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ILA Standards Addressed

Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

Standard 4: Diversity and Equity

Standard 5: Learners and the Literacy Environment

Claim: As a literacy leader, I am committed to empowering students with dyslexia by fostering their agency through appropriate reading accommodations and an inclusive learning environment.

Introduction: The Power of Student Agency

As educators, we have the privilege and responsibility to empower all students, including those with learning differences like dyslexia, to become active agents in their learning journey. Student agency, the capacity to act independently and make choices that drive one's learning, is a critical component of academic success and personal growth. For students with dyslexia, who often face challenges with accurate and fluent word recognition, fostering agency through appropriate reading accommodations is essential. By providing tailored support and creating an inclusive learning environment, we can help these students develop the skills, confidence, and self-advocacy necessary to thrive as lifelong learners.

The Challenges of Dyslexia

While there is no universally accepted definition of dyslexia, it is described as a specific reading disorder that affects a student's reading speed and accuracy, as well as their penmanship and spelling abilities (Gaggioli, 2018). Students with dyslexia often struggle with reading comprehension, which can lead to frustration and disengagement from learning. However, with the right accommodations and support, these students can access course materials effectively and demonstrate their knowledge.

The Power of Reading Accommodations

Reading accommodations are essential for leveling the playing field and providing students with dyslexia the support they need to succeed academically . Gaggioli (2018) explores the impact of digital technologies in classrooms, demonstrating how assistive technology can enhance students' motivation to write more, encouraging them to produce longer sentences and reduce orthographic errors. This continuous motivation is crucial for developing strong reading and writing skills, as it drives the practice essential for improvement. Moreover, Keelor et al. (2023) show that when motivation is matched with success, it fosters a positive attitude in students towards learning activities, extending to their overall perception of school and education.

Knoop-van-Campen et al. (2022) highlight that dyslexic students often struggle with decoding, which can hinder their overall reading comprehension. Assistive technology that offers audio support helps these students shift their attention from decoding to comprehending the text, allowing them to use their cognitive resources more effectively. This shift improves comprehension and builds confidence and engagement, as students are able to access content more fully and effectively . Examples of accommodations include audiobooks, text-to-speech software, extended time on tests, and modified assignments . These accommodations empower students to access information in a format that works best for them, fostering engagement and confidence in their abilities .

Fostering Student Agency through Accommodations

When students with dyslexia are provided with appropriate reading accommodations, they are more likely to develop a sense of agency in their learning . Accommodations allow students to take control of their learning process, as they can access information in a way that suits their

needs . As students become more engaged and confident, they are more likely to advocate for their needs and make choices that support their academic growth .

Creating a Supportive Learning Environment

Teachers and educational institutions play a crucial role in fostering student agency and providing necessary accommodations for students with dyslexia. By creating an inclusive learning environment that recognizes and supports diverse needs, educators can help these students thrive academically and develop self-advocacy skills. One effective accommodation is the use of audiobooks, which allow students to access content through listening. Many classrooms have incorporated audiobooks into their curriculum, providing students with dyslexia an alternative way to engage with texts. For example, teachers may use the Learning Ally audiobook application, which offers a vast library of human-read audiobooks and a suite of teacher resources. This ensures all students can participate in class discussions and activities related to assigned reading, regardless of their reading abilities.

Another useful tool is text-to-speech software, which converts digital text into spoken words. Teachers can integrate this technology into their lessons by having students use it to read articles, worksheets, or other digital materials. Some schools have even installed text-to-speech extensions on all classroom computers, making it readily available for any student who needs it. This accommodation empowers students with dyslexia to access content independently and keeps them engaged in learning alongside their peers. By implementing accommodations like Learning Ally audiobooks and text-to-speech software, educators create a more equitable and inclusive classroom environment that provides students with dyslexia the support they need to succeed academically while also fostering their confidence and love for learning.

Conclusion: Empowering Lifelong Learners

By fostering student agency through reading accommodations and collaborating with families, we empower students with dyslexia to become active participants in their learning journey.

Teachers play a crucial role in initiating and maintaining open communication with parents to ensure a consistent, supportive approach both in and out of the classroom. This partnership may involve sharing effective strategies, discussing the student's progress, and working together to create a nurturing environment that caters to the student's unique needs. By extending support beyond the classroom and involving families in the learning process, we create a strong foundation for students with dyslexia to thrive academically and personally.

When provided with the right support, an inclusive learning environment, and a collaborative approach between teachers and families, these students can develop the skills, confidence, and self-advocacy necessary to succeed academically and beyond. As educators, it is our privilege to help all students, regardless of their learning differences, unlock their full potential and cultivate a lifelong love for learning. By working hand in hand with families, we can ensure that students with dyslexia receive the comprehensive support they need to overcome challenges and achieve their goals, both in school and in their future endeavors.

References

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