

FAT CITY (Frustration, Anxiety, and Tension) – by Richard Lavoie

How Difficult Can This Be: UNDERSTANDING LEARNING DISABILITIES (F.A.T. City - Frustration - Anxiety - Tension)

Problem - Ownership

- a. Students with learning difficulties (LD) have *real* problems (6-10% of people have LD)
- b. They do not act up just to mess up the teacher's or parent's life
- c. Learning disabilities are not just a "school problem." They are difficulties that affect every aspect of the lives of those with learning disabilities - who deal with **frustration, anxiety** and **tension** every single day.
- d. Definition of exclusion: students with LD are described in terms of what they **cannot** do, rather than what they **can** do. However, they are **not**:
 - * **MR** - mentally retarded/impaired
 - * **MD** – sensory modality deficient (they are not blind or visually-impaired, deaf etc.)
 - * **ED** - emotionally disturbed
 - * **EC** - environmentally challenged (lacking opportunities to learn).

There is no obvious, outwardly visible reason for their learning difficulty.

Effects of Perception Issues - Expression and Response to F.A.T.

- a. **Sarcasm & belittling** creates a victim – we must treat difficult children with **respect**. Harsh words wound.
- b. Learning disabilities cause **frustration, anxiety** and **tension**, all of which affect performance.
- c. Those with learning disabilities are often unable to get the correct answers – but when we accept the answer, "I don't know" from these children, we are setting the child up to give up. We need to take the time and effort to help them find the answer.
- d. They begin to hide and believe, "*If I can't see the teacher, the teacher can't see me.*"
It is natural for us to look away from (avoid) stimuli that cause anxiety.
- e. They **"turn in"** other students who also do not do things right, so they are not the only ones - if they feel they are the only one making mistakes, they seek to identify others who make mistakes so they're not 'the only one'
This is perceived by adults as "*They don't mind their own business*" or "*They tell tales*"
- f. LD children often become class clowns...they would rather be perceived as silly or naughty than dumb.

Richard Lavoie proceeds to face adults with activities which give them the same feeling of panic experienced by their children who have learning disabilities, and who are asked to cope with information that is too difficult for them to process – especially under pressure:

Processing (i.e. name the picture)

- a. Pace of class is too fast for students with LD
- b. Students with LD differ in the way they process language
- c. They have to process questions as well as the **answers** - **twice the processing load** needs extra time
- d. They have great difficulty with **oral** language
 - Technique - make an arrangement with the child that does not put them on the spot
 - Technique - **give them time to process both question & answer**

Distractibility vs Attention Span

- a. **Myth** - students with LD have no/low attention span (attend to *nothing*)
- b. **Truth** - students with LD are distractible - they attend to **everything**, but lack ability to **focus**.

Risk Taking

- a. Most often, children with learning disabilities will not volunteer to answer questions (a **learned behaviour**).
- b. This is because they do not like surprises (they can't deal with the **unexpected**).
- c. If they get no reinforcement for correct responses and lots of negative attention - they are **embarrassed** for their incorrect responses (by teachers and students alike) and become unwilling to risk answering

Perception (activity using optical illusion/s)

- a. When LD children can't "see" what everybody else sees, it is pointless to:
 - * Tell them to look/listen/try harder;
 - * Promise them things (reward, bribe);
 - * Withdraw 'privileges' (punishment) – break times, meals etc. are 'needs' – especially for these children, so should never be withheld as a punishment.
 - * **Blame the victim** ("You're just not trying hard enough")
- b. It is not a **motivation** problem. "**Motivation** is the most misunderstood concept"

It is not that the child is not motivated.

Motivation only allows us to perform to the best of our ability at things we can already do

Seeing vs. Perceiving

Visual Perception (bringing *meaning* to something you see)

- Students with LD need direct instruction
- They can *see* things when we *show* them what things are
- They need to *hear* the instructions instead of having to read them
- The real-life experience of LD is being *the only one* in the room *who can't do it*

Reading Comprehension:

According to the *International Reading Association*, 95% of text books and 93% of teachers teach comprehension through vocabulary. They find the words a child has difficulty with, teach them the meaning of those words, then assume the child will be able to understand the story. The theory is that if you are able to understand every word in a passage then you'll be able to understand the passage. Is this true?

Activity: Do you understand all the words in this list?

are	corresponding	graphs	making	one	table
between	curves	if	only	points	value
consists	draws	isolated	often	relation	variables
continuously	variation	know	with	set	

Read this passage:

If the known relation between the variables consists of a table of corresponding variables, the graph consists only of the corresponding set of isolated points. If the variables are known to vary continuously, one often draws a curve to show the variation. (*Basic College Math. M. Michael Michaelson, 1945*)

Do you agree? Would you like to take a quiz on that?

Activity: Read this silently while it is being read aloud:

Last Serney, Flingledo and Pribin were in the Nerd-link treppering gloopy caples and cleaming burly greps. Suddenly a ditty strezzle boofed into Flingledopes tresk. Pribin glaped and glaped. "Oh, Flingledo." he chifed. "That ditty strezzle is tuning in your grep!"

Answer these questions:

- When did this take place?
- Who was with Flingledo?
- Where were they?
- They were treppering something, what were they treppering?
- What type of caples?
- They were cleaming something, what were they cleaming?
- Then a strezzle showed up, what kind of strezzle?
- Did they expect it?
- What did it do?
- Where did it boofed?
- Pribin was no help, what did he do?
- Pribin chifed something, what did he chife?

In the first story you understand every word but cannot answer a single question.

In the second, you have no idea what it is about - yet you can respond to all the questions.

Comprehension is very a complicated task – a scholar, client or new employee need direct instruction.

Reading Comprehension: We cannot assume that if someone understands every word in a paragraph, that they can understand the paragraph.

a. Knowing **vocabulary** words does not equal **comprehension**

b. To understand reading comprehension students with LD must have direct instruction

c. Comprehension has more to do with background - prior knowledge/experience - **schema** theory - the interaction of key factors affecting the comprehension process). A **schema** (plural: **schemata**) describes a pattern of thought or behaviour that organises categories of information and the relationships among them. It is a **mental structure of preconceived ideas, a framework representing some aspect of the world, or a system of organising and perceiving new information.**

* Schemata influence **attention** and the **absorption** of new knowledge: people are more likely to notice things that fit into their schema, while re-interpreting contradictions to the schema as exceptions or distorting them to fit.

* Schemata have a tendency to remain unchanged, even in the face of contradictory information.

- * Schemata can help in understanding the world and the rapidly changing environment.
- * People can organise new perceptions into schemata quickly as most situations do not require complex thought when using schema, since automatic thought is all that is required.
- * People use schemata to organise current knowledge and provide a framework for future understanding.

Effects of Perception Problems on Behaviour

A child's perception of a situation is different to your own. Life for them is a series of literary 'optical illusions'.
 Ask **questions** to ensure you are seeing the same thing the same way.

- Students with LD ***misperceive the stimulus*** - misperception of stimulus leads to misunderstanding.
 - A child **reacts** to the stimulus they perceive.
 - Students with LD will often get into trouble without knowing why, will truly not know what they did wrong
 - Teachers tear apart students' work when they respond to what they perceived: this is extremely demeaning and the student has no idea why the teacher did it.
- * Do **listen** to the student's accounts of the situation and **rationalise** who is at fault.
 - * If the student does not understand why they are in trouble, be explicit in your explanation of their behaviour.
 - * Do not **assume** what transpired and do not use an **accusatory tone**

Visual Motor Co-ordination/Integration (like trying to trace a diagram while looking in a mirror)

- Students with LD frequently have visual-motor problems and, like trying to trace the figure while looking in the mirror, they get mixed messages
- The **writing process** is very difficult and tiring for some – provide notes or other assistance
- Don't single out and embarrass the individual with the co-ordination difficulty

LANGUAGE ISSUES: Oral Expression

- Dysnomia** - difficulty *finding* words - can *describe* the word, but cannot "find" it, like 'a word at the tip of your tongue'.
- Storage - Retrieval** system in the brain is not efficient: either they cannot get information stored in their memory, or the brain replaces the word in the wrong place (mis-files) and they cannot find it again later
- Everything we do in life is either an **associative** task or a **cognitive** task.
 - **Associative** tasks - can be done several at a time (driving and talking)
 - **Cognitive** tasks - can only be done one at a time (in a storm, driving becomes a cognitive activity)

For children with LDs such as **dysnomia**, **speaking** and **listening** are **not associative processes**, but **cognitive tasks**.
Note-taking can be very problematic when listening is a cognitive task.
- Oral expression** can be very difficult for students with LD – impatience and telling them to hurry creates **anxiety** that makes it even more difficult for them to cope.

Technique - give students **time to think and respond** (ask a question, do something else, come back for the answer; call on them first (while they remember) - they usually know part of the answer, or one or two in a list of 5 or 6 things)

- Allow adequate time for students to process their thoughts in writing before oral expression is required.
- Do not ignore the student or pass them by before they have had enough time to process their response.

Reading and Decoding - Spatial Recognition problems - all about visual **perception**

- Spatial orientation does *not* usually dictate object identification (a watch is still a watch regardless of orientation)
- With **reading** spatial orientation **does** change what something is -
p, q, b, d - all have the same shape but different orientations
- What teachers do:
 - Tell them it's **easy** (*not* what they need to hear when they can't do it)
 - Use **rhetorical** questions – a weapon against LD children, which shuts down communication
- Decoding makes students very **tired** - the cannot answer any **comprehension** questions;
Content has no meaning for them - because all their energy went into decoding the words

In this exercise, spaces are not in the right place. When reading the lines the letters could be above or below the "main line". **b, d, q** or **p** are interchanged to demonstrate what it's like when these letters are confused.

Example d n = Pain
 ai

n." said B y. "W
comeo ets ehav dicku i o n.W thavea her
eto pth sc
fqdc
bago orn."

"Arew ngt tdoocor t'sqe n the o r?" A ep S sa
egoi oea ntha eno flo sk u n.

"Weca " Betsyan ep.
n washit swer

ooq l an.
"th 's a g pea, "saip Sus
at

"I c wa hi meo lofy dusqi tub."
an s t. Co n, al ou.Hel cki

the ch enw entt r k. ltt
ildr owo ook emal met d ub heqo m
th ongti o ick t pco

Th ey k heco t e ktc a B y sheq t.
enth too t m oth i hen nq ets wa i

the ch ren ou tt w us t ingt o.
ilb th gh hat as j t heth op

Be s du cor in oqigdans
t y the n tw

an utint
qb heaven.

Below is the same passage for an efficient reader:

"Come on" said Betsy, "We have to pick up this corn we don't have another can of popcorn."

"Are we going to eat popcorn that's been on the floor?" asked Susan.

"We can wash it," Betsy answered.

"That's a good idea!" said Susan, "I can wash it, come on all of you, help us pick it up.

The children went to work. It took them a long time to pick up the popcorn. Then they took the corn to the kitchen and Betsy washed it. All the children thought that it was just the thing to do. Betsy put the corn into two big pans to put in the oven.

- Use colour-coding, not just words, to organize the classroom and student work.
- Don't provide handouts that utilize small fonts.

Auditory vs Visual Capabilities

Some students cannot understand through their **eyes** - they need to **hear** it in order to *understand* it.

Can you translate this story?

Silent reading:

Won supporter dime wonder fodder over coat tree washer ladle bouy heroes wall king onus pompus from witty window hot chat Andy foulder chair retreat end tucker window ratcher end chapter dun. Dentist popper campus trolling buy "CHEESES PRICED!!" setee "husband shopping dun much hair treat?" "donner buster got" sadist sun, George, "I canatoll ally idea nitwit ma window ratcher" Denis fodder loss distemper and tucker swish unpadded ladle judge tillers canvas ore Mural: Donor chapped on chair retreats.

Now read it out aloud (auditory input) as written below: *This made no sense until auditory input was received.*

Once upon a time walking on his property was a little boy he was walking on his Fathers farm with a little hatchet And he found a cherry tree and took a little hatchet and chopped it down. Then his father came strolling by. "Jesus Christ!!" said he "Whose been chopping down my cherry tree?" "Don't...." said his son, George. " I cannot tell a lie I did it with my little hatchet" Then his father lost his temper, and took a switch and paddled little George till his can was sore. Moral: *Do not cut down Cheery Trees*

- Do provide instruction in writing as well as verbally and through demonstration.
- Do encourage the child to record their books and play it back.
- Do use encourage use of audio books etc.

Fairness

- a. Students learn moral development by watching us (what they **see us do**), not by what we **tell** them
- b. We need to model an **adult level** of moral development regarding **fairness** - if we tell a child with a learning disability that we want them to behave in a certain way, we must ensure that we model the behaviour we wish them to imitate.
- c. Classrooms tend to operate on a child's level of fairness
- d. **Fairness** - when everybody gets what they need (*not* - everybody gets the *same* thing) – it is fair to give CPR to someone unconscious – but not to everyone.
- e. The scales do not have to be balanced
- f. In order to be fair - we've got to treat them differently

Techniques - any accommodation that a child needs in order to express their ability

- Do provide, to the best of your ability, what each student **needs** to succeed. Not every student will need the same things.
- Don't dwell on trouble areas

The "greatest gift" I can give a child with learning disabilities is **time** - give the child an ample amount of time to answer a question – do not put them under pressure.

- Do give an appropriate amount of extra time to those students who require that accommodation.
- Do give direct instruction, give cues or modify
- Do give positive reinforcement to those who do take risks.
- Do encourage students to look at things from another angle and/or have a peer explain their perception.
- **Don't disregard and ignore wrong answers** – explain – kindly, tactfully, with understanding.