

Chapter 28

I Learn this Way!

Educational Workshop for Dyslexic Students

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ABSTRACT

The chapter presents a review of a series of workshops, called “I learn this way!” that was directed at children at the primary stage of education (ages 6 to 10) with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) to carry out the assignments using teaching tools suitable for their learning style, and at first grade secondary school children (age: 11 to 13) to help them structure a good method of study aimed to help them to learn more easily and effectively. Many children arrive at secondary school without having their own method of study, and the authors’ experience with those children with dyslexia can certainly provide educational ideas useful for all. The focus of this chapter will be mainly on the workshop aimed at first grade secondary school children.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-2122-0.ch028

INTRODUCTION

Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) are divided into dyslexia, dysorthography, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia.

They are defined as “specific” since the disorder is due to a minimum neurobiological alteration that causes them to manifest limits their functioning reading, writing and arithmetic (as ratified by the “Guidelines for the right to education of students with SLD” promulgated in July 2011 by the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research). That means that the general intellectual functioning of these students are preserved. More specifically, SLD involve the automation necessary to perform the conversion phoneme or grapheme, such as to manipulate strings, numbers, spelling, among others. Healthy and intelligent children, then, but with a different way to learn!

Mel Levine writes in his book, “A Mind at a Time,” that, according to some statistics, in the United States about 20 per cent of children have reading difficulties and it is believed that problems with phonological or phonemic awareness are the most frequent, going to compromise other features of the study.

If SLD are not promptly and specifically recognized may hinder the full potential development of the individual, because the student can develop a self-perception of diversity and inadequacy due to the frustration of being unable to meet expectations.

Research in neuroscience and specific laws in various countries that defines and protects Specific Learning Disability, lay the foundations for a cultural change towards the different learning styles.

In the United States, The Public Law 94/142 IDEA - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act used and also The International Dyslexia Association is urging Congress to pass the newly developed Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) Act. In the United Kingdom, the Equality Act 2010 has consolidate the Disability Discrimination Acts of 1995 and

2005 as well as the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2003. The 170/2010 Law in Italy, a specific law for SLD, sets guidelines for the school and states that “for the peculiarities of Specific Learning Disabilities, the law opens an additional channel to protect the right to education, specifically geared to students with SLD, other than that provided for handicap.”

Though is necessary, in our view, a program following the student in the use of educational strategies congenial to him, so that will be truly personalized and effective and they can be adopted at every stage of the course, even in study at home. In other words we must move from the logic of compensatory measures to that of *compensatory skills* (Fogarolo, 2010). On the basis of these considerations we have developed our workshops “I learn this way!” aimed at first grade secondary school children.

The workshops object of this chapter are made in the city center of Genoa, where a headquarters of our association is based. We are within a catchment area rather broad and varied. Genoa has a population of just over 600,000 inhabitants with a density of 2,500 inhabitants/km², with a total school population, school year 2009/2010, of 88,938 students (of which 3,557 potential SLD - 4%).

In Genoa, there are 17 educational directions that include 108 primary schools and 70 first grade secondary schools, between the supply of public and private. The percentage of school dropout in Genoa is 0.6 for primary school, 4.7 for first grade secondary school, then climb up to 21% in second grade secondary schools, a little higher than the national average (source: web site City of Genoa, year 1999/2000). Epidemiological data estimate, in Italy, a spread of SLD on 4% of the total population. The percentage is lower than the data reported in the English language, as the Italian language is based on a “transparent” spelling (languages “orthographically transparent” are those in which the relationship between phonemes and graphemes is direct and two-way matching).

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