

### Children with learning difficulties need to be heard



By Cathy Lumsden, The Adlerian Team

Mrs. Patrick, teacher of grade 2 students gives her class a math problem.

*Bob had 2 pencils and gave Sue 8. How many pencils do Bob and Sue have in total?* Brenda sees the question, fidgets in her seat and tries to read it. She sees it as: *Bob hid too pensls and guave Sue ate. How meni pensls did Bob and Sue huav in latot?* Brenda is dealing with a hidden learning disability. She has a difficult time seeing and reading the words correctly and consequently cannot give an answer and she is too embarrassed to ask for help. The other children seem to answer easily and quickly.

Day after day children with learning difficulties and disabilities are faced with problems such as the one outlined above. Their teachers and parents are initially confused and, thus, encourage Brenda to try harder. This produces no results. Brenda's peers may tease her which ensures that she doesn't share her struggles. A vicious cycle evolves where the child feels inadequate, and begins to avoid his or her school work. More labels are added and the child may be viewed as inattentive, disinterested and tuned out.

According to the Learning Disabilities Associates of Ontario (L.D.A.O.), there are approximately 800,000 people with learning disabilities in Ontario – 10% of the population. Six percent of school-age children with learning difficulties are not identified and therefore receive minimal or no support in their classes. These children struggle day by day, and by high school they've lost their motivation and wish to drop out of school. It is imperative that we identify these learning challenges and work with the strengths of each student, providing them with strategies to overcome their difficulties.

Children with learning disabilities frequently have average to above average intelligence. Therefore, problems in academic performance cannot be attributed to lack of intellectual capacity. Instead, poor performance at school may simply be a function of different learning needs. Once these needs are addressed and effective

learning strategies employed, these students can find success and become motivated to meet the daily school requirements.

How one learns is often compared to the inner workings of a computer. Individuals take in information (INPUT) by hearing, seeing, doing or a combination of these modalities. The information is STORED and processed to make a multitude of connections. Finally, we produce OUTPUT which can be in a verbal or written form. Individuals with learning problems may have weaknesses in one or all of these processes: input, storage, or output. When teachers, parents and children with learning disabilities are aware of their specified learning needs, a whole new world unfolds for everyone.

### **Common signs**

How do we know whether our child has learning difficulties? A number of possible signs and symptoms are:

- Difficulty in reading, spelling, writing, or math; or a significant discrepancy between two of these academic subjects.
- Better developed verbal skills than written skills.
- Weak auditory and/or visual memory.
- Disorganized and/or messy written work.
- Behaviour problems at school.
- Difficulty concentrating, short attention span.
- Weak social skills (problems with making and/or keeping friends).
- Difficulties with concepts such as up-down, left-right (remembering and directionality).

### **Be your child's advocate**

If your child displays one or more of these signs, he or she may have a learning disability. Given the ever increasing number of students in a classroom, and the burden of responsibility assigned to teachers, educators cannot always detect if your child is simply adjusting to the demands of the school environment or has a

learning issue. If they do suspect that a child is not learning by the usual methods of instruction, they will notify the family and suggest a psycho-educational assessment. Due to budget restraints, schools may not be able to offer immediate services in the area of learning disabilities. As a parent, you will be your child's advocate! To assist our children, both parents and teachers need to be part of the solution and future planning. Early detection of learning problems is one of the most important indicators of future success. Once a child's strengths and limitations are determined through an assessment, educators and parents can build on the child's strengths to support them. "If a child cannot learn the way he or she is taught, then he or she should be taught the way he or she can learn" (L.D.A.O.). Often, various accommodations are provided for the student with a learning disability, such as oral exams, photocopied notes, taped books and extra time for tests and exams.

Beyond high school, Ontario universities and colleges are more aware of individuals with learning disabilities and provide services if requested.

With your encouragement and support, your child can deal with learning difficulties and develop self-confidence, achieve success at school, and develop into a capable adolescent and adult.

*Cathy Lumsden is an associate at the Adlerian Counselling and Consulting Group Inc. She has 18 years experience in counselling individuals, families and groups. She has facilitated training programs and professional seminars focused on conflict resolution, team effectiveness, communication and stress management in both Canada and the United States. Cathy has been the Director of Training and Development at the Mind/Body Connection Inc., in Wayne, Pennsylvania. Please write to us at The Adlerian Centre at 1729 Bank Street, Suite 205, Ottawa K1V 7Z5, call 737-5553 or e-mail us at [info@adleriancentre.com](mailto:info@adleriancentre.com) with your reactions or ideas for this column. [www.adleriancentre.com](http://www.adleriancentre.com)*

*This article originally appeared in the November 2009 issue of Capital Parent Newspaper.*

#### **INFORMATION HYPERLINKS:**

[www.lynnforrest.com](http://www.lynnforrest.com)

[www.karpmandramatriangle.com](http://www.karpmandramatriangle.com)

[www.adleriancentre.com](http://www.adleriancentre.com)

