Defeating invisible barriers:
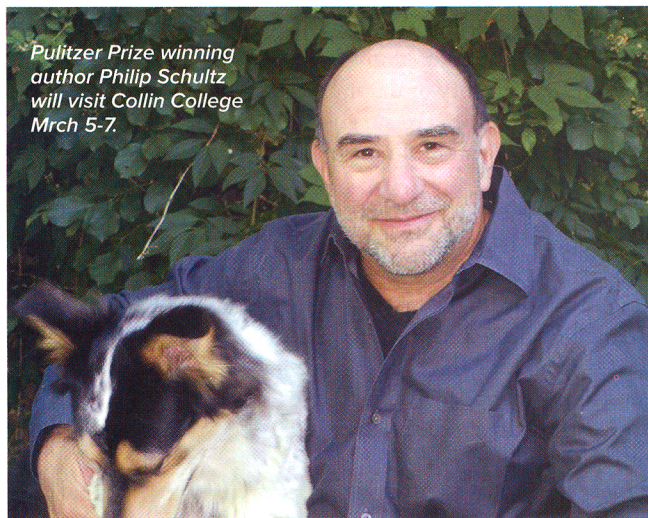
Fighting to succeed and regularly reminded of their "abnormality," the 4.67 million Americans with learning disabilities often face great struggle in attempting to fit the mold of a typical student.

With more than 11 percent of U.S. undergraduates reporting some type of learning disability, Collin College brought these challenges to light for its students through a school-wide read of *My Dyslexia,* a book by Pulitzer Prize winner Philip Schultz.

Although he had never understood why, Schultz was unable to read until age 11. It wasn't until he was 58 and his oldest son was diagnosed that Schultz discovered his dyslexia, a learning disability that makes reading and writing extremely challenging.

Determined to overcome this obstacle and become a writer, Schultz went on to win a Pulitzer Prize for his poetry and teach creative writing at the graduate level. Now, Schultz also spends his time dispelling myths about dyslexia while inspiring others who have struggled with learning disabilities.

"We found the book beautifully written and saw great potential for education on dyslexia," said Betty Bettacchi, district coordinator for the Book-In-Common program. "Our students now have a good understanding of what struggles

Pulitzer Prize winning author Philip Schultz will visit Collin College Mrch 5-7.

people may face and are sympathetic toward those 'blessed with dyslexia.'"

Affecting one in five children, dyslexia is a common disorder.

Melanie Hess is a public relations writer with Collin College.

BY MELANIE HESS

new perspective on dyslexia

Schultz desires to serve as proof for people with disorders like dyslexia—that they can prosper, too.

"I did poorly in school, was held back twice and couldn't concentrate or even listen to my teachers because of delayed processing issues, all of which I didn't understand at the time," Schultz said. "I spent all those years thinking I was stupid and incapable of learning most things. It didn't matter how many honors my poetry won, this old belief stayed with me."

Knowledge of dyslexia makes a real difference, both to Schultz and the many students he meets around the world, including his son. He now views himself and dyslexia differently.

"Dyslexia is, in many ways, a great advantage," Schultz said. "It's been described as a disability in a vast sea of abilities. I can juggle many narratives at once, remember every aspect of things that happened to me and know how to compensate for things I can't do by perfecting those I can do."

Fearing he didn't have the intelligence required, Schultz stayed away from poetry until he became an English major in college. Painting, a hobby of his even before he could write, served as the catalyst for his writing passion. When he realized what inspired him most in painting was its grace, fluidity and emotions, he also noticed these qualities were most heavily concentrated in poetry.

"It was a perfect match," Schultz said. "Ironically, when I started reading it I also started writing it."

Schultz said he hopes readers can see themselves in *My Dyslexia* and students can learn to appreciate their strengths despite their weaknesses.

"Young people especially can find their special strengths amid all the confusion of growing up with this difference," Schultz said. "They too can learn to understand that there's much about themselves they one day will be grateful for."

Erick Gomez, a Collin College student, identified with Schultz' book. While his own struggles are different from Schultz', Gomez found the book taught him a great deal about dyslexia while also reaching him on a more personal level.

"It's helped me understand myself," Gomez said. "I heard about the effects of dyslexia, problems such as self-esteem and anxiety, and I related with his struggle. While I don't have dyslexia, I have been through some of those things and reading it helped me reflect on what I was going through."

Schultz will visit Collin College March 5-7, where he will discuss and sign copies of his book. All events are free and open to the public. Visit collin.edu/academics/bookincommon for more information. ⊞