

## **Interview Assignment**

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SPED370

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October 14, 2022

## Interview Assignment

The purpose of this interview was to speak with an educator who provides services to, and interacts with, individuals with learning disabilities. Mrs. Bruce currently holds the position of Dyslexia intervention specialist at St. Patrick Catholic School in Dallas, Texas. She has held this position for the past two years. She earned her undergraduate degree in Interdisciplinary Studies from the University of Dallas and her master's degree in Curriculum and Literature from the University of Texas in Austin. Mrs. Bruce is a Certified Academic Language Therapist (CALT) who is trained in implementing the Take Flight reading intervention program.

After learning what Mrs. Bruce's educational background and training was, I was curious about her educational philosophy. This was especially true since she was a fellow special educator who also was teaching at a Catholic school. In reply she referenced her Catholic, classical, liberal arts training that she said is always searching for the "true, good, and beautiful". She wants her students to be able to use their gifts and talents to the fullest. Haley wants her students not to only know how to read, but she stated that her ultimate goal is that they also discover a love of reading.

Once the Mrs. Bruce's educational background and philosophy of education was established, I ask her, "What or who influenced your decision to teach the Take Flight classes?" Mrs. Bruce responded that she has always had a fascination with the process of learning; specifically learning to read. She shared that from this interest grew a secondary interest in reading interventions. Specifically, the reason why some individuals struggle with "word blindness". She added that while this may be an outdated phrase when referencing Dyslexia, she likes it because it paints a more concrete picture of what the individual may be experiencing as they work to decode the text.

The conversation continued when I asked Mrs. Bruce to tell me more about how the Take Flight intervention program came to exist. She admitted that she didn't know all the details, but she did know that a program was started in the 1960s by a group of educators. Haley added that when the program was developed it was initially named Alphabetic Phonics. Later, it was renamed Take Flight. In the early stages of Take Flight, the primary focus was on the decoding of text. Haley added that in the 1990s, the program added the comprehension, writing, and grammar components that it still incorporates today. The program that started out in a research lab in a hospital has now moved into school settings where teachers, like Mrs. Bruce, are implementing the program. I asked Haley what she hoped the future of Dyslexia intervention looks like. She replied that she hoped more attention is given to "prevention". In other words, research-based lessons and strategies are implemented more into the general education, tier one, classrooms.

Curious about more of the history of Dyslexia, I asked Mrs. Bruce if she thought the general public's view of Dyslexia has changed through the years. Her response was that yes it has changed, and it continues to change. She continued saying that in the 1950s and 1960s students who struggled learning to read were often just thought of as lazy. However, with the research that has occurred over the past several decades, she thinks this view has changed for the better and Dyslexia is better understood. Haley added that it's interesting in speaking with parents concerning their child because many times it comes to light that they themselves struggled with learning to read.

I went on to ask her what the goal was for her students who complete the Take Flight program at St. Patrick School. She referenced her philosophy adding that when they complete the program, the goal was that these students not only know how to read but enjoy reading.

However, she noted that not all students will learn to love and enjoy reading, and that was fine with her. She did state that the goal then becomes can the student read well enough that the difficulty reading does not impede living their life to their fullest potential. This sparked a lengthy conversation about the students I encounter as they complete the program with her and move to my classroom the following year. We noted that within two groups of students who were only a grade apart we could identify the students who learned to love reading, and the students were reading because it is a necessity in their day-to-day life.

At this point in the interview, I asked her about the biggest challenges she has encountered in her current teaching position. After some hesitation, she responded that the biggest challenge was “the institutional realities”. In other words, realities having to do with the sizes of the groups of students she worked with. She noted that while a group of three to five students is the ideal group size, she often sees larger groups of students in the intervention classes. Haley also noted the way the students she pulled were grouped, and the lack of flexibility in the way she could organize how the intervention was programmed, or implemented, at the school. She also referred to the lack of literacy instructional support being implemented in the general education classroom. Specifically, how the tier one level of instruction lacked structure and had very few, if any, research-based practices incorporated into it.

I then asked Mrs. Bruce what her favorite thing was about teaching the Take Flight classes. Haley works with students in first through fourth grades. Therefore, her response to this question made sense. She replied that she enjoyed the fact that she got to loop with students for several years. This enabled her to not only keep working with the same students over the years, but she like the opportunity to see the long-term progress the students make. On a more technical note, Mrs. Bruce stated that she really does like the Take Flight program due to the structure and

research behind it. This question led me to wonder if she had any tips for teachers considering going into teaching a program like Take Flight. She responded, “Do it!” Since an individual does have to attend training classes, she noted that it helps if the teacher likes professional development. Mrs. Bruce added that, “Every ELAR teacher needs to understand how the English language works.”

The discussion then shifted to the various ways Mrs. Bruce works with parents and the general education teachers at the school. In reference to working with parents, Haley stated that she takes the honest, transparent, and informative approach. She considers both a student’s strengths and needs as she communicates with parents. She considers herself to be her students’ advocate. This is especially the case when she works alongside the general education teachers. When asked what approach she takes when interacting with the general education classroom teachers, Mrs. Bruce responded that she works with them to implement strategies and solutions to use in their classroom. She noted that many times she is providing resources and tools for the teacher to use with the individuals who have Dyslexia in their general education setting.

In speaking about working with the general education teachers, I asked her at what grade did she begin to identify students at risk for Dyslexia. She replied that she universally screens all students in kindergarten and first grade at the start of the school year, and conducts follow up screenings throughout the year. Her goal is to have individuals with Dyslexia identified by second grade. Tools used to identify these individuals include formal assessments like the Renaissance STAR reading assessment, collaboration with general education teachers, sample of classwork, and if available a knowledge of family history.

Mrs. Bruce primarily provides intervention to students with Dyslexia; however, she does work with students who have other learning disabilities. I asked her how she meets the needs of

all the students she works with. She responded by stating that it was mostly through collaborating and supporting the general education teachers by providing resources and strategies. Mrs. Bruce is also one of the teachers in the building who facilitates accommodations, such as extended time on assessments. She has worked with teachers and families in developing accommodation plans for the individuals with Dyslexia, as well as individuals with other learning disabilities.

When Mrs. Bruce was asked to identify one thing she would change about her job right now, that one thing became five. She restated that there does need to be more “prevention” in the general education classroom, and more individualization. She added that she would also like to see an increase in the number of therapists. The need for therapists, even in a large city like Dallas, cannot keep up with the number of individuals who need access to those therapists. She hoped that the cost of training will decrease and perhaps draw in more individuals who are willing to pursue the CALT career path.

I moved the conversation to a lighter in topic. I asked Mrs. Bruce if there are benefits to working in a parochial school verses a public school. She replied with a resounding yes. The main benefit she mentioned was that she can share her faith with her students. She also noted that a benefit is that there is less bureaucracy, and more freedom in the implementation of programs. I was also curious where she finds the motivation to continue and persevere in the special education field. She stated that she simply likes what she does. This fact combined with her prayer life, the good days she has with students, and the positive feedback from parents all play a part in keeping Mrs. Bruce motivated to continue teaching.

In wrapping up the conversation, I asked Mrs. Bruce, “What is one thing that you would want the general public to know or realize about Dyslexia?” Her response was that she wanted

the general public to know that Dyslexia is not just about letter reversal. Yes, that is one characteristic, but there is a wide range of characteristics related to Dyslexia. She stated that she wants the public to know that Dyslexia is a neurobiological disorder that makes reading difficult, and that it is independent of an individual's IQ.

I was good speaking with Mrs. Bruce during this interview. I had not had the opportunity to sit down with her and get to know her better since she joined the school staff two years ago. I learned quite a bit about what her role is at the school. I also learned that we share much of the same educational philosophies, perspectives, challenges, triumphs, and goals in working with our students with learning disabilities.

### **INTERVIEW-QUESTIONS**

1. What is your educational background?

2. What or who influenced your decision to teach the Take Flight classes?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about how the Take Flight came to exist, or the history of the Take Flight program?
4. What is philosophy of education?
5. What is the goal for students who complete the Take Flight program at the school you teach at?
6. What is the biggest challenge for a teacher in your position?
7. What is your favorite thing about teaching Take Flight?
8. Do you have any tips for colleagues? For teachers considering going into teaching a program, like Take Flight?
9. Do you think the view of Dyslexia has changed through the years? If so, how?
10. How do you foster collaboration with the general education teachers?
11. What grade do you begin to identify students at risk for Dyslexia?
12. What kind of assessments and identification tools do you use?
13. What is your approach in working with parents?
14. Where do you find motivation to continue and persevere in your field?
15. If you could change one thing in job right now, what would it be?
16. Are there benefits to working in a private/parochial school verses a public school?
17. What do you hope the future of Dyslexia intervention will look like?
18. Describe your classroom routine/procedures.
19. Describe your strategy for meeting the needs of all the students with disabilities, not just those students with Dyslexia?



20. What is one thing that you would want the general public to know/realize about  
Dyslexia?