Additional Educational Needs

Dyspraxia

For "Harry Potter" star Daniel Radcliffe, it's the simple things that give him the most trouble. Radcliffe didn't have a problem with memorizing the scripts for the eight "Harry Potter" movies he headlined but, asking him to tie his shoelaces is a different story. To help to publicise this condition Radcliffe admitted publicly to suffering from dyspraxia, a neurological disorder commonly associated with clumsiness.

Radcliffe said the motor skill disorder sometimes gets so bad that he has trouble completing simple tasks, such as tying his shoes or writing a thank you note. "I was having a hard time at school with no discernible talent," he said in an interview. In Radcliffe's case it is a mild condition that affects his ability to tie his shoe laces and affects his handwriting. While he is capable of tying his laces, he often fails to do so.

What is Dyspraxia?

Sometimes known as 'clumsy child syndrome'

May be mild to severe

Can affect speech

Can cause child to have low self-esteem and if ignored can lead to later mental health problems.

Dyspraxia is a common neurological problem that impairs the organisation of movement, often with no obvious cause. Up to 10 per cent of people show signs of the condition, with about two per cent severely affected - males are four times more likely to be affected than females. It can affect any or all areas of development, including intellectual, physical and language, possibly impairing someone's normal learning process.

This condition is a lack of development in planning of physical movement and organization. The affected motor problems result in difficulties in academic learning and also in daily life skills. This may be seen in delayed crawling, walking etc. People with dyspraxia often have difficulty coping with multi-sensory stimuli and can feel pain from too
much sound or visual stimuli. Children with dyspraxia often appear to be above average verbally and this can lead teachers to believe they are more competent than they actually are.

In school the child will often have difficulties in handwriting, in physical education, in tying shoelaces etc. He/she may knock over or drop things easily. Getting all the items he/she needs out of a schoolbag can require a great deal of effort. The child can be of high/satisfactory ability in verbal skills but writing/gross motor skills can be very poor. This child can appear to be lacking in concentration and motivation and is sometimes considered 'lazy'.

**Strategies that may help students with Dyspraxia**

- Try to ensure that the child is sitting in an upright position with both feet flat on the floor.
- If possible try to give him/her a sloping surface to write on.
- The child should be seated away from doors and windows where there might be distractions. He/she should be close enough to hear and see instructions given by the teacher.
- Use sheets with spaces for answers to reduce the amount of writing required.
- Use lined paper and if possible, attach it to the desk so that the child doesn’t have to hold it in place while writing.
- Tasks should be broken down into small components
- Repeat verbal instructions several times and keep them simple.
- Use different coloured pens for each line when writing on the whiteboard.
- Avoid use of ‘right’ and ‘left’ and when giving directions try to name visually distinctive landmarks.
- Try to indicate when lessons are nearing completion.
- Indicate to the student that you will answer his/her questions but at an appropriate time, e.g. when the others have started; he/she needs to learn not to interrupt constantly.
- Encourage use of lists and diaries to help the student get organized.
- Try to offer alternatives to team games so that the student isn’t put in a position where he/she might 'let the team down'.
- Help the student to remember where he/she is meant to be, e.g. use written reminders or encourage a 'buddy' to partner him/her between classes etc.
- Ensure that instructions are clear and precise. Pupils with Dyspraxia don't always understand irony or sarcasm.
- Pupils can often be late because of difficulties remembering where they are supposed to be; praise punctuality but don't challenge lateness, just find out why.
- Teach mnemonics to help short term memory - this is a good exam technique for all pupils!

**Useful websites to learn more about Dyspraxia:**

http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/about-dyspraxia/

http://www.dyspraxiausa.org/symptoms/dyspraxia-facts/

http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/151951.php

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