

How Difficult Can This Be: Understanding Learning Disabilities
(Frustration - Anxiety - Tension) Presented by Richard Lavoie

Problem Ownership

- a. Students with LD have real problems (6-10% of kids have LD)
- b. They don't act that way just to mess up the teacher's life
- c. Definition of exclusion, students with LD are described in terms of what they cannot do
- d. Sensory is intact
- e. They are not MR, BD, ED

Expression and Response to F.A.T.

- a. Sarcasm creates a victim
- b. Anxiety affects performance
- c. Students give up ("I don't know")
- d. Look away from source of anxiety (look at feet, "if I can't see teacher, she can't see me")
- e. They "turn in" students who also do not do things right, so they're not the only ones - perceived as "they don't mind their own business"

Processing (name the picture, "name a book with a cat in it")

- a. Pace of class is too fast for students with LD
- b. Students with LD differ in the way they process language
- c. They process questions as well as the answers, giving them two times the processing load
("Who was the first President of the US?") ("Who wrote Huck Finn?")
- d. They have great difficulty with oral language
- e. **Technique** - make an arrangement with the student - "I will never ask you a question when I'm standing away from your desk", so student knows that when teacher moves toward them, they will be called upon to answer a question
- f. **Technique** - give them time to process both question & answer
- g. **Myth** - students with LD have no attention span (they attend to nothing)
- h. **Truth** - students with LD are distractible (they attend to everything)

Risk Taking

- a. Students with LD do not volunteer
- b. They do not like surprises
- c. They get no reinforcement for correct responses and lots of negative attention and are embarrassed for incorrect responses (by teachers and students alike)

Visual Perception (activity using picture of cow's face)

- a. When kids with LD can't "see" what everybody else sees we tell them to look harder; promise them things (first in line for recess); take things away (no recess, note home)
- b. We blame the victim ("you're not trying hard enough")
- c. Now it becomes a **motivation** problem ("can you see it for \$100.")
- d. **Motivation** only allows us to perform to the best of our ability at things we can already do

Perception (cow's face) **Seeing vs. Perceiving**

- a. Students with LD **need direct instruction**
- b. They can see things when we show them what things are
- c. They need trained experienced teachers to show them
- d. The real experience of LD is being the **only one** in the room who can't do it

Reading Comprehension (passage comprehension activity)

- a. Knowing vocabulary words does not equal comprehension
- b. Comprehension has more to do with **background** (not vocabulary) (prior knowledge, schema theory)
- c. To understand reading comprehension students with LD must have direct instruction

Effects of Perception on Behavior (woman at mirror/"death stalker")

- a. Students with LD will often get into trouble without knowing why, will truly not know what they did
- b. 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
- c. Students with LD **misperceive the stimulus**

Visual Motor Coordination/Integration (trace letter while looking in mirror)

- a. Students with LD frequently have visual motor problems and, like trying to trace the figure while looking in the mirror - they **get mixed messages**
- b. The writing process is very difficult

Oral Expression (can't use words with "N" in oral story - boys went to the beach)

- a. **Dysnomia** - difficulty finding words
- b. Student can describe the word, but can't "find" it, like a word at the tip of your tongue
- c. **Storage - Retrieval** system in the brain is not efficient, either they cannot get information in the first place, or the brain puts it back in the wrong place and they can't find it later
- d. **Associative tasks/activities** - we can do two or more at a time (driving and talking)
- e. **Cognitive tasks/activities** - we can only do one at a time (in a storm, driving becomes a cognitive activity)
- f. For students with LD, **talking and listening are cognitive tasks/activities**, which is why many of them are unable to listen to the teacher and take notes at the same time
- g. Oral expression can be very difficult for the student with LD, yet when they falter, we snap our fingers, stomp our feet, and tell them to hurry; this anxiety makes it even more difficult for them
- h. **Technique - give students time** to think and respond (ask a question, erase the board, come back for the answer; call on them first - they usually know part of the answer or one or two in a list of 5 or 6 things)

Reading and Decoding (reading passage about popcorn)

- a. We learn that spatial orientation does not dictate object identification (the watch, for example is still a watch no matter from which position we view it)
- b. With reading - spatial orientation does change what something is (**pqbd**)
- c. It's a perception thing
- d. What teachers do:
 - 1. We tell them it's easy (not what they need to hear when they can't do it)
 - 2. We use rhetorical questions - which shuts down communication
- e. Decoding **makes students very tired** - they cannot answer any comprehension questions; content has no meaning for them because all their energy went into decoding the words

Auditory vs Visual Capabilities ("nonsense" passage about G. Washington)

- a. Some students **need to hear it to understand it**
- b. With the auditory input, some students with LD can get it
- c. **Technique** - put their reading materials on tape

Fairness

- a. Students learn moral development by watching us, not by what we tell them
- b. We need to model an adult level of moral development regarding fairness
- 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)
- e. Has nothing to do with the other children, they don't need it
- f. The scales do not have to be balanced
- g. **In order to be fair - we've got to treat them differently**
- h. **Techniques** - any accommodation that a child needs to express their ability