

Rick Lavoie

## Learning Difficulties

Some points from his address in Perth September 2006.  
Understanding and Managing Children with Learning Disabilities\*  
(\*note – read “Learning Difficulties”)



**A** significant philosophical issue for the practitioner to examine is that of "**fairness**". It seems that, as parents and educators, we mold children's values and morals. We teach them valuable lessons related to honesty, courage, integrity, loyalty and so on. Yet it seems that we allow *children* to dictate to *us* the concept of "fairness". When asked to define "fairness," most children respond: "Fairness means everybody gets the same." Unfortunately, we often allow children to convince us that this indeed is the definition of that concept. As a result, we attempt to deal with all children in an identical manner. When a teacher modifies a lesson for an LD child or adjusts the course requirements for him, his classmates charge that the situation is "unfair". Rather than respond to their complaints, the teacher should explain that the mature conceptualization of "fairness" is not equal, identical treatment; rather, "fairness" means that every student receives what he needs. Because each individual's needs are different, "fairness" dictates that their programs and expectations will be different. Children are capable of understanding this concept if it is explained clearly and if it is observed daily in the teacher's modeling behavior.

### The Statistics of ADHD - A quick summary of statistical research of Russell Barkley

On average, there are 1 to 3 children who have ADHD in every classroom of thirty students. Three to six more boys are diagnosed than girls.

The rate of emotional development for children with ADHD is 30% slower than their non-ADD peers. For example, a ten-year-old with ADHD operates at the maturity level of about a 7-year-old; a 16-year-old beginning driver is using the decision-making skills of an 11-year-old.

Sixty five percent of children with ADHD have problems with defiance, non-compliance and other problems with authority figures, including verbal hostility and temper tantrums. A quarter of students with ADHD have other serious learning problems in one or more of these areas: oral expression, listening skills, reading comprehension, and math. Half of all ADHD students have listening comprehension problems.

About one-third of these students have one or more of the following:

- \* Language deficits (poor listening comprehension, poor verbal expression, poor reading comprehension)
- \* Poor organizational skills
- \* Poor memory
- \* Poor fine motor skills

75% of boys with ADD are hyperactive; 60% of girls with ADD are hyperactive.

40% of children who have ADHD have at least one parent who has ADHD

50% of children who have ADHD also have sleep problems.

Parents of a child who has ADHD are three times as likely to separate or divorce as parents of non-ADD children

Teenagers with ADHD have almost four times as many traffic citations as their non-ADD peers.

Teens with ADHD have four times as many car wrecks and are seven times more likely to have a second accident.

21% of teens with ADHD skip school repeatedly.

35% eventually drop out of school.

45% have been suspended.

30% have failed or had to repeat a year of school.

**H**ere are some considerations regarding teaching students who have learning difficulties. Inclusivity is not just about having disabled kids in your classroom.

- Sarcasm is wasted on the LD student because they are often very “literal”.
- Think carefully about your questioning – wait time and accepting “I don’t know”
- Be cognizant of the pace of lesson delivery and students’ processing time. Do you do little things to make lessons easier for the LD kid such as not talking when they have to copy from an overhead projector, or better still do you have some hard copies of the overhead notes for the LD kids to copy (or at least highlight quietly)?
- Appreciate the fear and anxiety that adolescents feel – and the play between being a failure as opposed to being a class rebel. When it is so natural to fail, why bother trying? The number one fear of an adolescent? Embarrassment in front of others. There is guaranteed no better way to make an enemy of an adolescent than to humiliate them in front of a class.
- Make your learning environment a place where people are safe and welcome.
- Try to provide learning experiences that engage all your students.
- LD kids don’t like surprises – they need to know what happens next.
- Learn some of the tricks of “child whispering”.

**N**ow, and here is the killer, where do children who have learning difficulties end up? Often they do quite well in their chosen field – for example Wade who completed trade qualifications and who now runs a metal fabrication business. The frustration and tension felt by Wade and his family due to his “pain” of attending school was immense. Often, the story is not a happy one. These children go through school suffering low self esteem and display a deficiency in social skills; they gravitate towards drugs, gang membership and reckless, self-harming behaviours. In California, of the suicide cases, 70% had a history of experiencing learning difficulties; and that is the saddest statistic of all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3UNdbxk3xs&t=120s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78bwTPUCBsE&t=1579s>