

Is learning *difficult*?

BELA RAJA, Bangalore.

The unexpected intrigues. That may be why the subject.

Specific Learning Difficulties is controversial. The history of Special Education reveals that, it is through the study of the abnormal that new insights have been gained.

Educationists and psychologists have identified difficulties in learning among some children and have labelled them as having a learning disability.

This disability, especially in a child, interferes with the normal development and if help is not given in time, it could prove to be detrimental to its well-being.

In an effort to understand the term 'Learning Difficulty' (as preferred to - 'disability'), it means that the brain processes information differently than in most others. This causes a discrepancy between the ability and the achievement.

The brain processes information 'differently' due to an anomaly of the brain. Thus it is a weakness in an area of learning.

Despite the bright prospects of a normal life offered by today's teaching and other remedial methods, the child with learning difficulties, its family and teachers, often encounter several prob-



The Resource Room in The Valley School, Bangalore

lems. Most of these may largely be because of lack of understanding.

The key to overcome this condition is early identification - as early as six years.

Symptoms:

Difficulty in understanding what is said. Wants you to repeat. Difficulty in following directions, especially when two or more are given at the same time. Inability to think of the right word. e.g. "I want an apple" becomes "I want that red thing to eat." Mixing up parts of words e.g. "getfor" instead of "forget". No clue of day/date/time. Unable to estimate time elapsed. Unable to attend to a task for a long time. Losing the way to the classroom, getting lost on a trip. Confusion in reading and writing. 'b' for 'd'.

Frequently loses place while reading, and copying from the blackboard. Unable to distinguish between sounds e.g. 'bed' is heard as 'bet'. Short term memory problems. Long term memory is usually quite good.

Cross laterality. A right handed child uses the left leg to hop on. Confusion between left and right. Difficulty in keeping reasonably within lines while colouring. Keeps falling down, dropping

things.

It is very important to remember that the presence of one or two sporadic symptoms is not indicative of a learning difficulty. There has to be a cluster of repeated symptoms.

As awareness grows, more and more schools are setting up Resource Rooms to meet the special needs of children. This is where the child receives remedial help. The focus is on multi sensory teaching. The child's preferred learning style is identified and is used while teaching. There are many accommodations that can be made in the regular classroom itself which would help the child to a great extent.

The author is a counsellor and remedial teacher in the field of Specific Learning Difficulties. ☐

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