

Why Kids Struggle



When I first began working with kids, I also began to wonder why education was routinely in the news for not meeting the needs to the kids it serves.

The reason why kids struggle was so obviously a functional issue, and if education was claiming, which it was, that it could help these kids, then it apparently also understood functional performance. Attempting to ‘help’ these kids from any other perspective, would be no different than taking your car to a florist for repairs, and expecting a great outcome.

Fast-forward 10-plus years, and you will find that I have essentially given up attempting to have a conversation with education about what it is doing. Over the years I have been fortunate to work in some schools and with some truly excellent teachers and, probably the greatest thing I saw happen in those schools, was that the burden or responsibility was lifted from those teachers. They realised that it was never their role to ‘help’ these kids. Even the most sceptical amongst them got to see, as these kids quickly transformed and engaged in ways they obviously could not, prior to receiving the Visual Perceptual Therapy. They saw, that when these children had their struggles addressed in an effective way, they could do what they were trained to do – teach them.



These days my focus is on the children and their parents. A grass roots approach seems the most useful, where parents get to understand why their child struggles and how they can be effectively assisted and their struggles resolved. There are answers as to why kids do what they do, and it can all be explained in a practical and common-sense way. I often tell parents that

they are the experts when it comes to their child. Even I can only add to what they know of their child and, by the time the parent has sat through *The Visual Perceptual Therapy* sessions with their child, they will have a very clear understanding of why their child struggled, and what they are now capable of.

What are we actually talking about?

A great deal of educational jargon, along with a great many myths, has been proliferated throughout our society. I do not use most of these terms, simply because they have nothing to do with why children struggle. I'm a practical type of gal and I prefer to have a conversation about things we can all readily observe, whilst applying some good old common-sense to the situation. Consequently, I will use terms such as 'learning' as little as possible and only in the most general sense. Instead, we will be talking about **task performance** and our **capacity** to perform everyday tasks.

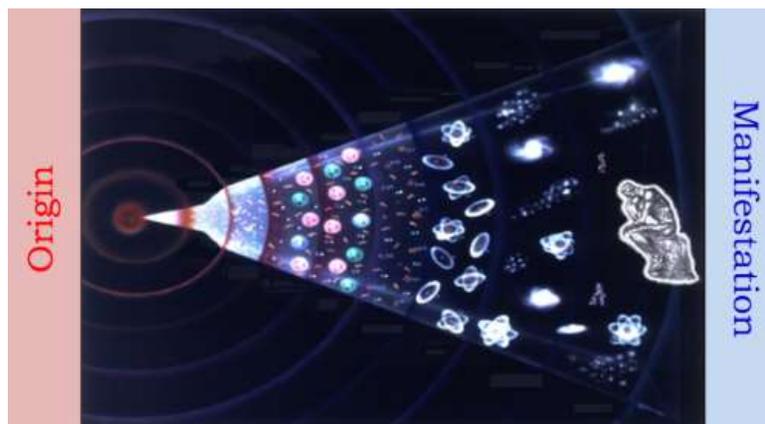
Task performance is about what we observe in someone performing a task. These are the things we notice. One of the first things I say to a parent in our initial consultation is that I'm not interested in what anyone else has to say about their child; I am only interested in what they notice and what they are concerned about. I also have an aversion to technical terms, such as those found in the average educational psychological assessment report. What I am really looking for is the simplicity of what the child is doing. My job is to relate this to what I know about the cause of a child's struggle, consequently, the parent's observations become functional indicators of visual perceptual performance ie: they are pointers to what I am likely to find in my visual perceptual evaluation. These observations also give me a basic idea of how severe the child's visual perceptual deficit may potentially be. However, I do want to stress that at this stage of the game, I would only be making a very guarded and general comment about what I **may** find in my evaluation. I say this because I have seen any number of children over the years, which have had a very significant struggle in life and yet the cause of their struggle, at the visual perceptual level, was really quite minor. Most of these kids I have only ever seen twice and their struggle just dissipated. I will always recall the mother of a 12 year old girl who caught up with a year after I saw her daughter. She thanked me with tears in her eyes, for giving her a 'typical teenage daughter.' I am sure many mothers, would rather their teenage daughter lived somewhere else for a few years, but this mother now had a daughter, who was like every other teenager on the planet and she was so incredibly grateful to see and experience this.

The world of visual perceptual performance exists below the everyday panoramic view we have of life. While the invention of the microscope and scanning technology has allowed us to look into the deeper structures of our physical world, visual perceptual performance is a dynamic of functional performance and we can't put it under a microscope. Instead, we will need to change our perspective, and move beyond a superficial perspective, in order to see and appreciate what is going on beneath the surface.

I often equate the worldview that most of us have, with looking down the barrel of a gun and not seeing how the bullet is being propelled because the bullet is in the way, or in only ever experiencing the surface of the pond, with no understanding that fish exist. From this perspective, it is just not possible to see how anyone is performing a task, beyond having a very superficial understanding, because there is just far too much information contained within what we are seeing, and it obscures a deeper view.



A moment of epiphany changed my perspective forever, and now I find myself introducing other to this subtle level of performance, so that they too can see a child's performance from a totally different perspective. It does take a change in perspective to see things differently and when these shifts happen, the perspective we held before seems so primitive and even superstitious.



Our capacity to make sense of this world arises from our capacity, to engage with a soup of raw sensory information, and to make something of it. We have no other way of experiencing life, except by way of the processing and integration of raw sensory information. We may see and climb the tree, taste and eat the cake or hear and play the music but, before these experiences are conceptualised and named, there has to be a process, which allows our experiences to coalesce out of that mass of raw sensory data, into something. And, if we do not have the capacity to process and integrate sensory information, because there has been some damage to our neural networks, this will be reflected in how we show up in the world, engage with it and perform various tasks. This is why what a parent has to tell me of their experience of their child is so important. It is totally reflective of what is happening within the child's visual perceptual performance, a world I understand very well.



There is no reason that a child struggles, other than them having a visual perceptual deficit - a reduced capacity to process and integrate sensory information. Correct this and all else falls into place.

Welcome to my world, the world of visual perceptual performance

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