

# Professional Development:

## *Through My Eyes* (interactive simulation)

### Description

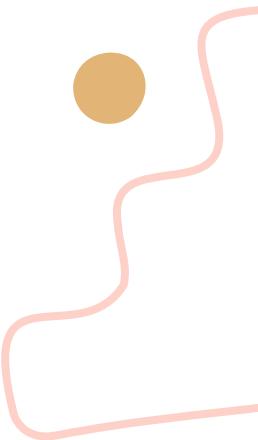
This professional development resource uses [\*\*Through My Eyes\*\*](#), an interactive experience created by Understood.org. This free set of resources features three simulations that are based on the real-life experiences of students with ADHD, dyslexia, and dyscalculia.

### Goals

- Build empathy for students with ADHD, dyslexia, and dyscalculia.
- Understand why and how to support students with learning differences.
- Shift mindsets from a deficits-based approach to a strengths-based approach.

### Time

45 minutes to 1 hour, plus optional extension activities



### Target audience

General education teachers (adaptable for all educators)

### Author

Kate Garcia, MEd

*Understood Expert and special educator*

### Materials

- [\*\*Through My Eyes\*\*](#)
  - **Simulations** (Pedro, ADHD; Caris, dyslexia; Francesca, dyscalculia) and devices (computers/tablets) for accessing them
  - **Handouts:** Fact sheets for each learning difference
- **Optional:** Projector, whiteboard/chart paper, headphones, variety of note-taking materials (markers, colored pencils, sticky notes)

# Procedure

## 1. Warm-up: Strengths and challenges (5 minutes)

Ask participants to individually write down two or three strengths and two or three challenges they observe in a student they currently teach. Provide a list of [types of kids' strengths](#) to help with brainstorming. This sets a strengths-based tone from the start. Then, have participants share their ideas in small groups. Briefly discuss how strengths can be leveraged to address challenges.

### Prompts

- Think about a student you teach. What are two or three strengths they bring to the classroom? Brainstorm a few — they can be academic, social, emotional, or related to specific learning skills. How can you give that student more opportunities to use these strengths?
- Now think about two or three challenges that the same student faces in the classroom. Consider how these challenges impact the student's learning and well-being.
- Think about how the student's strengths might help them with their challenges.

## 2. Introduction to *Through My Eyes* and learning differences (5 minutes)

Use the “Detailed intro script” in this resource, emphasizing the strengths-based approach and the importance of recognizing individual learner variability. Highlight how the simulations, which are based on the real-life experiences of three students, can help teachers understand the diverse strengths and needs in their classrooms.

## 3. Simulation selection and experience (5–10 minutes)

Have participants choose one simulation. Provide options for engaging with the simulation: Watch individually, in pairs, or as a small group. Be mindful of noise, as each simulation has audio narration and sound/music.

## 4. Small group discussion (20 minutes)

Divide participants into simulation-specific groups. Some teachers may need time to reflect, take notes, or outline observations before discussing the simulation.

Once ready, begin the discussions using the student-specific prompts below. Groups should pick a facilitator for questions. Circulate among the groups to help facilitate the prompts. You may also choose to use more general prompts if there are not enough participants for individual group discussions or if that's a preferred format for your group.

## Pedro simulation prompts

- Pedro's experience:** Describe specific moments that highlighted Pedro's challenges *and* any strengths or resilience he showed. How did he feel in the morning when he was trying to get ready? How did he feel in science class?
- Bonuses and obstacles:** How did the bonuses and obstacles impact your understanding of ADHD? What do you think bonuses, such as stretching or reminders from Pedro's mom, represent in terms of real-world support strategies and classroom accommodations?
- Outside of school:** Based on the simulation, how do you think Pedro's ADHD might affect his activities and life outside of school? How might his ADHD affect his homework completion or studying outside of school?

## Caris simulation prompts

- Caris' experience:** Describe specific moments that highlighted Caris' challenges *and* any strengths or resilience she showed. How did she feel when taking notes in social studies? How did she feel in dance class?
- Bonuses and obstacles:** How did the bonuses and obstacles impact your understanding of dyslexia? What do you think elements such as the decoder wheel and video replay represent in terms of real-world support strategies and classroom accommodations?
- Outside of school:** Based on the simulation, how might dyslexia affect Caris' activities and interactions outside of school? Are there any particular areas where she might flourish or struggle?

## Francesca simulation prompts

- Francesca's experience:** Describe specific moments that highlighted Francesca's challenges and any strengths or resilience she showed. How did she feel in math class? How did she feel when trying to complete her purchase at the market?
- Bonuses and obstacles:** How did the bonuses and obstacles impact your understanding of dyscalculia? Did any of these elements impact the way you think about real-world support strategies and classroom accommodations?
- Outside of school:** Based on the simulation, in what ways might dyscalculia affect Francesca outside of school? Are there particular situations where this might help her flourish? Are there particular situations where she might struggle?

## 5. Whole group sharing and wrap-up (5 minutes)

Have each group share one or two key takeaways they learned as educators. After the share-out, summarize the takeaways. Highlight what the groups learned about how teachers can support students to create more equitable learning experiences.

### Key takeaways to highlight

- Learning differences are variations in how a person's brain develops and processes information, not reflections of intelligence or effort.
- Empathy and understanding are essential for creating inclusive classrooms.
- When designing your classroom, it helps to think about students' experiences as you're making decisions and providing supports.
- Students with learning differences have strengths as well as challenges.

## 6. Homework

Have participants answer these two questions as homework. Schedule a follow-up session to discuss them, or build them into one of the extension activities.

1. **Individual reflection:** Read Understood's deep dives on [ADHD](#), [dyslexia](#), and [dyscalculia](#). Then, write down two or three key things you've learned about learning differences from the simulations and these articles.
2. **Strategies for support:** How can you better support your students who learn and think differently? Check out Understood's "Quick tips to create an inclusive classroom" (in the Educators section of [Through My Eyes](#)). Then explore common accommodations for [ADHD](#), [dyslexia](#), and [dyscalculia](#). Think about your current students, and list two or three specific strategies you can use to better support students with learning differences.

## Extension activities

Choose one or more of these activities for further professional development.

1. **Scenario reflections:** Use this resource (in the Educators section of [Through My Eyes](#)) to look at real-world examples from classrooms, learn to spot and address biases, and develop ways to help all students thrive. Each scenario includes discussion questions and resources.
2. **Resource exploration:** Explore additional resources on Understood.org, such as topic pages about [ADHD](#), [dyslexia](#), and [dyscalculia](#). You can also review "How to be an ally" in [Through My Eyes](#). Available as a gamified resource in the Kids section and as a handout in the Educators section, it can be used as a tool for creating a more inclusive classroom culture.
3. **Additional simulation review:** Complete the simulation for another learning difference. Use the discussion questions for that simulation and explore the related Understood resources.

## Detailed intro script

(Adjust as needed for your group.)

Welcome, everyone. Today, we're going to explore a critical aspect of teaching: understanding and supporting students with learning differences. We all know that every student learns differently. But some students have specific learning differences that can significantly impact their academic journey and their overall well-being.

*Through My Eyes* is designed to help us better understand these learning differences by experiencing them from the student's perspective. One of the goals of this resource is to build empathy — the first step toward creating truly inclusive classrooms where all students can thrive. This interactive experience was created by Understood.org, a nonprofit that provides free resources to support students, teachers, and parents.

Today, we'll focus on three common learning differences: ADHD, dyslexia, and dyscalculia. It's important to understand that these are neurological differences — variations in how the brain processes information. They're not reflections of a student's intelligence or effort. Just like some people are naturally taller or have different eye colors, our brains are wired differently, too.

- **ADHD:** Affects attention, impulse control, and executive function. ADHD can make it difficult for students to organize tasks, stay on track, and regulate their emotions.
- **Dyslexia:** Impacts reading and language processing. Students with dyslexia may struggle with decoding, reading fluency, and spelling.
- **Dyscalculia:** Affects how the brain processes numbers and mathematical concepts. Students with dyscalculia may have difficulty understanding number relationships, performing calculations, and grasping mathematical concepts.

It's crucial to remember that each student's experience with a learning difference is unique. There's no single "ADHD student" or "dyslexic student." Just like all learners, students with learning differences have a wide range of strengths, challenges, and preferences.

To gain a deeper understanding, we'll be using simulations that allow us to "walk in the shoes" of real students with these learning differences. These simulations are designed to give you a sense of the challenges and frustrations — as well as the coping strategies and successes — that these students experience.

## Detailed intro script (continued)

We'll also be using other resources from Understood, which provides free evidence-based strategies for supporting students with learning differences. Understood.org is a valuable tool that you can use in your own teaching practice to continue learning and growing in this area. Their website has a large collection of resources to help educators support neurodivergent students. (Show Understood's topic page for educators on the projector briefly: <https://www.understood.org/en/topics/educators>.)

The goal of today's session is not just to learn about the challenges associated with learning differences, but also to explore effective support strategies and to foster a mindset of inclusion and empathy. We want to move beyond simply accommodating students to truly understanding their needs and empowering them to succeed.

By the end of this session, we hope you'll have a greater appreciation for the diverse learning needs of your students, and that you'll be equipped with practical tools and resources to create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment for everyone.

## Acknowledgments

Understood greatly appreciates the following reviewers who worked with Kate Garcia, MEd, to help shape this and other *Through My Eyes* resources for educators, parents, and kids: Christina Cipriano, PhD, MEd; Shivoahn García, PhD; Rayma Griffin, MA, MEd; Andrew Kahn, PsyD; Julian Saavedra, MA; and Juliana Urtubey, NBCT, MA.