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## In The Beginning

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In The Beginning  
A Film by Lach Davidson

In The Beginning is a short film that explores the social effects of navigating the education system in the United States with a learning disability or what I prefer to call a learning difference. I say difference because conditions such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia are not disabilities per se. Rather, individuals who have these conditions are often at a disadvantage but that disadvantage stems from the system or approach to learning they are required to follow and not their actual ability to learn. In fact, in certain visual and creative situations individuals with these conditions may excel.

At a very young age I was diagnosed with dyslexia and dysgraphia. During my early grades in school I struggled to relate to my peers. At times I felt physically separated from them due to the practices the school used on children that don't fit well into the mainstream. As I got older I learned to use tools like a computer with writing aides, text-to-speech, and speech-to-text which is how I am writing this reflection. I also attended a summer school for students similar to me. This was eye opening. Suddenly I did not feel as isolated and the situations I thought were unique to me were not. Not feeling a sense of dissolution changed my life in the school setting. This phenomenon is not unique. There are many other situations that can lead to the same sense of isolation including race, religion, sexual orientation, and others. But in the case of learning differences, the social aspects are often not considered. These feelings can have a profound impact on the well being of students with learning differences.

My short film is intended to raise awareness of these social aspects of young children with learning differences. Visual storytelling is my way I feel that

I can communicate best. This story revolves around an adult elementary school teacher that himself had grown up with a learning difference. He finds himself reflecting on how he became a part of a system that was so challenging for him as a student because it was not designed for someone like him to succeed in.

His story is not mine or any one individuals but rather an accumulation of multiple experiences from individuals who thought they were the only ones to go through it. At first, when taking on this endeavor I thought it would be very hard to find stories of others going through similar experiences. Many people go undiagnosed or do not understand they have a learning difference until high school or college. But to my surprise, it wasn't that challenging to find the others with similar stories.

One notable person who has shared their own experience with a learning difference is Speechify founder Cliff Weitzman. Speechify is a product that turns text into speech to help those with difficulty reading. He is both a successful entrepreneur as a member of the Forbes 30 under 30 as well as an avid promoter of dyslexia awareness. He has built a billion-dollar company to help others like him and in the process discovered that non-dyslexic individuals also benefit from his technology. He is not shy about being dyslexic and that he could not read or write until the fifth grade. He often refers to how he would faked his inability to read to avoid looking stupid in front of his peers. Recognizing that he had to learn to read in order to pursue his goals he forced himself to spend time in the library but when trying to read he often found himself falling asleep from the effort it took. His dad noticed this newfound commitment and on the recommendation of a friend started to read Harry Potter stories to Cliff every night. This ultimately became the catalyst moment in Cliff's journey to read.

My own experiences were similar and hearing Cliff Weitzam's story is confirming and empowering. I also couldn't read on my own until late in elementary school. It was exhausting to learn to read and to this day reading still leaves me feeling exhausted. At the suggestion of a teaching assistant, my mom read Harry Potter stories to me as well, every night for years. I learned to read because of Harry Potter and my mom's dedication. This also when I fell in love with storytelling.

Another example is Danial Britton. He did not finish a book on his own until age 22. As a graphic design major he became fed up with his classmates and professors depicting him as lazy or unintelligent which is a common issue for individuals with learning differences. He decided to apply his skills as a graphic artist to share the experience of dyslexia with others by creating a font that simulates the frustrations of reading with dyslexia and processing challenges. In doing so he created a new shared experience. I have incorporated his font into the graphics of my film Student film.

In my film I have tried to communicate the significance of the social challenges confronting young students with learning disabilities. My choice is to use visual storytelling. I believe this is an important time for students with learning differences. Even in my lifetime there have been changes in laws to support students with learning differences. Teachers in some states can now openly discuss these issues with parents and suggest testing if there are signs that a child may have learning differences. Technology and tools continue to improve. I believe all of these positive developments stem from awareness and an appreciation for the unique skills and perspectives students with learning differences bring to the classroom and life.

I hope that my film will cause viewers, whoever they are, to reflect on the social issues experienced by young students with learning differences and encourage empathy by those who may not have considered them. For kids with learning differences that feel different than their peers and their parents I hope to convey a sense that things are going to be okay.