in the word "rest," the consonant "r" is the onset. The remaining letters in the word, "est," create the rhyme. Words that end with the phonemes / ĕ / / s / / t / rhyme with "rest" (e.g., "test," "guest," "blessed").

nics instruction must be explicit and systematic. It is explicit in that sound-symbol relationships are directly taught. Students are told, for example, that the letter "s" stands for the / s / sound; however, when the letter "s" sits between two vowels or follows a voiced sound, it says / z /. Phonics instruction is systematic in that it follows a scope and sequence that allows children to form and read words early on. The skills taught are constantly reviewed and applied to real reading.

Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read text accurately and quickly with expression. Embedded in this is the notion of reading with proper pitch and cadence as dictated by punctuation. Fluency is aided by the rapid recognition of high-frequency words and the usage of meaning, structure, and visual cues to self-correct.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is important for comprehension. Readers can't understand what they read without knowing what most words mean. The most profitable and enduring manner through which to strengthen vocabulary skills is to teach students to use word structure to determine meaning. As discussed in Chapter 5, English Language Word Construction, the English language is composed of a mixture of other linguistic influences. Here, the linguistic influences come in the form of how we construct the words that compose our spoken and written language. The three main linguistic models of word construction that constitute the English language are Latinate word construction (55%), Anglo-Saxon word construction (25%), and Greek word construction (11%). In order to successfully master our language, students must receive adequate exposure to the components of each of these three linguistic influences. This includes the foundational roots of Latinate word construction and the combining forms (roots) of Greek word construction. Additionally, students should be encouraged to read a variety of grade-level texts to acquire new vocabulary through the

identification of these Latinate roots and Greek combining forms in action.

Comprehension

Good readers are purposeful and active (Reading Rockets, 2012). They have a purpose for reading and monitor their reading to make sure it makes sense. They connect ideas in the text with what they already know. This is called *activation of prior knowledge.* As I work with a student, I remind myself that everything that he has seen, experienced, heard, felt, or tasted has a role in the interpretation of text. When new ideas conflict with previously held information, good readers make additions, subtractions, or revisions to the old information.

Additionally, good readers demonstrate the ability to identify and utilize the following elements:

- **main idea:** the central message of the passage,

- **supporting details:** statements used to promote the main idea,

- **clarifying devices:** methods and tools that the author uses to express thoughts,

- **drawing conclusions:** the ability to make accurate assessments based upon the material read,

- **inference:** the ability to "read between the lines" to determine what the author is saying without having been expressly informed, and

- **vocabulary in context:** understanding the meaning of new words based upon the surrounding text.

Chapter Summary

As we have examined the components of reading, let us now examine the primary difficulties that prevent students from mastering decoding. These fall under two categories: dyslexia and central processing disorder. A brief overview of each and some red flags to watch out for will be provided in Chapter 2.

Reading Difficulties

T H E R E are three main learning disorders that may be diagnosed in childhood: those related to reading, writing, and math (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). It is estimated that 80% of children with learning disorders have reading problems, making reading disabilities the most common form of learning disabilities (LDOnline, 2010). Most reading difficulties fall under two labels: dyslexia and central auditory processing disorder.

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a common disorder that hinders the development of reading skills. Some researchers refer to dyslexia as a visual processing disorder that is neurological in nature. Dyslexia is defined by the International Dyslexia Association (2008) as

15

> . . . a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin.
> It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent
> word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities.
> These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the pho-
> nological component of language that is often unexpected
> in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of
> effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may
> include problems in reading comprehension and reduced read-
> ing experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and
> background knowledge. (para. 1)

Students with dyslexia often struggle with language acquisition skills
despite having been exposed to scientific-based reading teaching
methodologies.

The visual pathway is the most important pathway involved with
the acquisition of written language skills; however, when discussing
visual processing ability, the actual process of seeing is not the issue.
There are two components to visual processing ability. The first involves
recognizing that words are a systematic string of individual graphemes
(letters). Each individual sequential combination represents a different
word. Therefore, students must be able to accurately track (from left to
right and top to bottom) and string together the individual phonemes
to produce words (called *word identification*). The second component
involves the acquisition of a visual image in the mind's eye based upon
the text decoded (called *concept imagery*). Visual processing ability is
believed to be determined by the level of functioning of the angular
gyrus, an area in the left hemisphere, which is the hemisphere that
serves as the language center of the human brain for 90% of the human
population. The angular gyrus sits on the junction of the temporal lobe
and the parietal lobe (see Figure 4), and it translates visual input into
auditory code. It is located directly behind Wernicke's area, the lan-
guage center of the brain that is responsible for processing sound into
understandable words. The level of functioning of the angular gyrus
directly impacts the recognition and recall of words. Those students
who have a high level of angular gyrus activity have good visual mem-
ory. Those who have low levels of angular gyrus activity struggle with

Figure 4. **The angular gyrus.**
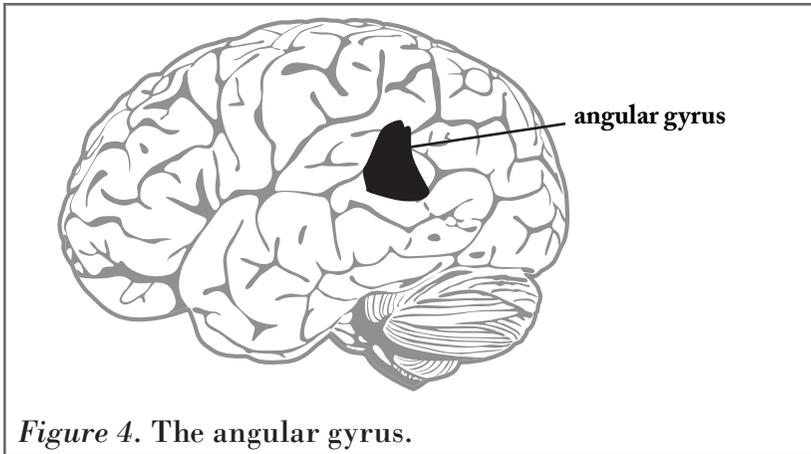
reading, spelling, and composition due to a deficit in visual processing ability. These students have poor visual imagery and pronounced word recognition difficulty. Those toward the lower end of the spectrum, approximately 15%–20% of the world's population, can be described as having dyslexia with a specific visual processing difficulty (Learning Inside-Out, n.d.).

Visual imagery and word recognition ability have no direct correlation to a student's intelligence. Cultural icons such as Thomas Edison and Albert Einstein had visual imagery and word recognition skills toward the lowest end of the spectrum. In fact, both are thought to have had dyslexia.

Genetic Cause of Dyslexia

Researchers have known for quite some time that there is a genetic link between students with dyslexia and their families. Anecdotally, for each student with dyslexia with whom I have worked, either a parent or a grandparent recalled displaying symptoms of dyslexia during their academic careers. Researchers, however, have recently identified a connection between dyslexia and one gene in particular.

In November of 2005, Dr. Jeffrey Gruen, an associate professor at Yale School of Medicine, and his research team discovered that read-

ing ability is influenced by a gene called DCDC2 (May, 2006). This gene is located on chromosome 6. The team studied 153 families of children with dyslexia and identified an altered stretch of DNA within the DCDC2 gene of the study group that correlated to a severe reading disability (May, 2006).

Dyslexia Red Flags

The following are common indicators of a language-based learning disability founded upon the visual processing of language (i.e., dyslexia):

- reversals of letters and words when learning to read;
- difficulty in direction and laterality;
- continued uncertainty of left- and righthandedness;
- uneven levels in academic achievement in various testing situations;
- persistent, unusual spelling errors;
- difficulty with mathematical skills;
- normal intelligence with patchy defects;
- slow and labored rate of reading;
- tendency to make wild guesses with new words;
- tendency to skip over small words (e.g., "a," "an," "the") while reading;
- tendency to mix up the order of letters;
- listening comprehension that is much better than reading comprehension;
- difficulty segmenting and blending individual letter sounds and syllables;
- a tough time learning to write one's own name;
- difficulty with sound/symbol correspondence;

- significant difficulty reading and spelling multisyllabic/longer words;

- difficulty recognizing and producing rhymes;

- confusion with letters that look alike (e.g., b/d/p, w/m, h/n, f/t);

- reduced awareness of word structure (i.e., prefix, roots, suffixes);

- difficulty with spelling and written composition;

- difficulty learning new information from text because of word reading errors;

- trouble learning a foreign language;

- significant difficulty with writing due to spelling and organization problems;

- reading and spelling errors that indicate difficulty sequencing sounds (e.g., "blast" vs. "blats");

- avoidance when asked to read aloud;

- omission of grammatical endings when reading and writing (e.g., "-s," "-ed," "-ing"); and

- difficulty remembering spelling of words over time.

The aforementioned list is not all inclusive. However, if a student demonstrates multiple indicators, parents and teachers are encouraged to pursue diagnostic testing from a qualified educational diagnostician to determine the presence of a specific language disability.

Auditory Processing Disorder

As visual processing ability referred to word recognition and recall of words after the image has been received by the eyes, audi-

tory processing ability refers to what happens to impulses of sound in the brain after the ears have received them. Sound is processed into understandable words in an area of the temporal lobe of the dominant hemisphere called Wernicke's area (see Figure 5). The level of functioning of Wernicke's area directly impacts the auditory recognition and recall of words. Those students who have a high level of activity in Wernicke's area have good auditory processing ability. Those who have low levels of activity in this region struggle with the verbal skills associated with spoken words and ideas. These students have Auditory Processing Disorder (or Central Auditory Processing Disorder), a neurological condition that prevents students from being able to process information that they hear in the same way as other students without the disorder. Something interferes with the brain and its recognition and interpretation of auditory input, most notably the sounds composing speech. As a result, these students have difficulty remembering what was said (following oral directions), are highly susceptible to distracting noises, and find it extremely difficult to master foreign languages. As with visual imagery and word recognition and recall, auditory processing ability is independent of intelligence. Further, it has been suggested that 6 out of 10 people with visual processing difficulties also have auditory processing deficits (Myomancy, 2005).

Central Auditory Processing Disorder Red Flags

The following are common indicators of a language-based learning disability founded upon the auditory processing of language (i.e., central auditory processing disorder):

- difficulty remembering or following directions;
- poor auditory discrimination;
- poor ability to retain information;
- difficulty in finding the right word when speaking;
- excessive yawning and sleepiness in class;
- better performance with oral testing;

Figure 5. **Wernicke's area.**
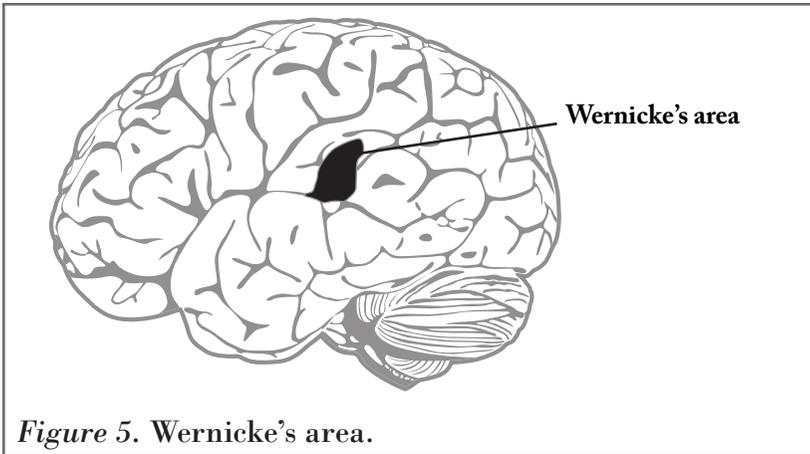
- difficulty pronouncing words correctly (e.g., "aminal" for "animal");
- difficulty rhyming;
- problems learning the names of shapes and colors;
- difficulty learning letter names and letter sounds;
- difficulty understanding text because of underlying oral language problems;
- confusion with letters that have similar sounds (e.g., d/t, b/p, f/v);
- difficulty remembering common sight words (e.g., "was," "the," "and," "she"); and
- difficulty taking notes in class.

Again, if a student demonstrates multiple indicators, parents and teachers are encouraged to pursue diagnostic testing from a qualified educational diagnostician to determine the presence of a specific language disability.

How Are Reading Difficulties Addressed in School?

Students with diagnosed reading difficulties are typically provided with either an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan in public schools, both of which are free of charge to families. The provision of these plans are based on federal law (the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, or IDEA, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973). Provision of the IEP requires diagnosis of a disability; the 504 Plan can be provided without specific diagnosis. Both contain accommodations and adjustments to the classroom environment and curriculum that should be made by the teaching staff. We'll concentrate on the IEP in this book.

The sole purpose of the IEP is to level the playing field and to help kids with special needs succeed in school. The IEP describes the goals set for a child during the school year by the IEP team, of which parents are a part, as well as any special support needed to help achieve them. Generally, the services and goals outlined in an IEP can be provided in a standard classroom setting. This can be done in the regular classroom or in a special resource room in the regular school designed for a group of students with similar needs who are brought together. In rare circumstances, students may need to be placed in a special school for students with specific learning disabilities. In these circumstances, the teachers in the school have special training (language instructors trained to teach children with dyslexia) to assist students with reading and spelling as it relates to their other academic endeavors. Although all efforts are made to ensure that each child stays within the regular classroom, situations do arise where special needs are best addressed in other environments, like resource classrooms, special schools, and tutoring.

How Students Are Referred

The referral process usually begins when someone associated with the student, typically a teacher or a parent, is concerned that the stu-

dent may be experiencing academic difficulties. I wish to highlight that the parent may initiate the referral process. If you feel that your student is struggling academically, reach out to the school counselor or psychologist and request an assessment of your child's reading abilities. Several steps should be taken to gather information on the student's academic performance, including:

- a conference with parents and teachers of the student;
- a meeting with the student, parents, and counselor or psychologist;
- an observation of the student in and outside of an academic environment; and
- a thorough analysis of the student's complete academic performance.

All of the aforementioned steps are integral components in determining the causes of your student's academic struggles. After the collection of the data, the decision is made as to whether or not to move forward with educational diagnostics with a qualified diagnostician. It is important to note that regardless of what the school determines, you, as a parent, decide whether to have your child assessed. Note that children with disabilities who are placed in private elementary schools and secondary schools by their parents do not have the same rights as kids with disabilities who are enrolled in public schools. Private schools are not federally mandated to provide services.

For clarity, if the school does not independently pursue educational diagnostics without prompting, you may request it at the school district's expense. If you choose to do so, you'll be asked to sign a permission form that will detail who the diagnostician is that they have selected and the types of tests to be used. A complete battery of tests should include measures of specific school skills such as reading or math (e.g., Woodcock-Johnson III Normative Update Complete) and tests of cognitive development and abilities (e.g., Wechsler's Intelligence Scales for Children—Fourth Edition). If warranted, par-

ents may wish to incorporate tests that cover specific speech and language skills. (Note that many schools use specific tests purchased by the district, and parents may not be able to recommend specific tests.) Testing does not necessarily mean that a child will receive services, neither does the presence of a diagnosed disability. To be eligible, the disability must affect a child's functioning at school.

To determine eligibility, a multidisciplinary team of professionals will evaluate the child based on educational diagnostics, observations, standardized tests, and classroom assessments and homework. For a thorough treatment of the IEP process and how it's conducted in schools, I recommend *Special Needs Advocacy Resource Book* by Rich Weinfeld and Michelle R. Davis.

Chapter Summary

The visual and auditory pathways play a crucial role in the acquisition of written and spoken language skills, and deficits in these two key areas require specialized intervention. Chapter 3 examines how these interventions may appear in the classroom and at home.