

Let's Talk Learning Disabilities

EPISODE 36

Welcome to Let's Talk Learning Disabilities with Laurie Peterson and Abby Weinstein. Laurie & Abbey spend their days talking about dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, & ADHD they talk to parents of struggling students and adults who have had a lifetime of academic challenges. They want to share those stories, along with their own insights with you. So, *let's talk learning disabilities*.

Abbey: Hey everyone! And welcome to Let's Talk Learning Disabilities. This is Abbey and today's episode is going to be so informative. Laurie and I sat down with Darius Namdaran, all the way from Scotland to talk about his experience with dyslexia and how he has used it to his advantage and has made a career out of it. He had so much incredible information to share. That we decided to split his interview into two episodes. So enjoy part one of our conversation with Darius Namdaran.

Laurie: Hey everybody. This is Laurie,

Abbey: and this is Abbey. Welcome to Let's Talk Learning Disabilities! Today we have a very special guest, Darius. Welcome to our podcast Darius today. Tell us where you're coming from Darius.

Darius: I'm in Scotland

Laurie: In Scotland. So he's going to talk to us today. He has got some fascinating information to share with us today about dyslexia, um, how it impacts students with their reading and their writing, and also how it impacts adults. So, um, do you mind just starting out, telling us a little bit about you and kind of what got you into the world of dyslexic?

Darius: Yes. So I have dyslexia, unlike many, uh, people, my age. It was my teenage daughter that made me realize the pain that children experience in

dyslexia with dyslexia at school, um, especially in the area of organization skills and organizing their ideas and study skills and so on. I think often as adults we kind of block out that pain of childhood and school and so on. I experienced. And then when you start seeing it happen in your child's life, it just kind of wakes you up and realizes, oh my goodness, they need help. And that's kind of what, what woke me up. Um, I used to be, uh, I am an avid mind mapper, which is, uh, if anyone knows, it's like, um, visual organizer, like bubble diagrams, spider diagrams, webbing, these are all different phrases that people are using for mind mapping. Uh, because the word mind maps was trademarked by Tony Buzan who invented it 35 years ago. So people use other variations of it. So they don't infringe that. Um, I used it to get through my law degree at Edinburgh Law School and my daughter woke up to the fact that she was getting DS and biology. When she was the street A ducks of the school ducks. Do you have the same term in America, ducks? You know, the.

Abbey: No...

Darius: Basically the top student of the school is called a ducks in the UK. It comes from Cambridge and Oxford. Um, and that's when she said, okay, dads teach me your techniques. You know? And I then realized how hard it was to teach a child with dyslexia, how to mind map. I just couldn't believe it. You know, I really couldn't believe it. I thought it would take an afternoon or a weekend, but it took longer.

Laurie: Why do you think it's harder? Why do you think it's harder for a student with dyslexia?

Darius: Well, that's over the last four or five years. It's just been a journey of discovery of when I actually turned it into a business to teach children how to do this. I think it's because children with dyslexia have like zero gravity brains. It's like the thoughts in their minds are like floating all the time and they're not sitting neatly on their work table or desk. I call it like a zero gravity workshop compared to a gravity workshop. My wife's got a workshop where all our thoughts sit neatly on a desk when she walks out, the room comes back in all our thoughts are still where she left them. For me, they're floating and bouncing around the ceiling and for my daughter it's the same. And so we have to constantly capture those thoughts and set them down on

the table and reorganize them. So when you ask a child to do a brainstorm of a mind map and get all their thoughts down, it's just basically like. Uh, a picture of that random chaos in their mind, and they look at it and they go yuck. I don't like that. That makes me feel bad. It's all horrible and chaotic. And they want to get away from the chaos of their mind. And we in a very well-meaning way, try and bring order with a visual organizer, but it's either too much order too linear and order and lots of boxes and so on with these visual organizers in inverted commas, um, Or it's this chaotic random spider diagramming. Um, and there isn't anywhere in between that actually takes that chaos and brings a creative order to it. So that's become my mission over the last five years is to find a way of mind mapping that teaches dyslexic kids how to go from chaos to creative order and then make it productive.

Laurie: How did you first get introduced to mind mapping? Like where, how did you find that and how did you, how did it become the way that you worked?

Darius: Well, it was funny because my geography teacher, when I was 14 years old and I was in the bottom class. So in Scotland, you get streamed into five different classes in private schools. And I was in the bottom class. That's the no hopers and the troublemakers and... And I was a no hoper basically. And my geography teacher said, Namdaran, come up to the front at the end of the class. And I was like, oh no, I'm going to be in trouble because I spent all the lesson talking to the bad boys. And, um, he said...

Abbey: And had you been diagnosed with dyslexia at the time?

Darius: No, no, I didn't find out I was dyslexic until I was 35 until, you know, all of this was over, you know? So, you know, one of the wonderful things about dyslexic individuals. Um, and ADHD is that we start finding lots of workarounds and an unconscious pretty random way. It's a bit unfortunate because it can take you 2, 3, 4, 5 years to find a workaround that you can learn in a month, you know, but you know, we get there, we're slow slowly, eventually. Anyway, so this geography teacher said, Namdaran, I think you're smart. I think you could pass this exam. And I'm like, well, thank you. But I, I don't see how, and he said, you need to read this book called use your head by Tony Buzan. And it was all the rage. Anyway, Tony Buzan simplified all

sorts of things like the Pomodoro technique and space repetition and all of these important techniques on how to study. And one of them was this mind mapping thing, and it was too complicated for me. Seeing all those spiderwebs and stuff like that. So I left it until six years later when I crashed and burned in the third year honors of law school. And I went back to law school and said, I want to finish, but I need better techniques. And that's when I sat down with this book and said, I'm going to learn how to study. And I learned from his book how to mind map. And that was the first time I actually sat down and really enjoyed learning a subject completely. Not just tactically learn the three main topics that they'll ask in the exam and try and avoid four or five of them to lighten the load, et cetera, and playing Russian roulette with what you're going to decide, because I'd done that all the way up to, uh, law school. And by the time you're in third year in law school, you actually have to know your subject, all of it. And so I failed. Um, and that's when I decided no, I've got to find a way to actually learn stuff and enjoy it. And that's when I learned how to mind map. I'm self-taught.

Laurie: So you went from the bottom class, the bottom to law school?

Darius: Yes, actually I was 14 years old and by the time I was 16, I was in the top of every class and I'd got some of the highest grade in the whole country. Within two years.

Abbey: Wow. And what do you attribute that success to?

Darius: Oh, I would love to attribute it to my intelligence. Uh, but it's not. It's actually, I played Russian roulette with what questions I had to answer in the exams. So what I did was I went through all the exam papers. Going back 15 years and mathematically calculated what the probabilities were of what questions would turn up. And I just studied those questions plus, or minus one or two. And my calculations were right all the way up until third year of law school when you can't play that game anymore.

Laurie: Darius, I hate to break it to you. But that sounds like that was due to your intelligence because that's brilliant. I mean, what a great idea.

Abbey: What a great strategy.

Laurie: I think that shows too, that dyslexics, they think so different, you know, they think outside the box, they look, they, they look at things from different angles and you took that and, yeah, that's crazy.

Darius: So my whole approach with a bullet map academy, because it's like, Hey guys, look, let's learn how to play the game. Let's learn the rules of the game and let's learn how to play within the rules of the game, because what I've noticed with a lot of people with dyslexia, it's kind of like if you can imagine a football field, okay. You know, it's like a test is the teacher saying to you, I want you to take this ball and run to the end of the pitch and put it through those sticks over there. Okay. And. Whether it's soccer or whatever, let's take soccer. We play soccer here and you play soccer over there. You kick the ball and you get it into that net and then you're done. Okay. The only thing is that sometimes people with dyslexia often get into their heads. So they think, oh, this is a to show how good I am at running or how good I am at dribbling or how good I, and they're off the pitch and they've run two miles and they've shown that they've run around all the circles and then they get close to the nets and they get across the line. And the teacher goes, sorry, I can't give you a mark. And you're like why I did all these amazing things. See how good I am. And he says, you didn't get it in the net. All I want is you to do is to walk up the pitch and kick it in the net. And then we'll go onto the next thing now, like really is that all you want? And so they expand the scope because they think, they're constantly hungering for the bigger picture, the bigger meaning, the bigger context, how things all interrelate. And often some of these kids, like my geography teacher when I was 14 was saying, what's the problem here Namdaran? And I said, well, you know, I really am trying to learn everything. And he says, so, so give me an example. And I said, well, physics, I'm trying to figure out what the substance of gravity is. And. So I can't figure out what the substance of gravity is, and he says Darius, no one in the world has figured that out yet. You know? And we don't start asking that question until you're at university. Right now, you just need to say that gravity is 10 Newtons and you're okay. And I'm like, really? Is that all? And he said, and I said, so, so what do I do for geography? And he says, look, Darius, I'll tell you how it works for geography. Here's how it works. Do you want a B? I said, yes, I'd

love a B. And he says, this is how you get a B. Last week, I told you some stuff about geography and this week I've got a little test. Okay. All I want you to do is tell me what I told you last week. Can you do. I'm like what? I don't kind of need to explain it or anything like that. I says, no, no, don't go into all the explanations. That's your problems Darius. And just tell me what I told you. And I said, seriously, is that it? And you'll get a B and I'll get a B. Yeah. Okay. And he says, would you like an A, and I said, I'd love an A. And he says, well, what you do is if you think of something that connects to something else, I taught you, not something else you've learned on the side, but something else I've taught you in the curriculum. I'll give you an A. And I was like fine. Within six months I was getting A's. I was on the top of the sets and my, my mum had to fight to do six hires. I mean, in Scotland, we do five hires, which is five really tough. But I did six. Um, my, my, and they're like, how can he, this is Namdaran. And I was like, well, my mum is my advocate. You know, I couldn't have been here without my mom. That's the bottom line. No one was just like, she can get anywhere really without a really good mum. Um, sorry dads. But it really does come down to mum's forgive me, but there are exceptions and that's really neat to be in the picture too, but it's often the tenacity of moms, like my mom saying to me, diaries, you are really clever when every single other person and organization and lesson was saying, I was dumb.

Laurie: Was your mom around when you had your diagnosis, when you were diagnosed with dyslexia?

Darius: When I was 35? Yeah.

Laurie: Yeah. Did that sort of, um, give her a little bit of like, see, you're smart. It's just, I mean, I feel like that would have given her so much joy to find that out.

Darius: Yeah. Yeah. I think it was quite, I don't know if it really did that for her. I did it for me. It was funny. I'll tell you about my mom, right? I'm 51 years old. Okay. And, uh, two months ago I was sitting in the, uh, semifinals of the ed tech championships in the UK, the world ed tech competition. And we had the UK semifinals and I was presenting bullet map academy because we're an ed tech company and I presented it in the three

minutes. And we were, there was other companies that were earning like \$20 million a year, had huge technology budgets had lots of research behind them, whatever, and we are tiddlers compared to them, but we were joined equal if they could have, we came second runner up. And my mom said after that, she said, you know, I knew eventually you would, um, what does she say? I knew eventually you would find your thing or something like that, or I knew eventually you would be successful. I'm not successful yet, but, um, uh, it was like, it's an ADHD thing as well. I've got ADHD as well. I self-diagnosed, I'm diagnosed with dyslexia, but, uh, self identified with ADHD over the last year or so. Um, so you, you kind of go from one thing to another and not all what become a Jack of all trades. And sometimes don't always become an expert of one. And I suppose in the last five years, I started to become the expert of one.

Laurie: I think you've found your passion though. And I think that's part of that ADHD brain is when you find the thing that you're passionate about, you kind of dive all in.

Darius: Yeah. I think that's really important for dyslexia. Often. I heard this talk where a guy said, you know, often people are wanting you to find your, “what” you're meant to be doing in life or “why” you're meant to be doing it. But actually the secret is to find your “who” are you living for? And once you find “who” you're living for, “who” you're working for, all the “why's” and “what's” come into place. And my, “who” is people with dyslexia?

Laurie: That was awesome. Right. I love that. So tell us, oh, go ahead.

Abbey: I was going to say, so do you work with individuals with dyslexia of all ages or what's your, in your wheelhouse or what's your target age group for your program?

Darius: It's been really strange over the last seven years as I've kind of developed this and then more formally in the last five years. I started off wanting to teach entrepreneurs, visual, organizing skills with dyslexia because often entrepreneurs really need to organize their ideas visually to figure out how to stay focused and on track. Then I thought to myself, my goodness, yes. Okay. These guys will pay one to two to 3000 pounds a day for

training, et cetera, in a group or a, for a CEO suite, a C-suite or whatever. But actually, what if I could train them when there were 14 before they went through all that grief, that would be so much better. And so I decided, could I teach 14? Year-olds my university technique for going through exams. And so I did it with them, my pilot group, and they just thrived over a couple, three months. They were all ACEing their exams and just doing so well from failing within just weeks. It was just mind-boggling what happens when they engage their visual skills. So that worked well. And then I started telling people about it and people came and did it. And then mothers would come to me and said, look, could my eight year old, do this? And I said, I have no idea if your eight year old could do it. This is like for examination students, of course, and groups to discuss it. And so I said, well, try it. And, uh, you know, we'll just do a trial and try it. Eight year olds were doing it and getting it. And they were getting it faster than the 14 year olds and the adults. And I was like, wow, this is incredible. And the parents were amazed by it as well. And I was saying to myself, what if we could teach a five-year-old how to take notes and, um, explain what they learnt from their notes before they can even read and write. Could I do that? And so we developed this doodle mapping technique for even children who can't read or write. And so we get them to listen to a short story for five minutes, they doodle in a certain technique, and then they point through their doodles in they re-tell the story. And a lot of parents with kids who are dyslexic are like, my kid has reading comprehension. They can read, they spent like two grand on Barton or an Orton-Gillingham or whatever, they can read. But if you look at each one of these, uh, um, uh, programs, which are brilliant, by the way, they do say there's a limit, you know, we'll teach your child how to decode and read, but we don't teach them comprehension. That's another skill. And it's comes from wisdom and understanding because what the parents found was their child could read the whole story. And at the end of it, you'd say, what was that story about? And then we said, oh, there was a, there was a, there was, there was a king and there was a sword. I can't remember anything else, you know. But if they did the doodles, they could say, oh, there was this king and there was this Damocles guy. And then he had to sit on a chair and he got all this food. And then there was a sword hanging above him and it was on a thread and then he was scared and it was all about how you don't want to be like a king because they could have a sword drop on their head. And it's actually okay to just be an ordinary person because sometimes that's better. And the parents going oh, my goodness, my child comprehends the story and can re-tell it, you

know. All from about five minutes of doodling. And so basically when you ask me. What age range we do. So what we've done is we started with the entrepreneur. We went down to the 14 year old, down to the eight year old, down to the five-year-old and have gone back up to the entrepreneur with dyslexia at work. And so, yes, all ranges. So in bullet map academy, you've got like a hundred students and some of them are doctors. Some of them are professors in law, in medical school with dyslexia. Others of them are eight year olds and seven year olds and everyone in between.

Laurie: That is ridiculous, I love that. So can you give us just a brief overview, you know, without giving away all the secrets of what bullet map academy does and what is the, the, uh, The theory behind how you provide that support?

Darius: Well, first of all, there's no secrets. Okay. Um, there's no secrets. I'll tell you everything. Um, I want to tell you everything. I want to tell everyone everything, um, We were standing on the shoulder of giants here, you know, I've not kind of, you know, so, so what we've done is I've gone and over the years looked at the students and decided, figured out what they need. And, but what basically what they need is a combination of capturing their random ideas as bullet points, which is kind of taking a Cornell system approach to capturing information and then combining it with a mind mapping approach. Um, and then with seven executive functioning techniques built into it all onto a one page sheet of A4 paper, uh, legal paper with pen and coloring in pens. You need to know technology, nothing. A child can do it. Whether they're five years old or they're 55 years old, they can organize their thoughts all on one page and that's so important for children with working memory difficulties, executive functioning, difficulties, processing difficulties, uh, auditory processing difficulties, phonological processing difficulties. Basically we found lots of little techniques that the best people with dyslexia tutors do across different disciplines and put it into the one page. Okay. So I'm kind of sitting on the shoulder of giants here. You know, this is each one of these techniques. You can go back to research on what that one technique is there for. Okay? So I'll just give you a quick visual, verbal description of what happens and I'll give you an example. Okay? So. It's useful to get practical. So one of the biggest difficulties we've noticed is children with dyslexia often, um, find it hard to write a story. They're really great storytellers.

They have really great imagination. But when it comes to crunch and someone says, that's a fantastic story, Billy, could you just write it down on one page? So I've got it. And Billy's like, oh no. And well, the first time he tries and it goes on and on forever and never finishes. Then the second time he learns or the third time he learns, he says, look, I'll just write in two or three sentences because this is never going to end. And then the next time you ask him, he says, no, I'll just tell you the story. Okay? And so we've got a lot of 13 year olds who have never written any story in their life. Okay? Now, if you've got a child with dyslexia, you'll go, "well, of course." And if you don't have a child with dyslexia and they're a typical learner, you'll go, "oh my goodness, really?" And, and so that's the difference, you know, you go, of course, children with dyslexia, resist writing down stories, and they've maybe only written one or two in their life properly, but they probably will have a secret journal somewhere of a never-ending story in their imagination that they're never finishing. Okay. So you've got this dilemma where hugely creative, but they've not got the executive functioning skills to actually get that story down into a written piece of paper. Now every single person is going to have to write a structured creative writing story at some point in their high school to get their grade. And if they don't pass that they will not pass English and they will fail out on that guaranteed. And that will be a minimum requirement for any future jobs. If they want to become a paramedic or if they want to become a vet nurse or something like that. And they find their thing and they say, do you have English or whatever? Oh, no, sorry. I don't have that yet, but I'm really good at my job. And I'm like, really, sorry, you've got to have that as a basic, so we deal with that straight up front and center because it's an utter monster of a problem for kids with dyslexia. To me, what it feels like is when I see these kids walking up to that little, just write me a little paragraph or a story for them. It's like approaching a doorway in a wall and there's this monster change to the doorway on a leash and it's barking and yapping at them. And the closer they get it's brawling and wanting to attack them. It doesn't hurt them because it's on the leash, but there's no way they can get through that door. They try everything that can to sneak past it. And distract it or whatever, but there comes a point where that doorway is not wide enough to sneak by it. Normally when they're like 12 years old, you've got to write the story, tough. You've got to do it now. And it takes hours and hours and hours, and they try everything they can to kill this monster. But what we say to the kids is don't try and kill the monster, feed the monster and tame it. Every story monster wants five things

in the story. And once you feed them those five things, the story monster calms down and becomes like a little puppy that is like your friend and is actually really kind. And all it is, is it's hungry. All right? So I want to show you how to feed this story monster. Would you like that? Because I've done it already. And I want to show I've come back to show you how to do it. And they're like, okay, I don't believe you, but I would quite like to get past this story monster, but they don't believe me. Okay. Because I've set the E word, the essay word. It's like a swear word in dyslexia circles, the E word essay. And so here's what we do. You want to hear what we do?

Laurie: Yes Please.

Abbey: Yeah.

Darius: So take a sheet of paper. Let's feed the monster. Okay. We take a sheet of paper on the left-hand side, we write down all the random ideas that they've got in a bullet point list. It doesn't matter what or do they come in? Don't worry about it. Then we underline a few key words. Then we draw something in the center of the page called the story star. Okay. And it's just a little five points. And on the tops of the star, it's like a starfish five branches. Okay. The top star has a face. The next branch has an eye. The next branch has a foot. Then there's a hand. And then there's a crown because in a story, the face represents the characters. The eye represents what the main character has their eye on what the main character really wants. So they might want to become rich. Okay. Or let's say, Paul. They want to become famous and loved. Okay. Then, then the foot is the baddie who comes along and trips them up and stops them becoming popular or famous or loved. And then the hand is the person who stretches out hands, normally some wise figure or kind figure, or a guide of some sort that gives them a magic wand or a magic spell or some training or a karate training or something like that. And then they get to the crown, which is what they had their eye on and they get what they wanted. And that's when you know, you've got the end to your story because often children with dyslexia write never ending stories because they don't know what an ending actually is. So you've got to set yourself up for an ending by having the right structure. So in teaching language, this is a scaffold. Okay. This is a visual scaffold. Okay. So then we take all the random ideas and we just place them visually in the relevant parts on the branch. Okay. And then it

starts to bring structure to their random thoughts, creative order. Do you see it? Can you imagine that.

Laurie: Yeah, that's awesome.

Darius: Now the magic is that because it's all on one page, their working memory is not being overly taxed. They're not looking at one page over here, remembering something and flicking it through. Oh, I've got something else over here. And then their working memory falls and drops all the balls and everything floats to the ceiling again. Everything's stuck on one page. Their attention is in one place. Okay. And they don't get stressed out because they know everything is just on that one place. It's okay. You're not going to lose anything. Nothing's going to float away. Then this is the magic. Okay. Because they've emptied their working memory and taken all their ideas and puts it into the star. They can see where the gaps are. They can see they've got lots of character. They've got lots of the baddy action. And then you say, so what does the character want? Oh, I don't know. Or maybe do they want to get rich? Do they wanna, you know, and we just did this with a 13 year old and he wrote this great treasure hunt story. And basically what the character wanted was to get this treasure of the treasure thieves and take it to the museum because he wants to preserve history. There's a want, that makes the story. Interesting. Do you get my drift? But without that, it just becomes a never ending, you know, trips of lots of different things happening you see? And now, you know, what that wants is you can start thinking, well, how did he get it in the end? And what was the guide? Who's the guide, what's the thing that really helped him. He's like, oh, I don't know. Oh, there's a wise man. And so on. Anyway. So he figured out this story. So what's happened is there've been two creative moments. The first one. Was the brainstorm of the ideas, but because you've gone through an external process, you've actually given yourself head space to be truly creative on top of what you've done. It's the second iteration of your organization of the, of, of the story. And that's when the genius of dyslexia, ADHD, and other neuro-typical, uh, atypical kind of, uh, thinking patterns really comes out and it gets captured. And then once we've done that, there's other techniques in here as well. Like I'm not, I can't explain it all in detail here, but I've got a course and so on. I can give to you or access to your listeners for free, if you want. Uh, people normally pay for it, but happy to, you can go into more detail, but then we get them to talk through

the story by pointing to the map so their auditory processing the story before they go into words and written word. So at every level we're trying to use different processing styles to both. Um, manually go through what they find hard and use what they're strong at to get them to their destination, which is finally to talk through the map with voice to text and voice, to text that out as a document, and then go through it and clean it up as the finished piece. And this is laborious the first time it might take eight sessions, 8-45 minute sessions to systematically go through this process. But once a child has got their own map of this story. What we then teach them to do, and it doesn't stop there. What we then teach them to do is to flash map it. How can you redraw that map from memory without looking at it? And they do a quick doodle of it and they're like, oh my goodness. I can remember it. And we say, let's do it again. And they do it again. And they do it three times in a row. Take about four minutes to do a flash map. At the end of that, we say to them, do you know. You could go into an English exam. And if they asked you to write a story about an adventure, creative adventure, you can redraw that map from your memory. And you've already got your essay outline. That's uniquely yours, ready to write out. And it's organized because if you don't realize that as a parent, every single exam is 50% an organization, an exam and 50% the subject. How are you going to organize the learning that you've got to deliver? The product that the examiner is wanting? It's actually hugely about organization. Organizing information, organizing your time, all of that. That's really half the mark and you can literally go into common core or Pearsons or whatever, and you can look at the marking rubric and it's about 42% of marks. Go simply to how you structured your information and your, and you organized it.

Laurie: That makes sense.

Abbey: Brilliant. And then they have the visual in there. Sorry. I was just thinking then they have that visual in their mind that they can use in so many different instances and generalized to so many different settings. Once they've learned that visual of that mind map in their mind, they can apply it to so many different things. I think that's brilliant.

Laurie: Well, and that was going to be my question. Like, you know, do you feel like when you have a student that needs to write a paper for English, that's maybe not a story, but he sells to write a five paragraph essay that,

about a bookie read or that has to contain. Do you feel like this translates into those kinds of things? He's not necessarily telling the story. You might be analyzing the story, right. Or having to write a paper for government class or something like that?

Darius: Yeah. So once a student has faced down the most terrifying essay monster, there is in childhood, which is the creative writing story because it comes so early and it's the first one you're basically faced with. Then once we teach, we've taught them as story star process, the bullet map process, it's called a bullet map because you do a bullet list and then a map bullet map. Okay. So it's like a Cornell bullet list compared with a mind map. So bullet map and in the middle of the bullet map, there's this story star. Okay. Now story star doesn't need to be always in the middle of a bullet map. You can swap that scaffold out for a different scaffold. For example, if you're doing a descriptive essay and you, uh, teachers often give you here's a picture of this scene, I want you to do a descriptive essay of it. And okay. If you're dyslexic, you're like, right. Do you want me to do a descriptive essay from a geological point of view? Or do you want me to do it from an architectural point of view or from a sci-fi point of view or from a UV light point of view, there's all sorts of different ways of looking and describing what's in that picture. How, what on earth you trying to ask me to do here? I've no idea, you know, um, and they end up saying, well, there's a man and a dog. You know, because what are you asking me? So what we do is like a descriptive window. I've got a scaffold, for example. So we call these little stars in the middle scaffolds. And so you can swap out for a descriptive different scaffold. Like I've got descriptive windows, scaffold. Which has five branches, but they're very different than the story star. We've got like the persuasive fence. So as a man sitting on a fence and you have to persuade him to jump one way or another, how are you going to do that? Well, there are five main branches for that. So we use, for example, Aristotle's three different techniques of logic and uh, ethics and ethos, and we put that into a picture for them. So what's the logical thing to do? What's the emotional, uh, how are you going to appeal to their emotions? And what's the ethical thing to do? And then you've got an introduction and conclusion. There's a few others as well, but basically you, you, you take with a scaffold, it's kind of. It's really helpful to understand this whole process of learning like cooking. Okay. So cooking has two parts to it. You go get the ingredients and then you cook them together. Now learning is like going and getting the ingredients,

but a test is how you cook them together. And a lot of children with dyslexia or ADHD have processing difficulties. And so there's like, what is the process of cooking together everything you've got so it creates a lovely juicy meal that will make the exam monster happy? And so often that's overlooked or assumed by teachers. They just say, oh, do an essay outline. And I, and you know, some kids have gone five years still wondering what on earth? An essay outline actually means because all they have is a random bullet point list of ideas and they just give up on that and they just say, oh, I'll just start writing. It ends up being 10 times as long as it should. And then your parents have to edit that blooming essay for, for a whole weekend. And, oh, it's never ending.

Laurie: You know, what's interesting. What I have found with a lot of the kids, at least in the area where we are is that they do these processes as a group in class, which sounds really great, right? Like they're going to do the outline together, but I think what ends up happening is the kids aren't really learning. They're just, they're just writing stuff down where the teacher says it, but they don't understand why. And I think using this process. Really gives them the "why," why are these things going in these places? Why in this order? Um, but I think, you know, they end up with an outline in class, but they have no idea why it's organized that way. And I think then they leave class and not with, with no skill on how to write a paper.

Darius: Unless there are bullet maps. Shouldn't sorry, Abbey for cutting you off on that. One of the things that makes me so excited with my students is, we teach our students how to brainstorm with a bullet map. So there's no story. Start in the middle. You just write the bullet point list on the side, find some keywords and make your own kind of pattern of the core ideas. Okay. So that's a bullet map brainstorm. Okay. Which is really very hard. And some of the kids, when the teacher says, I want you to brainstorm what you remembered from the last geography lesson. Okay. Uh, just write it down. I'll give you three minutes to recall it. Okay. And then they stop and then they say write. Turn to the person, the, the, the two or three people at your table and share your ideas with each other to help each other, fill in the gaps. Okay. What my students do is they brainstorm their ideas of bullet point list. And they quickly make a little spider map in the middle of the main three or four main ideas. Okay. And then they turn to the, uh, kids beside them and the

kids share their ideas. Some of the same as theirs and some are different, the different ones they add in, to their branches. Okay. And they fill that out. And then the teacher says, so what did your group discuss? And it's the kid with the map that ends up showing their leadership by saying, oh, we were discussing this, that the next thing. And they do this beautiful succinct summary, not a personalized, this is the thing that I really wanted to talk about, but a bird's eye view, and that's a sign of leadership where you give everyone's idea their proper place. And that's when they start shining because that's off, they're often leaders, you know, they're often people who compile information, gather information, get people together and collaborate and so on, coordinate, and see the bigger picture. And once they've got a tool like this, they start shining and the teacher goes, that was a really great summary diaries. What did you do that from? Oh, I just did a little map and she looks at it and she can I take a photo of that for my records. And this happens all the time. And they ended up teaching the other kids how to organize visually, not with a crappy photocopied visual organizer with boxes all over it. That changes every single time. It's got to be a consistent process of thinking that has the space to dynamically change according to the circumstances, but still has continuity so they can develop. Ultimately the city, which is one of the biggest problems with children with dyslexia, ADHD often comes.

Abbey: Yeah, you're right. They they're taught many skills and they go through the motions of replicating those skills. But they're not understanding like Laurie said earlier, the why, the foundation of why this is an important skill and what this means and how you can apply it to different scenarios. So I think it's really not what you're teaching individuals with dyslexia to do, and it can be so helpful to individuals with ADHD to that struggle with those executive functioning skills, like planning out a task and executing the task and organizing your thoughts in a manner so that you can execute a task. So I think that's great, but, and it's called Bullet Map Academy, correct?

Darius: Yes. Yes. I'm not here to promote the up academy. I'm really here to promote the principle of dual coding. To be honest, actually, you know, like dual coding is a key principle in education. If you look into the research on dual coding, dual coding is basically coding information. And words at the same time. So you've got a fire exit sign and it's got a picture of a person going out the window and it says exit that's dual coding, you know, and dual

coding. Isn't just drawing a general picture of a tree in a forest or whatever. It's about distilling it down into a symbol, an icon like apps have icons that really just drill down the essence. And so when a child is taking notes, if they are dual coding while they're doing their notes, they're doing a doodle that goes along with the idea from the story they're using both their working memory loops, that verbal loop and the visual loop, the auditory loop and the visual loop in their working memory. Um, so if they've got working memory difficulties, they double up their ability to use their working memory because they're not just leaving their visual one, you know? You know, they're engaging it. And that might be a stronger working memory loop than the, the auditory one, for example. Um, and, and the word one as it were. So dual coding so important and actually learning how to take visual notes in an organic way. Not just always the there's gotta be structure, but it's gotta be a flexible enough structure to, to, to take visual notes. So I highly recommend mind mapping, proper hand, done mind map.

Abbey: Okay.

Laurie: Yeah, no, it, it reminds me of, we talked about. Multi-sensory and I feel like what you're talking about with the dual coding is along the same lines. We hope that you found that as informative as we did be sure to come back for part two of our interview with Darius and our next episode, you're not going to want to miss it. Thanks so much for joining us and let's talk, learning disabilities.

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