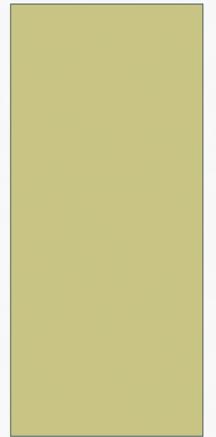


# Dyslexia Friendly Classrooms

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# Three Key Concepts

- Safety
  - **Emotional** safety for the dyslexic student(s) in your class
- Structure
  - Specific classroom structures to foster **learning**
- Support
  - The role of **advocates**: parents and teachers

# Emotional Safety

**Dyslexics tend to be big picture, feelings-first individuals.**

- Big feelings are hard for kids to experience and understand
  - Things that do not feel good or accessible are avoided for self-preservation purposes, sometimes unconsciously
- Uncanny ability to intuit interpersonal dynamics & feelings
  - ...but children can easily misunderstand and misinterpret
- Typically painfully aware of their weak areas
  - Deep feelings of shame, inadequacy, failure

**Most dyslexics will shut down when they do not feel safe.**

# Emotional Safety: What You Can Do

- **If you support our big picture, we will feel safer!**
  - Schedule for the day is posted with visual aides
  - Morning Meeting: due dates, field trips, goals for day
  - Timeline for big assignments/projects provided in many formats
- **Communication is vital**
  - Answer/address the “why” questions without frustration
  - Pausing to explain your thinking/choices is helpful
  - Address misunderstood feelings/situations: trust is everything
- **Be pro-active in supporting feelings**
  - Allow as much choice as possible (“xxxx or xxx, which works?”)
  - Respect and allow breaks (set specific guidelines)
  - Cultivate a relationship & check-in often

# Structure: Ideas for the Classroom

- **Never assume something is accessible**
  - If you have not analyzed a current assessment or done one yourself....we have a big problem, period.
- **Accommodations are vital**
  - All dyslexic children benefit from accommodations, but accommodations are most effective when individualized.
  - Backwards planning from the goal with graphic organizers/flow charts can be helpful when individualizing accommodations.
- **Craft assignments that celebrate choice**
  - Give structured choices (such as a book report that could be typed, made into a poster, or crafted into an iMovie).
  - Encourage students to approach you one-on-one if they have their own unique idea for an assignment.

# Ear Reading in the Classroom: Why This Accommodation Matters

**Information** is like water to me, and the learning process offers just as many ways to consume information as there are ways to consume water.

The knowledge in a conventional book is like ice to me. It has been put into a solid state to be preserved, allowing it to be consumed by a standard reader at any time. Most people can pick up a book and, like transforming ice into liquid water, quickly transform it into the information they need to learn. **I cannot do this with my eyes, but I can do it with my ears.**

--Ben Foss, The Dyslexia Empowerment Plan

# The Many Strands that are Woven into Skilled Reading

(Scarborough, 2001)

## LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE  
(facts, concepts, etc.)

VOCABULARY  
(breadth, precision, links, etc.)

LANGUAGE STRUCTURES  
(syntax, semantics, etc.)

VERBAL REASONING  
(inference, metaphor, etc.)

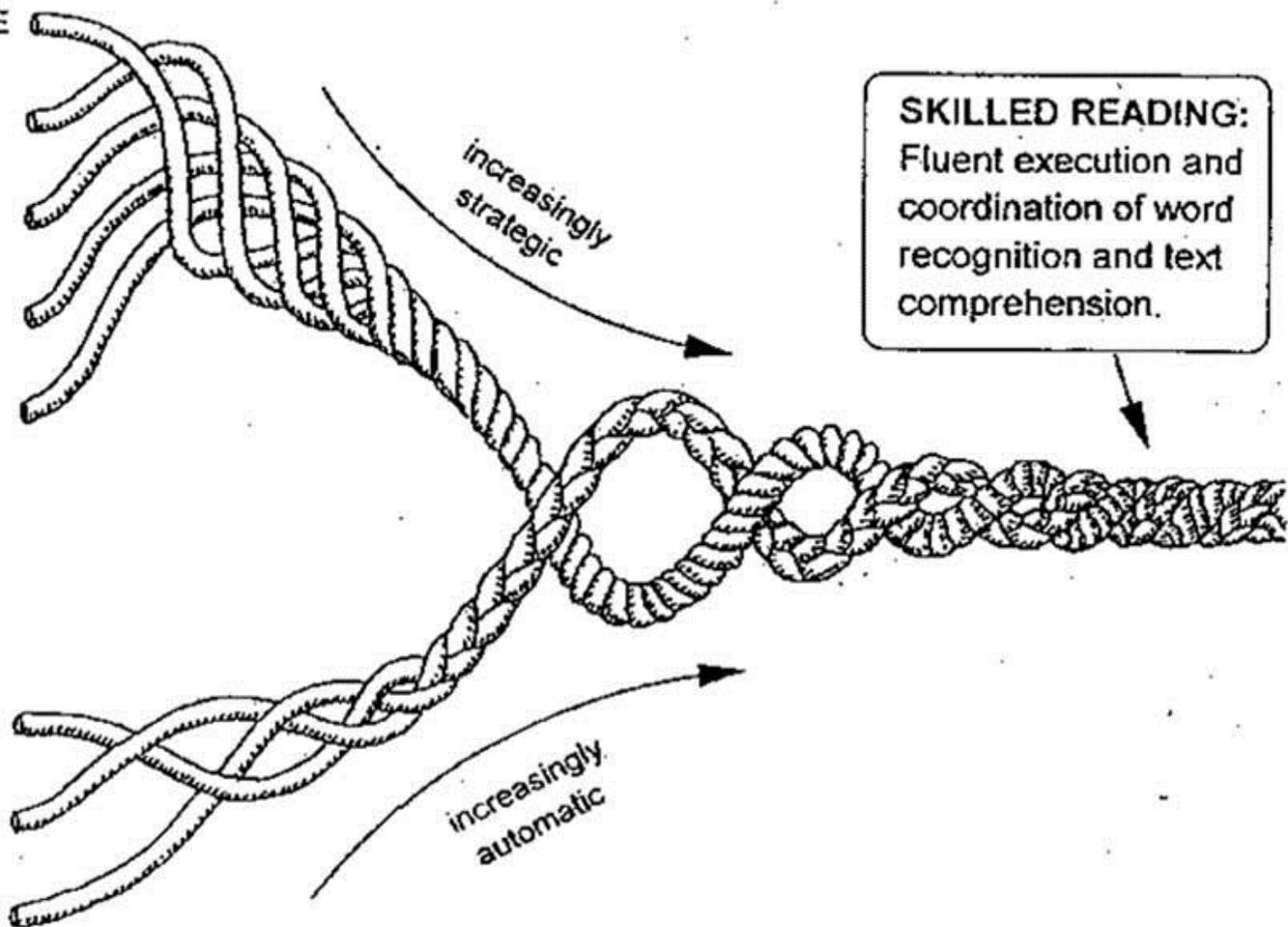
LITERACY KNOWLEDGE  
(print concepts, genres, etc.)

## WORD RECOGNITION

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS  
(syllables, phonemes, etc.)

DECODING (alphabetic principle,  
spelling-sound correspondences)

SIGHT RECOGNITION  
(of familiar words)



# Accommodations in the Classroom: Some Guiding Principals

## **Accommodations require education & teamwork.**

- Educate yourself as to what is out there, and create a plan with your specific child/student in mind.
- Technology cannot be just handed to a child: you must teach him/her how to use the technology.
- Be flexible and realistic. Use the technology as much as you can yourself before teaching a child how to use it. If something seems really awesome but is not functional in practice, reevaluate and change course. Learn from experience, and practice non-attachment.
- Encourage a practice of self-advocacy when appropriate.

# **Inclusive Classrooms:**

- 1. Make content accessible to the full diversity of learners.**
- 1. Allow students to demonstrate content mastery in more individualized/accessible ways.**
- 1. Keep kids safe.**

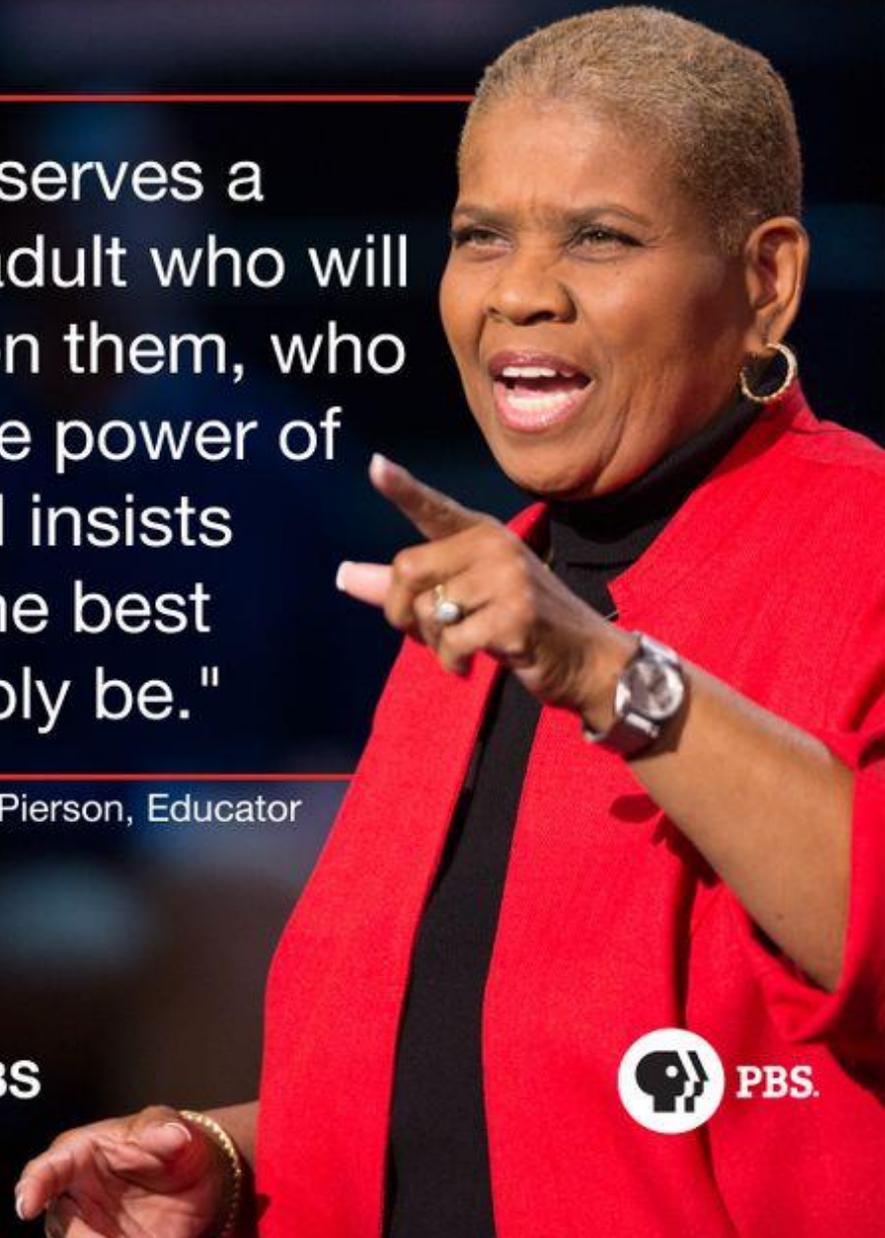
"Every child deserves a champion: an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists they become the best they can possibly be."

- Rita Pierson, Educator

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**EDUCATION**

[PBS.org/TEDTalks](https://www.pbs.org/tedtalks)

**May 7 at 10/9c on PBS**



# Support: Parents as Advocates at School

- Process your own guilt and shame. And then educate yourself...as soon as possible, and as much as possible.
- Do not make assumptions and listen to your gut.
- Practice compassion: towards yourself, towards your family, and towards the hardworking teachers who you have a chance to impact positively.
- Be pro-active in finding solutions to road blocks, and:
  - Have access to data/assessment for proof
  - Create a plan, communicate the plan, revise the plan
  - If needed, consult a professional: we will work with and for you!

# Support: Parents as Advocates at Home

- Your child needs to engage with rich text at his intellect level as much as possible. Make this time comfortable, enjoyable, and shame-free.
- Get your child the services that will teach her how to eye read and spell.
- Find an activity that your child loves and feels successful doing, and encourage his participation.

I wish I could have seen and understood these elements of the brain when I was young and struggling to fit in, because the brain images clearly show what I've found out to be true: that no matter how hard you try, you can't change who you are. **Seeing the picture of my dyslexic brain was incredibly powerful for me.** The key to my happiness occurred when I stopped trying to change my brain, and started changing the context around me.

--Ben Foss, [The Dyslexia Empowerment Plan](#)

# Support: Teachers as Advocates

- If you know what dyslexia is and suspect a child may be dyslexic, tell the parents and use the word.
- Create a classroom culture that celebrates difference. The mantra is, “Fair is not equal: fair is everyone gets what he or she needs to be successful. I am the teacher and it is my job to make sure everyone is successful.”
- Recognize that students who need support often need you to be proactive in offering that support.
- Consider pursuing training that will equip you with the knowledge you need to make difference for dyslexics.

# Call to Action: Be Agents of Change

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