

Why Do Kids Struggle?

When I first began working with kids, I found most problems relatively easy to resolve. Consequently, I wondered why education was not getting the same results.



It was apparent to me right from the first child I ever worked with, that these childhood struggles were a functional issue. Consequently, I wondered why Education was constantly in the news for failing to meet its benchmarks. Surely, they also understood these struggles were functional, right? Wrong! It turns out that education is a system built entirely on an intellectualised understanding of the children and the tasks they perform. It is a system that has absolutely no idea how do what we do at all.

Over the years I have found myself pointing out to so many teachers that functional kids don't struggle. As soon as they hear this, they have a moment of realisation. However, many of them then ask what they can do to fix this, and I have to point out that they are not therapists, therefore they cannot treat these conditions. This alone made me realise just how far educationalists had strayed outside the scope of their practice and been lured into a fantasy world.



These days I find I have abandoned my attempts to engage with Education, primarily because it wants to maintain its intellectualised ideology and does not want to engage with others in any useful way. This is unfortunate as I have seen what does happen when schools do engage and are prepared to up their game.

I have now moved onto treating other neuro-cognitive disorders, and whilst I still do treat the occasional child, it is no longer has my focus as it once did. But many parents are still hungry for information and I continue to believe that true change in education is only ever going to come about by way of a grass roots movement driven by parents. There are answers as to why kids do what they do, and it can all be explained in a practical and common-sense way.

So what is the actual issue with these kids?

In order to understand these childhood struggles, we need to leave all the educational jargon behind and start using terms that actually mean something. As soon as I tell a parent that we will be looking at the child's task performance ie: what the child is doing when they are performing a task, they noticeably relax. A child's actions, behaviour and demeanour are full of functional indicators of visual perceptual performance ie: pointers to what is going on beneath the surface. For example, a child who reverses numbers and/or letters will have a problem with using visual cues within their task performance. They will be missing the things that allow them to stabilise their performance and to know how 'connect the dots' and make sense of the tasks they are performing.

It comes as a relief to most parents when I tell them I'm not interested in what anyone else has to say about their child and that I am more interested in how they see them, and what concerns them about the child's performance. When I tell them why their child is doing these things that concerns them, it all starts to make perfect sense. The other part of this equation is that the parent gets to sit in on the session with their child and see where the breakdown in their performance is occurring. I also explain how this translates into what the child is doing in other areas of life, and parents are often surprised at what I know about their child's performance, simply because I understand how what the child demonstrates in their therapy sessions does translate to their wider performance.

One of the most concerning things that happens in Education, because of its lack of understanding, is that these kids are so often judged, because their behaviour is not understood as a symptom of a deeper problem. These children are not getting up in the morning and plotting the downfall of the empire, but this is what is believed by so many people. I still have adults telling me that these children need to be hit and punished, and I have had so many teachers tell me about these 'naughty' children. All that is happening here is that a child finds themselves in situations that do have an incredibly negative impact on their self-worth and many will go on to be plagued by anxiety and self-doubt for the rest of their lives. We only have to look at prison populations to see that issues with literacy and numeracy are incredibly widespread; and, while the literacy and numeracy issues are not the reason for them being incarcerated, their psychological status most definitely is a primary cause for the life they are living.

Education is full on nonsense and silly ideas about kids who struggle. The idea that 'children learn in different ways' is one such example. I can assure you that we all need the same core skills, abilities, and processes in order to be functional in this world and, without the understanding of this teachers are left trying to work out how to present a task to a child so they can perform it. The issue here that this way of engaging with kids does nothing to identify where their performance is breaking down and correcting it. Instead, the child remains dysfunctional and the way the teacher engages with the child only keeps them in this dysfunction and the developmental delay, which typically accompanies such dysfunction.



The reason why children struggle always comes down to a core breakdown in their ability to process sensory information, connect the dots and make sense of the world. There is a very intimate relationship between perception and performance, and when information is missing from what is being perceived, it will also be missing from performance. This is why we can look at what a child is doing and use their performance to understand what has gone wrong within their perceptual performance. This relationship between perception and performance forms the basis of the functional indicators we use to determine what has gone wrong for the child.

For any child who struggles, the issue can be said to be neuro-cognitive ie: there is an issue with brain development, which leaves the child unable to perform tasks such as literacy and numeracy. However, once we begin to understand the world of perceptual performance, cognition immediately starts to become a world of make believe. We only need to ask how it is we perform any cognitive skill to discover that, "We think," and "We believe," typically precedes all answers to our questions.

Perception and performance and their inter-relationship are all there is.

Discover this and great things are possible

Your child does not have a 'learning disability' nor are they intellectually impaired. They will have a processing disorder, which is relatively easy to correct in most instances. For most children there is no reason for them to be struggling in this world.

*Natoya Rose
Occupational Therapist*

*With that, I would like to welcome you to my world,
the world of visual perceptual performance*

