

THE NeuroDiversity PODCAST

with Emily Kircher-Morris

[The Stealth Nature of Dyslexia \(encore\)](#)

EPISODE #151

Narrator 0:00

This episode is brought to you by Bridges Academy online, an online high school for twice exceptional students find them at bridges.edu

Dr. Dan Peters 0:09

Some anxiety comes out of that because you're performing below and you're not feeling very smart and people are then wondering, wait, if he or she is so bright and can talk, why are they underperforming?

Emily Kircher-Morris 0:25

Today we're digging deeper into dyslexia with Dr. Dan Peters. What are the indications and difficulties associated with dyslexia? Are there differences between dyslexia and a simple reading deficit? How is it connected with dysgraphia or dyscalculia? Dan Peters is a psychologist and an author and he is also the co-founder and executive director of The Summit Center, and we revisit our conversation about stealth dyslexia in episode 151. The last episode of 2022. I'm Emily Kircher-Morris. And this is the Neurodiversity Podcast.

intro 1:02

This is the Neurodiversity Podcast.

Emily Kircher-Morris 1:25

As we put 2022 behind us, we are rolling out some new things for 2023, including beefing up our offerings in the Neurodiversity University. Today's conversation with Dan Peters is all about dyslexia, and so is our newest course, "Foundations of Dyslexia for Educators." Research shows that one out of every five kids in school districts everywhere are looking for new and better ways to accommodate and support these students. "Foundations of Dyslexia for Educators" is a four module course that will help

teachers understand what dyslexia really is, how it's identified and assessed, some methods for developing reading skills, and supports and accommodations that work for dyslexic students. The course is set up to help track continuing education credits, and it's available in a classroom style format, or for online independent study. For details, look for a link in the show notes or just go to www.neurodiversity.university. Our conversation with Dan Peters is next.

Emily Kircher-Morris 3:20

Today, we'll be talking about dyslexia with Dr. Dan Peters. He's the co-founder of The Summit Center in California and the host of the "Parent Footprint Podcast With Dr. Dan." Dan Peters, it's a pleasure to finally have you here.

Dr. Dan Peters 3:38

Oh, happy I've been looking forward to it.

Emily Kircher-Morris 3:40

Can you start by telling us more about yourself? And what was it that got you interested in this population of kids?

Dr. Dan Peters 3:48

Well, I would say it was about probably 10 years into being a psychologist and I had hit sort of a rut, I was sort of in this, you know, what am I doing? Which direction am I going? I was doing, I had left a lot of agency work, which I really liked and went towards more private practice, which we all know could be a little more isolating. And I was just in this place of what's next? And I got a call from a mother who happened to be a social worker who had these two gifted kids and said, hey, do you know anything about giftedness because we need a local specialist, and we're flying this guy in from Kentucky named Ed Aymond. This was several years ago to test these kids, and it's crazy that we should need to do that. And then and so she also said and we had heard about you through the district that you were able to get parts of the district to understand that kids behavior is not just behavior and it could be due to anxiety. So we had coffee and she told me about gifted and nothing about twice exceptional, but about gifted and she said you know, do you know anything about it? And I said, yeah, all my friends were in those classes, that's what I know about it. And so I was interested, so I started getting books, I started going to conferences and at the first California Association for gifted conference, Ed, who I got to know quite well and we became friends said, hey, you got to meet this guy, Jim Webb told him, I introduced you. And sure enough, I go to the booth and I meet Jim Webb with Potential Press, and he says to me, oh, you need to meet Susan Daniels and Susan Daniels, I just saw her over excitability talk at like 7:30 in the morning. And she and I then talked for about two hours, and the whole idea of

Summit Center was born. And I have to say, I just became obsessive, really about this whole population that I was not trained in. But where the deep dive came, is when realizing that all of these kids that I had worked with at ADHD summer camps, and all my clients, and all these people I tested, who had all these strengths and didn't fit in the box, the idea that they could be gifted and just blew me away. And I realized, oh, gosh, you know, we're, we're just pathologizing and missing so many of these kids and focusing on their weaknesses instead of their strengths, and I continue today.

Emily Kircher-Morris 6:09

Yeah. So specifically, we want to really talk about kids who struggle with reading today. And so we've talked a lot about twice exceptional kids on our podcast in the past in different episodes, and we've kind of glossed over dyslexia a little bit here and there, but never really looked at it really deeply. So that's what we want to do. So why don't you start by explaining to us what does dyslexia look like, specifically in gifted learners?

Dr. Dan Peters 6:34

We call this it was coined by Drs. Brock and Fernette i,e who wrote the Dyslexic advantage, and our founders of the Dyslexic Advantage website and nonprofit, wonderful people, and it presents in gifted people, it can present in similar ways, which we'll talk about, but there it's also hidden. And so what I mean by this is, you know, we see in school that people, everyone expects, you know, as long as you're reading at grade level, then you're fine. And we know when kids have advanced intellectual ability potential, let's say top 2%, and then they're reading at the 50th percentile, which is normal, everyone just glosses over that. But in reality, what we see is stealth dyslexics are gifted dyslexics, they often don't read out loud, they often read in a choppy, slow way, they either will actually skim through the page and bounce all around, and then get the gist of it, which they're very good at, or they'll read very slowly and run out of time. The other thing we typically see with stealth dyslexics is a lot of difficulty with not only handwriting related to the dysgraphia, which is so associated with dyslexia, but also challenges getting their writing out. So what you see is, you know, someone who can pontificate about the fall of the Roman Empire, or you know, just name it anything in history, and then you ask them to write about it and if it's not a full blown meltdown, you might get three sentences, and then you get graded on those three sentences as your as your knowledge base. So it's real, if you really see it in writing. The other things we see are challenges with rote memory. So on the flip side, strong knowledge for the way things are contextually presented way things are meaning have meaning the way patterns come together, challenges with days of the week, months of the year times tables, presidents, capitals, you know all of this rote memory trouble with sequential memory, what do you do first, second, third, and fourth, whether it's daily routine, or it's a math problem, or it's some operation you have to do in your class every day. So a lot

of these executive functioning challenges, we see poor spelling. And again, what you really see is a lot of frustration, and not enough time to complete the task. And then, unfortunately, then some anxiety comes out of that, because you're performing below, and you're not feeling very smart, and people are then wondering, wait, if he or she is so bright and can talk? Why are they underperforming?

Emily Kircher-Morris 9:08

And what causes some confusion for people is that you can't use those age norms in the same way with dyslexic gifted kids to understand whether or not they're struggling. And that's a lot of times what happens in schools when they're deciding on IEPs and 504s. So we need to try to put age norms aside, what is it that we're looking for in terms of discrepancy with gifted kids and dyslexia?

Dr. Dan Peters 9:35

So we're still looking at what has always been the discrepancy model which I know with response to intervention, which some people will know about, a lot of the discrepancy model went away for qualifying kids for special education services. However, what that means is, if your cognitive if any of your cognitive abilities are at level A, and your output abilities, or your academic abilities, are at level B, and there is what we say is one and a half standard deviations apart between those scores, and you can you can look at several different scores. But that's 23 points. So, from the education code, you know, if you have a 123 verbal IQ, and you have a 100, which is the 50th percentile for reading fluency, that still is a reading deficit, that is a reading disorder based on Special Education Code. The problem is, the schools aren't always following that discrepancy, what they're often following is what you alluded to, which is, well, no, it's just where they are for what is expected for their grade level, are they meeting great expected performance? And that's why it's so difficult to get twice exceptional kids qualified for an IEP let alone a 504 plan. And when we look at the two, it depends on the level of dyslexia, I would say for the child, which is in terms of what they need, when you have someone, a bright kid who's very on the mild side, it's impactful, but on the mild side, they might not need an IEP, they might not need pull out one day a week where they have specialized services, they often might need more time, copies of notes, take tests in a quiet setting, you know, a lot of the accommodations, but a lot of these gifted twice exceptional kids who people say, well, yeah, they're reading at the lower end of their grade. Like if you're reading at the 23rd percentile, and your intellect is at the 98th-99th plus percentile. That is a huge deficit statistically, but also functionally, that person's reading and writing ability is going to be very impaired, even at the lower end of the average range in terms of their ability, and that is a learning disability.

Dave Morris 12:01

More in a minute.

Emily Kircher-Morris 12:03

With neurodivergent kids, identification is important, but then the education experience is vastly different from one school district to the next. And although there are some very good programs out there, many parents have limited options locally, so maybe it's time to look beyond. Our friends at Bridges Academy have been educating 2e and other neurodivergent learners for over 25 years, but now they've adapted that model to a really amazing online space. Bridges Academy Online features synchronous instruction, small class sizes, and because 2e kids really thrive when they can focus on their areas of interest, Bridges highlights talent development as a bridge to college and career. And Bridges is a diploma granting institution. If you haven't thought about the online option, you'll definitely want to talk to Bridges Academy, just go to bridges.edu.

Emily Kircher-Morris 13:02

One of the things that I see a lot of times with twice exceptional kids, they compensate really well. For example, somebody whose parents noticed from a very young age that they were really struggling with reading, kind of the things that you mentioned, some of the very slow and labored and really having to work at it, but was also exceptionally gifted. And so then could figure out from the context or you know, do okay, and finally, when you know, this child reached late elementary school, it became so pronounced the school recognized, oh, yes, this is a concern. But then they still didn't know what to do with that, you know, they recognize that maybe, you know, even though this child's IQ was, you know, near 140, and their reading fluency was down 89 or 90. And so, you know, talking about that 23 point discrepancy, it's huge, but, you know, if we put them in these educational services, that's not going to meet their needs, because they're still quote, unquote, in the average range at a 90.

Dr. Dan Peters 14:06

Yeah, and it's I think you need to look at each child's profile and each child's needs. So the first thing is just to validate what you said, is gifted kids compensate, and dyslexics are known to get the gist of what they read. So what happens is, you get these elementary school really bright kids, that they have really strong reading comprehension. And when we give the questionnaire to the teachers, it's about their performance. Some of them come back and say they're the best reader in the class. Well, now, this is a kid who hasn't read out loud in two years. And then so their comprehension is at the 95th-99th percentile, but then when you actually read their mechanics, they're actually phonological decoding, it's really low. And so what, like you said, what happens is eventually they hit a wall when it comes to middle school or high school when they can't keep up with the scanning and just absorbing you know, just

kind of like extracting the information. So then It's like, what do these kids need? Well, if you have a pullout resource room where they, you know, some kids need more time, like some kids just need, they need more help with their writing, they need someone to help organize them, they need to dictate, they need to walk around the room and think of ideas. And you know, so that sort of support can be really helpful with some writing help. If they say, well, you know, they're reading at the 25th percentile and the reading intervention, you know, a lot of the reading intervention doesn't help Dyslexics what they offer in the schools. You know, we know that multi sensory intervention is what does, rewire, helps rewire the neural networks of a Dyslexics brain and multi sensory means you have tiles, you have touch, you have sound, you have your, the way your mouth moves when you make letters, how you hear words and the sounds, and so a lot of schools don't do that. So where I would agree is if they have a program that is not a research based approach for dyslexia, which many aren't, to have a child an hour a day, getting that kind of intervention isn't going to help. So you're really trying to find what they need? What kind of services of support do they need based on their profile in school? And you know, often you're getting intervention, the multisensory intervention outside of school for the schools that don't have it. So I guess it's case by case.

Emily Kircher-Morris 16:16

Yeah, definitely, they qualify for their gifted programs very young. And then as expectations grow as they get older, the reading both in the gifted programs and in their classrooms, you know, that is required increases. And also a lot of times performance on an achievement test in reading is often one of the qualifying factors to participate in a gifted program. But that can often be a barrier, what are your thoughts about how that influences participation in a gifted program?

Dr. Dan Peters 16:44

It definitely influences identification, let's start with identification because you know, different schools use different measures, you know, some of them stick to the visual spatiales, more and more people are using like the COGAT and others where there's, you know, visual, there's verbal, there's quantitative. You want to have a measure that that first of all, captures as many types of gifted thinking and processing, and then you also need to know what sort of does that is that person a fit for the gifted program, because so to your point, you know, sometimes the gifted programs are math only, and you have a verbally gifted individual who's not that awesome at math, right? So that doesn't work. What happens is, when you have a lot of times, you have these kids that do have very strong verbal intelligence, and then they're going into these advanced literature, advanced, verbally laden classrooms subject area, and they can handle the knowledge, what they can't handle often is the pace of the reading and the writing. And so best practices is that with these for these twice exceptional kids, that they have

accommodations within the gifted classroom setting, so they can be with their intellectual peers, and have the engagement and challenge that they need, but also have support for more time, audiobooks, dictation, voice to text, that sort of thing. And that's a way to level the playing field so they still can benefit from those classes.

Emily Kircher-Morris 18:11

I also often see kids who are in middle school or high school classes, and they want to take the honors or the AP classes, which cognitively they are very able to do. And one of my biggest frustrations is when the schools, their first suggestion will be, well don't take those classes, and I always want to go, not taking an honors course is not an accommodation. And you know, you have to go and advocate for these kids and help people know, they still deserve to be challenged, cognitively, with the content and with the critical thinking, and we just need to help boost them up with these other areas where they're struggling.

Dr. Dan Peters 18:46

Totally agree. It's exactly it. And the hard part usually is getting the school first to just acknowledge that there is a learning difference or you know, let's call it learning disability to use, you know, the required language learning difference to use our neurodiverse friendly language. That's A and then once they say okay, yeah, okay, I could see that, then it's saying it's getting the school's recognition for AP and honors courses, that having an accommodation is an educated, special education, right. Where sometimes they'll say, well, no, that's not fair, that's just gonna give them an added advantage, and you know, anyone who has this will not give them an advantage, it's all to equal the playing field.

Emily Kircher-Morris 19:23

You mentioned, dyslexia is not always the same as what accommodations would look like for another type of reading, identified learning disability in the schools. Can you clarify that a little bit for people who may not be as familiar?

Dr. Dan Peters 19:37

First of all, dyslexia, general dyslexia, has been a movement, which is wonderful, and we still have a way to go for schools, districts, states to recognize dyslexia and then put identification and intervention into practice. You know, a lot of times first of all, it's just called oh, they have a learning disability in the area of reading., and so dyslexia is never even talked about as an actual profile, it's always broken down to, okay, they need work with their decoding, and they need work with their fluency or they mainly work with their comprehension. And that's all true, but we just feel like if you don't understand the larger dyslexic profile, including the strengths you're missing, you're missing the whole picture.

So in a traditional intervention program, IEP, for a person with a reading disorder, you will have generally one hour a day pullout support, where they will get some reading intervention, they'll get some help with writing, they'll get some help with their assignments to speaking very generally, now, of course, it can be different, but generally speaking. So when you're looking at a stealth dyslexic, or a gifted dyslexic, you really need to look at it again, like how advanced are they? Where are the areas that they are strong? And where are the areas that they need support, because just blanket saying, okay, you need an hour a day, a pullout support, might not meet their needs, like I said, it might not have the reading support that they will benefit they will really learn from and then they will be pulled out of other classes where they could be benefiting, you really need to look at what is the actual functional challenge in this dyslexic profile. And as I also said earlier, a lot of times with stealth dyslexics, their reading is good enough, they still need more time, but you might not be spending a lot of time on their reading, they might need a lot of support for the writing. And then the question is, how do they get that support when they're writing? You know, do they have a writing coach? Do they have some pull out support? But do they need it every single day again, missing some of their other classes, or does it really just need to be also a heavy emphasis on the accommodation of all the supports that will help them? So for example, colleges are great at this, so colleges have wonderful accommodation plans, and if you go in and you give a report, which we can talk about, you know, you need some documentation that says hey, I have this processing or this learning disability and it affects my reading and writing, for example, colleges, you know, in my day, you'd have to buy notes, these days, it because it's often hard to follow a lecture as a dyslexic because your brain is actually you're trying to process everything you hear, but if you have to write it and write it as fast as the professors or teachers talking, you don't really learn anything and you get behind. So for example, one accommodation is you just get your professor or teacher notes emailed to you. So you just can sit there and listen and write down what you want. So there's all of these ways that are actually pretty simple that can help a stealth dyslexic, so it's just looking at a case by case.

Emily Kircher-Morris 22:37

You've mentioned dysgraphia, what are some of the other connections, either with dysgraphia, or also something I think that doesn't get a lot of attention is dyscalculia. What is similar and different about those diagnoses?

Dr. Dan Peters 22:49

So dysgraphia is really a like fine motor disorder, the "dis" in the "graphia," of like fine motor output, so what you typically see is illegible, or very labored handwriting. So it could be at the muscular level and the ligament level of the hand. But you also can see

not only that, but a disconnect, it's usually a disconnect between the thoughts and the hand. So it doesn't, it doesn't flow, I often say it's like for these gifted kids, they have a five inch water pipe that just flows rushes with information. When you're dysgraphic, that five inch pipe goes to a half inch pipe that's clogged and it just drips out, so frustrating. So the dysgraphia really impacts handwriting, it impacts spelling, dyslexia, and dysgraphia impacts spelling, it impacts written output on a positive. You can get around that by helping someone learn to type, that's something we want to have these kids do. Then there is so then dyscalculia is really what's thought of these days as the dyslexia of math. The field is a little bit split on this, so some people are calling all math disorders dyscalculia, and there's the folks that study dyscalculia we like to at our center differentiate between a math disorder that could be related to dyslexia, and or dyscalculia. And what I mean by that is, so dyslexics have trouble with math facts, because, again, facts and sequences are difficult for dyslexics, but often dyslexics have very strong math concepts, they're very strong concepts and conceptualization, right? This is like Einstein, right? Failed ninth grade math did some other pretty good stuff. Now, a person with dyscalculia they don't understand math concepts, either, so it's literally whether you're talking about numbers, you're talking about time you're talking about estimation, you're talking about money you're taught like it just it expands to all areas of math, not just the math facts. So what we see is that math, wrote math challenges are often a part of dyslexia, but dyscalculia is a separate and more expanded problem with math that needs its own multisensory intervention as well.

Emily Kircher-Morris 25:07

I see, that's a good description. I think that's helpful. What are some strategies for parents who right now probably have their kids home more than expected, and have kids who are struggling? What are some things that they can do to help their kids continue to progress?

Dr. Dan Peters 25:26

So I have a few thoughts about that one. I think I want to quickly go over the dyslexic strengths because that will lead into these few things that people can do that would be really helpful. So the IDs and the Dyslexic Advantage, they talk about the mind strengths, M I N D. So M stands for material reasoning and material reasoning means advanced 3D or spatial reasoning. So dyslexics are generally very strong in design, construction, seeing multiple perspectives, so that and a cool fact is seven out of the seven modern man made wonders have been designed by dyslexic architects, very cool. Okay, I stand for interconnected reasoning, dyslexics have a strong ability to connect different ideas, properties, data points, they're there they consider the novel outside the box problem solvers, So that stick of connection and patterns. N stands for narrative reasoning, dyslexics are often storytellers, either visual, or by story, there's a

bunch of dyslexic, famous dyslexic authors. So dyslexics are often thinking in stories and context. And then D is dynamic reasoning, which is really the entrepreneurial gene, which is the ability to take past and present data and information and predict future outcomes, and so dyslexics are highly intuitive. Now, we might not be capitalizing on the D, but we can definitely be capitalizing on the other three, which is to think about how your child learns best. And often it's when they see something, or when they have it, they identify the patterns, or when it's put into a story. And so what's really challenging for all of the folks that are having to be homeschooled to not by design, is that the modalities, a lot of them are very much now traditional modalities, read, write, do work, and that is not a dyslexic strengths, so dyslexics generally need to get hands on, they need to talk it through, they need to understand the story. So when it comes to history, if they're not watching a video, it might be you're reading to them or they're reading to you or you're watching a documentary about the Civil War about World War Two. Like it's really about making things meaningful and contextual. And removing the barriers, and usually the barriers are having to memorize a bunch of non contextual information, and doing a lot of writing. Those are the things that usually are making these kids collapse and not want to do any of the stuff which they're being told they have to do right now.

Emily Kircher-Morris 28:13

This has been a really enlightening conversation because dyslexia and gifted kids is something we've not talked about a ton before. Can you leave us with just a final nugget of encouragement before we go kind of something to think about?

Dr. Dan Peters 28:27

Actually, I had one final thought. A non-dyslexic is a bottom up processor and learns from the pieces of the building, so a letter, a sound, a sentence, a paragraph, and goes all the way up. Dyslexics are top down processors meaning they're always looking for the connections and how things go together and then they back into the details. So just I'm just really thinking about empathy for all the parents who are teaching and schooling their kids right now, when you have the stealth dyslexic, just remember how strong he or she is and putting the pieces together and getting the big picture and if they can get that information, then they're able to back into those challenging details.

Emily Kircher-Morris 29:13

Dr. Dan Peters, thank you so much for your time today.

Dr. Dan Peters 29:16

Thank you.

Emily Kircher-Morris 29:23

Bright students aren't immune from struggles, so we have to be on the lookout for difficulties that fly under the radar. Stealth dyslexia is difficult to spot and if support aren't provided early, there's a domino effect on both the student's academic path and their social and emotional development. They aren't offered entrance to the most challenging coursework, their competence and risk taking skills are undermined. Helping all educators and parents recognize the ways that learning disabilities can coexist with intelligence is vital for helping each and every student succeed. I'm Emily Kircher-Morris. I'll see you next time on the Neurodiversity Podcast.

Dave Morris 30:47

Our thanks again to Dr. Dan Peters. You can find him and his podcast called "The Parent Footprint With Dr. Dan" at dr.danpeters.com. Also learn more on the episode 151 page of our website. A reminder that we release all of our episodes on our YouTube channel and coming in 2023 a new video based feature we think you're going to love. Subscribe to our social media for coming details. We're on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. As we wrap up the year, our undying thanks to you for all of your support this year. Our host is Emily Kircher-Morris. Our office manager and social media expert is Krista Brown. I'm Dave Morris, the executive producer and studio engineer. For all of us here. Thanks for listening. Happy New Year and we'll see you next time.

Dave Morris 32:01

This is a service of the Neurodiversity Alliance