



Fall 2007 Newsletter

*The Northern California Branch of The International Dyslexia Association (NCBIDA)
Parents Education Network (PEN)
and Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic (RFB&D)
Present*

 **Blazing Your Path** 
Straight Talk for Teens with Learning Disabilities

**with Jonathan Mooney
and a Student Panel**

If you are a teen with a learning disability, chances are you have hit some bumps in the road to academic success. Life paths that work for others may not be right for you. Join dyslexic writer/ activist Jonathan Mooney and a panel of young adults as they share strategies for blazing a personal path to success. Students, parents, and educators are welcome!

When Saturday, Sept 29, 2007
10:00-11:45 am - Jonathan Mooney
11:45 am-12:45 pm - Lunch
12:45-2:00 pm - Teen Panel

Where Sacred Heart Preparatory (Campbell Center)
150 Valparaiso Avenue, Atherton, CA 94027
(Parking at St. Josephs School of the Sacred Heart, 50 Emilie Ave., Atherton)

Cost \$20 students, \$25 adults, \$50 families
Includes lunch from Armadillo Willy's!

Back by popular demand, Jonathan Mooney brings his special insights and energy to empower students who learn differently. An honors graduate of Brown University who did not learn to read until he was 12 years old, Mooney is co-founder of Project Eye-To-Eye, a mentoring program for disabled students, and is the author of the memoir *Learning Outside the Lines*.

Following Mooney's presentation, members of SAFE Voices, PEN's teen panel, will share how they have navigated their learning disabilities.

To Register www.dyslexia-ncbida.org or call 650.328.7667



PARENTS EDUCATION NETWORK



Letter from the President

The road to academic success can be bumpy for students with dyslexia. That is why we are so excited about our fall event, *Blazing Your Path: Straight Talk for Teens with Learning Disabilities*, which we are presenting at Sacred Heart Preparatory School in Atherton on September 29 in concert with the Parents Education Network (PEN) and Recording for the Blind & Dyslexia (RFB&D). Jonathan Mooney, who has been an extremely popular speaker with Bay Area audiences, will kick off the program by sharing his insights into learning differently. An honors graduate of Brown University who did not learn to read until he was 12 years old, Mooney is a widely respected author and speaker on the subject of learning differences. Joining Mooney at the September program will be members of SAFE Voices, PEN's teen panel, who will share how they have coped with their learning issues. This program is designed with teens in mind – we're starting a little later in the morning (10:00 am), and we're including lunch! Check the link in this newsletter for information about registration. Parents and educators are, of course, welcome, too.

We are particularly pleased to be presenting the September 29th program cooperatively with PEN and RFB&D, organizations that provide valuable services to individuals with learning disabilities and their families. We are fortunate to have groups like theirs offering assistance to the Bay Area community. Check out their websites at www.parentseducationnetwork.org and www.rfbd.org to learn more about them.

As in past years, October is officially designated as Dyslexia Awareness Month by the national office of IDA. Our September event provides an early kickoff to the month's activities. They will include several of our popular dyslexia simulations, *Put Yourself in the Shoes of a Person with Dyslexia*. NCBIDA will be helping to present a simulation in Santa Clara on October 9 at Parents Helping Parents (PHP), another very active Bay Area group that serves individuals with learning differences and their families. We also hope to offer a simulation in San Francisco in October. Visit our website for details as they become available.

Finally, we hope you will consider attending our national conference, which will be held October 31-November 3 in Dallas, Texas. This is always an excellent opportunity to catch up on developments in the field of dyslexia and other learning differences.

Here's to a busy fall!

Leslie Lingaas Woodward
President, NCBIDA

October is Dyslexia Awareness Month

To promote dyslexia awareness, we have organized or are planning several events for the month of October. Two of the events are listed below. Please stay tuned and check in with our website (www.dyslexia-ncbida.org) for other upcoming events.

Kick-off event

Blazing Your Path: Straight Talk for Teens with Learning Disabilities

Saturday, Sept. 29, 10:00 am-2:00 pm

Sacred Heart Preparatory (Campbell Center)

150 Valparaiso Avenue, Atherton, CA 94027-0940

If you are a teen with a learning disability, chances are you have hit some bumps in the road to academic success. Life paths that work for others may not be right for you. Join dyslexic writer/ activist Jonathan Mooney and a panel of young adults as they share strategies for blazing a personal path to success. Students, parents, and educators are welcome!

See the [Sept. 29 Event article](#) in this newsletter for more information.

Learning Disabilities Simulation

Tuesday, Oct 9, 2007, 7:30-9:30 pm
Parents Helping Parents in Santa Clara
3041 Olcott St, Santa Clara, CA, 95054

NCIBDA and Parents Helping Parents Learning Differences/Attention Deficit (Hyperact) Disorder Support Group (www.php.com/include/groups/showInfo.php?ID=3) present *Walk in the Shoes of an LD Student: A Learning Disabilities Simulation*.

Experience firsthand through this learning disability simulation different types of learning challenges faced on a daily basis by LD/ADD students. A not-to-be missed event for parents, relatives and teachers, too! *Parents, invite your child's teachers: they may attend tonight's event at no cost.*

Facilitator: Steve Corelis, M.A., ET, Director, Educational Therapy Service

To reserve online, go to www.php.com/include/events/event_registration.php?shortcut=6503. Cost is \$12 per individual, no cost to teachers. **Pre-registration is required** as attendance is limited. Sign up early! You may register online or leave a message for Melissa at 650-965-9818 (leave your **name** and **number**).

A free parent-to-parent discussion precedes the lecture from 6:10-7:15. You are welcome to attend both lecture and parent support group, or either one.

The Short Bus: A Journey Beyond Normal

by Jonathan Mooney

(An excerpt from Jonathan's latest book, which chronicles the journey across America of a young man once labeled "severely learning disabled" as he finds others who have used humor, imagination, and resiliency to create satisfying lives beyond "normal.")

Prologue

I have to admit, in the spirit of full disclosure, that I once harbored aspirations of becoming an after-school special. On June 2, 2003, I was waiting in the lobby of the Waldorf-Astoria hotel in Manhattan for Ernest, an independent movie producer interested in optioning the story of my life. We were to have breakfast that morning with a producer from Merv Griffin Entertainment, during which I was to "pitch" myself as the subject for an after-school special.

Shifting my weight back and forth, I turned over the situation in my mind. In less than twenty-four hours, I would be leaving New York to fly to Los Angeles, where I had grown up, to pick up an old short school bus (the kind used to take some kids with disabilities to special ed programs). My plan was to transform this vehicle into a makeshift RV and depart from California on a two-month journey around the United States.

On the road I'd interview and spend time with people, like myself, who had once been labeled "abnormal" or "disabled." I wanted to see how they overcame – or didn't – being labeled different. I wanted to see the lives they fashioned for themselves. Waiting for Ernest, watching old ladies with plastic faces and big diamonds pass by, I suddenly realized that my trip really wasn't after-school-special material. I wanted to empower people, but I also wanted to be real, completely honest, and unsentimental.

A short-bus rider myself, I had grown up in special education, having been labeled learning disabled with attention problems at the end of third grade. I was one of those kids who grew up chilling out with janitors in the hallways; one of those kids who were always on a first-name basis with Shirley, the receptionist in the principal's office; one of those kids who grew up hiding in the bathroom to escape reading out loud. I dropped out of school for a while in sixth grade and had a plan for suicide by the time I was twelve. A high school guidance counselor confided that people like me ended up flipping burgers. That prediction did not come true; I eventually graduated from Brown University with an honors degree in literature and published a book, in part about my experiences. I had believed,

when I arranged to meet the producer, that all this could be the subject of a movie. Now I was realizing I had to tell it my way.

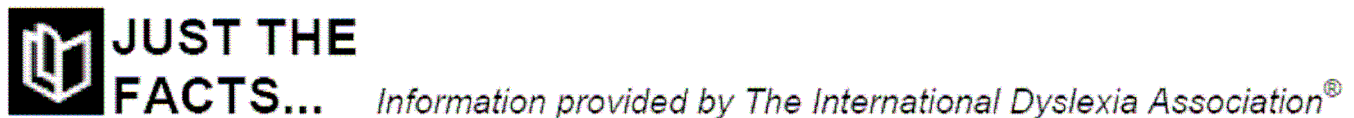
Ernest, who had a handlebar mustache and wore a blue western vest, tapped me on the shoulder and escorted me to the restaurant, where we were to wait for the producer whom I thought of as the Man. Kind and quiet, Ernest looked like a fusion of accountant and, given the mustache, retired porn star. As we sat and drank coffee, he told me about his work. He had read my first book, *Learning Outside the Lines*, and thought my story was pretty inspiring stuff. "You are an American success story," Ernest said. I mulled that over as I ate my fancy eggs. Is that what I wanted, to be what television considered "inspiring"? After about fifteen minutes, the producer arrived, and Ernest rose to stand at attention. It was clear the Man made all the decisions.

I was used to selling myself, selling my story. So after the pleasantries, I leaned forward to deliver my well-rehearsed pitch, but something strange happened: when I opened my mouth nothing came out. My old song and dance about overcoming my "disability" seemed like a fraud. I had wanted this meeting but just couldn't do it. I couldn't speak about my resilient mom, or my determination to be successful, or even the injustice I faced in school. "Did I tell you all that I'm about to leave for a trip around the country in a special ed school bus?" I asked. Ernest looked downcast. After a little explanation of what a short bus was and who rode it, the conversation stopped. The Man adjusted his belt and said, "Why the hell would you do that?"

I did and did not have an exact answer to this question. My reasons for this trip shifted around like the sides of a Rubik's cube; the moment I thought I had something pinned down, the other side was screwed up, jumbled, and needed to be rearranged again. Why would I go back to my experiences of disability when I had transcended all that? What did I hope to find out there back in the bus? Sitting at that table, I was at a loss. What emerged, however, was as close to an answer as I could muster: "I'm going because of two kids, named Bobby and Clay."

From the Book *The Short Bus: A Journey Beyond Normal* by Jonathan Mooney.
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Dyslexia: Is It All in Your Mind?



Recent neurological research provides new insight into the mechanisms and etiology of developmental dyslexia, although there is still much to learn and discover. In this article, we will consider the latest neuroanatomical findings that may, in part, be responsible for the functional difficulties that challenge individuals with dyslexia. The conjecture explored here is that there is a disruption of the cerebral architecture during gestation that sets in motion a cascade of events resulting in reorganization of neuronal circuits and networks. This reorganized anatomical substrate is not optimally organized for language acquisition and does not flourish in the typical environment/education system. Learning difficulties may result depending on the severity and location of brain alterations, the neural plasticity of the system, available compensatory cognitive strategies, and environmental conditions.

Anatomical Differences

In 1979, Albert Galaburda and Thomas Kemper examined a brain removed during an autopsy from a 20-year-old man with dyslexia and reported that there were nerve cells in unusual parts of the cerebral cortex. Subsequent studies at the Dyslexia Research Laboratory at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston, MA, of four dyslexic males and three dyslexic females showed that in the males (less so in females) clusters of "ectopic" neurons are consistently seen in the outside layer of the cerebral neocortex. This layer usually is devoid of nerve cell bodies. Most ectopias were in the frontal and perisylvian language regions. Ectopias are produced before six months of gestation when

there is a breach in the pial-glia border, which normally prevents neurons from migrating too far. Although female dyslexics had only a few ectopias, large numbers of gliotic regions representing areas of neuronal loss were present in the cortex.

Etiology of the Anatomical Changes

Ectopias result from the disruption of the developing cerebral cortex before neuronal migration ends at mid-gestation. The focal gliotic regions in female dyslexics may be the outcome of a similar pathological process acting during the third trimester of early postnatal period after neuronal migration is completed. An insult spanning the two periods could produce both ectopias and areas of neuronal loss. Because autoimmune disorders (work begun by the late Dr. Norman Geschwind in 1982) may be increased in individuals with dyslexia, it was suggested that maternal auto-antibodies might injure the developing brain during gestation, leading to the type of neuropathology seen in dyslexia. This view is not supported by work in experimental animal models. Further, new findings in the human and in experimental models point to the importance of genetic factors. An exciting finding recently by Dr. Bruce Pennington and colleagues is that a region on chromosome 6 may be related to dyslexia. It is intriguing that this area contains many genes related to immune function.

How Might Anatomical Changes Affect Function?

Ectopias are densely and aberrantly connected with other brain areas. Thus, one result of ectopia formation is the alteration of brain organization. One such alteration in dyslexia is the lack of asymmetry in a language-related cortical region called the planum temporale, an auditory area that lies on the superior surface of the temporal lobe. In control subjects, the planum temporale is usually larger in the left hemisphere. However, the dyslexics discussed above showed symmetry of the region. Another change involves one subsystem (magnocellular system) of the visual pathway that may be functionally deficient in individuals with dyslexia (Livingstone, Galaburda, and colleagues). The visual processing disturbance could interfere with normal reading ability. Likewise, similar deficits in other sensory pathways, such as the auditory system (refer to the work of Paula Tallal), could interfere with the normal acquisitions of phonological skills. The visual and auditory systems both show related anatomical changes in organization and neuronal size. However, the functional meaning of these changes is not always clear. For example, Margaret B. Rawson and Thomas West both have emphasized that differences in brain organization sometimes may impart a processing advantage. Albert Einstein and Thomas Edison would undoubtedly concur.

The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) thanks Gordon F. Sherman, Ph.D., Director of Newgrange School and Educational Outreach Center in the Princeton, NJ for his assistance in the preparation of this fact sheet. Sherman, past president of IDA, was the Director of the Dyslexia Research Lab at Beth Israel Hospital and Assistant Professor at Harvard Medical School.

Welcome to Our Newest Members

Please welcome the following members who have joined our branch from March to June 2007.

Carl Arnold
Mary Beavins
Valerie Brooke-Wilke
Vera Celikkanat-Wilson
Dawn Cova
Alisa Crovetti
Janis Garcia
Leslie Good
Amie Gray
Michelle Gumbs
Mary Kate Harris
Karen Imai
Lisa Jewett
Carl Lindstrom
Marg McCaffey
Andrea McEvoy

Louise McGuinn
Sally Moreno
Emily Morgan
Shawna Nielsen
Patricia O'Connor
Anthony Pierre
Susan Rath
Laura Rattay
Cecilia Robb
St. Peter and Paul Catholic School
Dan Stein
Judyth Suttle
Phyllis Swindells
Marilee Taylor
Linda Waechter
Barbara Young

Save the Date

Save-The-Date!

2007 INTERNATIONAL
DYSLEXIA ASSOCIATION
58TH ANNUAL
CONFERENCE

OCT. 31—NOV. 3, 2007
THE ADAM'S MARK HOTEL
DALLAS, TEXAS

Mark October 31, 2007 on your calendar today! Then join 3,000 fellow educators and learning difference advocates at the Adam's Mark in Dallas for the premier professional development conference in North America dedicated to dyslexia.

REGISTRATION and SESSION SCHEDULES ONLINE:
July, 2007

HOUSING RESERVATIONS ONLINE:
April, 2007

3,000 ATTENDEES, 150 EXHIBITORS, 250+
professional development sessions

DALLAS BRANCH
The International Dyslexia Association (972) 233-9107 x222 www.dbida.org

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