



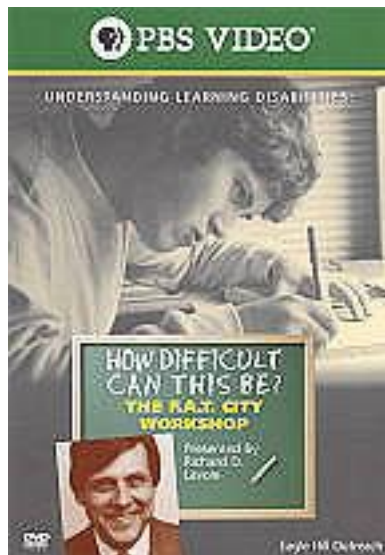
# Vision & Sensory Integration

Connecting Vision & Body

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F.A.T City Workshop by Richard Lavoie

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhzh9kt8z7c>



## How Hard Can This Be?

By Richard Lavoie

**In the author's workshops, participants wind up frustrated, angry, and in tears — and finally understand what having a learning disability means**

My awakening to the challenges faced by children with learning disabilities occurred nearly 30 years ago, on an autumn morning in 1972. At the time, I was already involved in the field — as a recently certified teacher at a small school in Massachusetts for kids with learning disabilities. I still had much to learn.

Craig was a 13-year-old student with severe dyslexia and language deficits. He was a very motivated and likable kid who was exceptionally eager to please, and we had a great relationship. I was assigned as his tutor, and in that role it was my job to teach him the language arts. No small task.

At the end of class one morning, I asked him to write a 150-word composition for the next day.

Considering his difficulties with written language, the topic I selected was one of his favourites. "Write about your dog," I suggested.

Craig submitted his essay to me the next morning, and that evening I began correcting the errors. Armed with my red pencil, I highlighted and corrected every misspelling, punctuation error, and capitalization mistake. I commented on the inconsistent slant of his handwriting and his failure to adhere to the right-hand margin.

When I arrived at my classroom the next morning, I was surprised to find Craig waiting for me. "Did you read my composition, Mr. Lavoie?" he asked eagerly. "Did you like it?"

"Sure did," I responded. "I was glad to see that you used some of our new vocabulary words. But, Craig, we need to talk about some of the mistakes you made."

I placed the composition on the desk and began reviewing the corrections. As I looked over at Craig, I could see tears forming in his eyes. I had seen Craig in countless tough spots, but I had never seen him cry.

I stopped and asked what was wrong. "I know that you're doing your job, Mr. Lavoie," he said. "I know that these are real mistakes on this paper. But I stayed in my dorm for an hour after study hall to proofread my story. I reread it four times. And look at all the mistakes that I missed."

I gently placed my hand on his shoulder, looked him in the eyes, and proceeded to say the dumbest thing that I have ever said to a student. "It's okay, Craig," I said softly. "I know how you feel."

Craig stood up and said — with uncharacteristic anger and frustration — "The heck you do! Tell me that you'll help me, tell me that you feel bad for me, but don't tell me that you know how I feel! You have no idea how I feel!"

As he stormed from the room, I came to recognize — for the first time — the great irony of the teaching profession: Those of us who teach school usually did well in school ourselves and enjoyed the experience — why else would we return to the classroom to make our living? Therefore, the kid whom we can best understand — to whom we can relate most — is the one who does well in school and enjoys being there. The school newspaper editor. The class treasurer. The soccer captain. The honour student.

Conversely, the kids whom we understand the least are the kids who need us the most. The struggler, the special-education student, the failure . . . Craig.

It took several weeks to repair the damage I caused to Craig's self-esteem and our relationship. I learned much from that incident, and made a commitment to do all that I could to increase the sensitivity of teachers. Before we can fully understand the feelings of another person, perhaps we must first see the world as he or she does.

### **Frustration, Anxiety, and Tension**

The F.A.T. City workshop and video are my contributions to the important process of understanding learning disabilities. F.A.T. stands for Frustration, Anxiety, and Tension — and that's exactly what the participant's experience. This workshop and video provide teachers, parents, caregivers, and siblings with the opportunity actually to experience the emotions and stresses that children with learning disabilities face daily. By using simulations and contrived activities as models (for example, telling a story without using any words that contain the letter N), the participants temporarily experience the frustration, anxiety, and tension that is the lifestyle of students with special needs.

For the first time in years, these parents and educators are asked to sit on the other side of the teacher's desk. They are required to recite aloud and complete timed spelling and writing activities under great pressure. I play the role of an unforgiving — and uninformed — teacher. I yell. I scold. I ridicule. I interrupt. I embarrass. ("Try harder!" "Pay attention!" "Are you trying to be funny?" "Why can't you do this? Everyone else can.") I recall the results with myriad emotions:

- The elementary-school principal who stormed out of the workshop . . . only to be found crying in his office about his own long-undiagnosed learning disorder;
- The divorced dad who left the workshop and drove directly to the airport to fly to his son and hug him for the first time in 10 years . . . because he finally understood the boy;
- The tenured teacher who approached me to say, "I have been teaching school for 22 years . . . and tomorrow I am starting all over again!";
- The teacher of English who mailed me all of her red pencils . . . with a note promising she would never use another one again.

The workshop gives teachers the opportunity to "walk a mile" in the shoes of the students who invariably cause complications and disruptions in the classroom. By viewing the world through the eyes of the child, teachers gather insights into a child's troubling behaviours. As I often remind my audiences, "The pain that a troubled child causes is never greater than the pain that he feels."

### **Save Now, Pay Later**

A school superintendent phoned me recently for counsel regarding a problem he was facing. Because of a budget cut, he had elected to eliminate the system's Early Identification Project, which pinpointed the district's "at risk" students at age five and provided readiness skills prior to kindergarten entry. What did I think?

Upon hearing this, I was immediately mindful of a person I had met in my travels. Dan, a college student who had not been diagnosed with a learning disability until he was 20 years old, told me of an incident that had occurred when he was in first grade. Unable to master the reading process early on in the school year, he feared the reactions of his teachers and parents to his inability to "keep up." Dan soon came to realize that one of his classmates was also a non reader, but that child was seldom criticized by the teachers or ridiculed by the other kids. The child was deaf. Because of this disability, his reading problems were deemed understandable.

Dan decided that the solution to his dilemma was to convince everyone that he, too, was deaf. For two months, he ignored loud noises, failed to respond when teachers called his name, and, at home, continually set his television at the highest volume possible. When his concerned parents took him to audiologists, he purposely failed the hearing evaluations. The pressure to read — as he put it, "to make the books talk" — lessened significantly. By the spring, Dan's father told him that the doctors were puzzled by his inexplicable hearing loss and had scheduled exploratory ear surgery and the removal of his adenoids. Dan actually went through with a surgical procedure that only he knew he did not need.

An Early Identification Program would have diagnosed Dan and saved him from this trauma. The decisions that we make in our offices, classrooms, and conference rooms do have an impact on the children we have pledged to serve.

A reporter once asked me, "If you could teach America's parents and teachers one single truth, what would it be?" "Simple," I responded. "We need to understand that kids go to school for a living. That's their job." What if you hated your job? What if your days were filled with conflict and you were misunderstood by your colleagues and superiors? What if you failed at nearly every task you were assigned? How would you react? This is the daily experience of a child with a learning disability.

The next time a student with special needs disrupts your class, forgets his or her homework, or spills the milk, try to remember the sage observation of a 12-year-old who sadly told a teacher,

"It's like my mind is a television set, but someone else is working the remote control. Sometimes my life just gets all scribbly."

They need us to be at our best. They can't function, grow, or progress with anything less.

## **Signs of a Learning Disability**

How do you spot a child who may have a learning disability? Although all children with learning disabilities are different, each shows at least two or three warning signs. If these signs are chronic or occur in clusters, they may indicate a problem. The checklist below, provided by the National Centre for Learning Disabilities, in New York City, includes many common signs of a learning disability. Check the areas that are troublesome for a particular student.

### **Organization**

- Knowing the time, date, and year
- Managing time
- Completing assignments
- Locating belongings
- Putting things in order
- Carrying out a plan
- Making decisions
- Setting priorities

### **Spoken or Written Language**

- Learning or pronouncing words
- Discriminating between sounds
- Relating or writing stories
- Understanding questions
- Responding to questions
- Following directions
- Reading comprehension
- Spelling

### **Memory**

- Remembering directions
- Learning math facts
- Learning new procedures
- Learning the alphabet
- Identifying letters
- Remembering names
- Remembering events
- Studying for tests

### **Physical Coordination**

- Manipulating small objects
- Learning self-help skills
- Cutting
- Drawing
- Handwriting
- Climbing and running
- Mastering sports

## Attention and Concentration

- Completing a task
- Acting before thinking
- Waiting
- Restlessness
- Daydreaming
- Distractibility
- Carrying out requests

## Social Behaviour

- Making and keeping friends
- Impulsive behaviour
- Low frustration tolerance
- Sportsmanship
- Accepting changes in routine
- Interpreting nonverbal cues
- Working cooperatively

## Understanding Learning Difficulties

(Notes from the workshop compiled by Bryan Smith)

### Visual Processing

What is it? You can all see this but you can't bring meaning to it. You can't perceive it



What normally happens when a person can't perceive?

1. Look harder!
2. Promise them something if they can do it, offer reward, and bribe them.
3. Take something away.
4. Blaming the student e.g. "The reason why you can't do this, is that you're not trying hard enough". They believe there is a Motivation

problem but motivation only allows us to do to the best of our ability  
what we are already capable of doing

Solution: Give direct instruction by changing Approach, giving them a cue or  
modify the assignment. E.g. 'What you see is a poor quality photograph of the  
face of a cow'



**Do** give an appropriate amount of extra time to those students who require that  
accommodation.

Processing

**Do** give direct instruction, give cues or modify

**Do** give positive reinforcement to those that 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.

**Don't** tell students to "look harder".

**Don't** use sarcasm.

### Reading Comprehension

According to 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 those words then assume they will be able to  
understand the story. The theory is that if your able to understand every word  
in a passage then you'll be able to understand the passage.

Is this true?

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

are

between

consists

continuously

corresponding

curves

draws	with
variation	one
graphs	points
if	relation
isolated	set
know	table
making	value
only	variables
often	

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?

Comprehension has much more to do with experience /background then vocabulary. We cannot assume that because a person understands every word in a passage that they will understand the passage.

Activity:

Now 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!"

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 understood every word and couldn't answer a question. The second you have no idea what it's about but you can respond to all the questions.

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

### **Effect of Visual Perception on Behaviour**

Do you think visual perception problems can affect behaviour?

Many of the times a child's perception of a situation is different to your own. A child reacts to the stimulus they perceived.

Ask questions to ensure your seeing the same thing?

Activity: Write a nice title for this picture (seen from 3 metres away)?





e.g. Death Skull, based on perception is a good answer but it does not match the perception of the teacher as it's a classic picture of a woman looking a mirror called 'Vanity'.

**Do** listen to the student's accounts of the situation and rationalize who is at fault. If the student does not understand why they are in trouble, be explicit in your explanation of their behaviour.

**Don't** assume what transpired and **don't** use an accusatory tone

## Visual Motor Coordination

Activity: Copy a line diagram while viewing it in a mirror. Time how fast they are.

**Do** promote empathy by having the students complete the mirror drawing activity.

**Do** give notes. Ask a faster copier to make a second copy of their notes by using carbon paper

**Do** allow notes to be typed if faster

**Don't** single out the individual with the visual motor coordination sensitivity.

## Language Problems

Everything you do in your life is either cognitive or associative.

You can do 1 cognitive task at a time but 2 or more associative tasks.

Speaking for some kids is a cognitive task.

Activity: Speaking as an **associative task**

- Tell a round robin story around the room
- I'll give a sentence then we'll go around the room.
- Each sentence has to connect to the one before it in order to tell a story.

"The boys went to the beach on a sunny day" .....

**Now let's make this a cognitive task**

Same as before but you cannot use the letter N

"The Boys were at the beach..."

**Do** allow adequate time for students to process their thoughts in a written journal before oral expression is required.

**Don't** ignore the student or pass them by before they have had enough time to process their response.

## Reading and Decoding

### Spatial Recognition problems

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 r eqon' not  
comeo ets ehav dicku i o n.W thavea her  
eto pth sc  
fqodc  
bago orn."

"Arew ngt tdo bcor t'sqe n the o r?" A ep S sa  
egoi oea nth a eno fi o sk u n.

"Weca " Betsyan ep.  
n washit swer

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

"Ic 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 rn  
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 asj 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.

**Do** 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**

I've got to hear it before it Makes any sense to me! Some children have to hear something in order to understand it.

What's it like to be an auditory learner?

Activity: 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, get through ears:

Would have made no sense till you had auditory input

Important for some children to have their books put on tape so they can get their information through their ears, they can understand it that way, they can't understand it when they get it through their eyes.

Below is the same story written normally:

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 book.

## Fairness

Fairness means doesn't mean everyone gets the same, it means everyone get one he or she needs

**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 the trouble areas

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