

Zach Osbrach: Building an educational foundation for dyslexic students.

Most people don't expect, to be diagnosed with dyslexia at the age of 40, but that was Zack Osbrach's situation in 1995, when a neurologist delivered that verdict after Osbrach came to him thinking he was suffering from a memory disorder. Osbrach was heavily involved in real estate development at the time, and he recalls that another doctor he was referred to was fascinated by the severity of his dyslexia and his success in life despite it.

He wasn't completely surprised by the diagnosis, though: his mother took him to a doctor for testing when he was three or four years old, and he says he was never officially labeled dyslexic in school even though some of his teachers thought he was. Osbrach received LiPS (Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing) therapy for his condition and enrolled in a statewide research study on learning disabilities. His reading improved, but his spelling continued to be a problem, and he soon discovered why he was overlooked during childhood.

"I tried to get LiPS into private and public schools, but educators didn't care about 2-4% of the population," he says. "Unfortunately, dyslexic kids' educations are dominated by failure after failure and they never even experience the feeling of success. That creates frustration and anxiety for them, and years of that kind of environment create behavioral and emotional problems. It's not hard to see why up to 84% of all juveniles arrested have reading disabilities.

During that time, Osbrach searched for a cure for his spelling woes and discovered Dragon NaturallySpeaking. He began using Dragon to rewrite property ordinances for his real estate development business. The confidence boost he received from using speech recognition software led to an epiphany: Why not open a charter school geared toward dyslexic students?

Osbrach recalls: "I was used to starting my own business, but I had no experience with education. More than once I woke up at 3 AM wondering 'What did I do?' On the first day of sign-ups, though, the parking lot was full; I met many parents who were frustrated with the public school system."

Writing with Dragon

Osbrach had researched the charter school creation process and used Dragon to write the application required to start the Einstein Montessori School in Gainesville, FL; it opened its doors in 1999, the first of its kind in the nation. A second school, Einstein Montessori Academy (ems-cocoa.com), was established in Cocoa, FL in 2003, and a third, Einstein Montessori School Orlando East, was approved for the 2012-2013 school year.

"All of my charter school applications, grants, and other written documentation have been dictated with Dragon," Osbrach explains. "As a severely dyslexic person, I could not have been successful without Dragon. For people like me who have severe language processing disabilities in the area of phoneme awareness, Dragon NaturallySpeaking is essential."

During his day-to-day activities handling the affairs of the three charter schools, as well as the real estate development he still does on the side, Osbrach relies on Dragon for all written communication, whether he's responding to an email or putting together a formal report. "Without Dragon, I would be somewhat illiterate," he says. "I often don't get close enough to the word to rely on spellcheck."

His experience with the three schools has fed into his work toward creating a national model for educating dyslexic children and reducing the percentage of juveniles with reading disorders in the criminal justice system.

When Osbrach met with the person in charge of charter schools for Orange county, where the third Einstein school is located, he was asked if he wrote the application. Osbrach recalls: "I said 'No.' He was shocked. Then I said 'Those are my words, but I dictated them with Dragon.'" He said he has dealt with learning disabilities his whole life and appreciated what I had done. In fact, he said it was one of the best charter school applications he had ever read."

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