

Miniwakan E-Newsletter

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FEATURES

A Different Look At Helping Children

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A true story –

When my daughter, Jennifer was three years old, she literally swung from the chandelier. She would push a chair out from the table, climb up on the chair, climb up on the table, jump up and swing from the chandelier.

Since chandeliers are made to look pretty, hang from the ceiling and give light to your room, and NOT to be used as playground equipment by a toddler, I was not very happy about this situation.

I mentioned it to a professor at the university where I was in graduate school at the time. She was quite alarmed. She told me that this was clearly a sign of Attention Deficit Disorder, that she knew some people who ran a special program for preschoolers with ADD and she offered, very kindly, to ask them to move Jennifer up on the waiting list and admit her immediately as a special favor.

I told her not to worry about it, that it was not a problem. She stared at me in disbelief and asked, "How can you say it is not a problem?" I told her, "I moved the table. Now she can't reach the chandelier."

Throughout our Caring for Our People Training, staff members hear the same words again and again. Changes do not need to be expensive or extremely difficult to increase the success of people with disabilities. That is a major point we would like to make to teachers and parents. Sometimes, you can solve the problem just by moving the table.

What is Caring for Our People Training?

As Dale Carnegie said, most people will be more disturbed by their own headache than by your death. His point was that our concerns that seem so huge to us are not even noticed by most others. Based on this, we assume that the Caring for Our People Training (COPT) grant which is a huge deal to Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc. is something you have probably totally forgotten.

COPT is a program to train staff members in remote areas how to work better with people with disabilities, particularly those who live on or near Indian reservations. The training includes:

- A website - <http://www.spiritlakeconsulting.com/COPT/>
- A CD-ROM
- Four workshops conducted on-site (which usually means on the reservation)
- Newsletters to follow up to the training, mailed monthly to all who attended

- Bulletin boards on the websites were tribal members and others working on or near the reservation can post their questions and ideas.

Through funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, we are able to offer our training at an extremely low rate. Through agreement with Turtle Mountain Community College, participants can receive college credit or continuing education units.

We are happy to have included you on our first mailing of the regular monthly newsletter. Please feel free to forward this newsletter to anyone who might have an interest. All material on our newsletter is written by Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc. staff members. You are welcome to copy and distribute to anyone, but please do credit Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc.

If you know anyone who would like to subscribe, the newsletter is free and they can get it every month by going to <http://www.knewsnet.com/spl/ksub.nsf> and signing up.

How To Change The Classroom So Students Don't Hate School

"No one can read my writing. I can't even read my own writing. I can't spell. I HATE school."

The teacher who read this comment from a student laughed, "Can't write, can't spell. This kid isn't LD, he's JPD – just plain dumb."



The teaching supervisor visiting from the university didn't think it was funny. He wrote as the student's diagnosis, 'bad teaching'. Then he responded, very coldly, "Did it ever occur to you that maybe the child doesn't have a learning disability, YOU have a teaching disability?" The meeting kind of went downhill from there.

As for students with any learning disability, school tends not to be a very fun place if you have dysgraphia. The International Dyslexia Association gives this description:

"At an early age, these students are asked to forego recess to finish copying material from the board, and are likely to be sent home at the end of the day with a sheaf of unfinished papers to be completed. They are asked to recopy their work but the second attempt is often no better than the first. Because they are often bright and good at reading, their failure to produce acceptable work is blamed on laziness or carelessness. The resulting anger and frustration can prevent their ever reaching their true potential."

(Go to this site <http://www.interdys.org/fact%20sheets/Dysgraphia%20FS%20N.pdf> to read the complete article)

It doesn't have to be this way.

A learning disability is a disorder that affects one of more of the processes in learning and using language and/or mathematical skills.

Dysgraphia – is a type of learning disability that involves problems with writing. Look for the following signs:

- Students who are good speakers but very poor writers.
- The student has trouble reading his own writing.
- He may mix upper and lower case letters in the same word or sentence, or shift from print to cursive

and back again.

- Some students with dysgraphia have difficulty with spelling, particularly writing letters out of sequence.
- In the classroom, students with learning disabilities may require modifications to allow them to succeed in school. All of the following have been found useful:
- Allow students to use printing or cursive, whichever is easier for them.
- Accept oral reports.
- Allow students to give you (or an aide) the test answers verbally, and then write these down.
- Provide typed copies of class notes. These are a good idea to distribute to all students after class, anyway to insure they focused on the main points of a lesson.
- Do one thing at a time. For students who have to concentrate on making the letters correctly and spelling correctly, trying to come up with new ideas at the same time may be just too much. First write out your answers on paper. Then edit it for spelling errors, misplaced words. This is good practice recommended by most English teachers to anyone wanting to be a better writer.
- Encourage use of a computer to type assignments.
- In class, and for students who cannot afford computers, there are less expensive handheld devices such as the Franklin Language Master (\$450) with speech recognition and, our favorite, the Children's Talking Dictionary and Spell Corrector (\$60) that will change misspellings from phonetic spellings like "fonics" to "phonics".

For more information about learning disabilities:

See the Introduction to Disability & Culture section of the Caring for Our People Training – this page provides some introductory information on learning disabilities.

Dysgraphia is a disability that involves writing – it is one specific type of learning disability. We will discuss other types in future newsletters. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please feel free to email us at COPT@spiritlakeconsulting.com

Attention Deficit Disorder

*Another Story (I have always wondered if this one really happened)...
Many years ago, an acquaintance of mine says she was asked to conduct an evaluation on a child a teacher was convinced had ADHD. Back then, the term was just "hyperactive."*



The consultant entered the classroom to see a group of children sitting at their desks and the teacher in front of the class giving directions. Thinking to herself, "Ha! Another one of those teachers that thinks every child who doesn't sit in his seat six hours a day is hyperactive!" she turned to the teacher and asked, "Where's Johnny?" The teacher pointed toward the ceiling in the corner behind her, "Up there. On top of the filing cabinet."

ADD/ADHD is a disorder of inattention, impulsivity, and hyper-activity. The complete name is Attention Deficit Disorder/ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (now you see why we use initials?) Students who have ADD/ADHD find it hard to concentrate for long periods of time. They are almost always paying attention to something but not always what you would like them to be paying attention to. They really do want to be good, it is just that it is so hard to sit still for so long.

Changing the Classroom for Students with Hyperactivity

- Let the student kneel or even stand at the desk so that physical activity is possible, as long as it does not distract the other students. (PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE tell us that you are not one of those teachers who is constantly yelling at students to sit still.)
- Be careful where you seat the student. This includes both:

Classmates sitting around a student. I am from a large family and I can study during earthquakes, with people tap-dancing next to me and construction going on outside the window. I would be a good person to sit next to a hyperactive student, because his tapping of his pencil, standing up next to his desk and flapping his arms would not distract me a bit.

It would drive some other people crazy. Most experienced teachers will automatically move a student to a different seat and see if that reduces the problems. Think about not just the student you are moving but also the other students who will be around him.

Location in the classroom. Teachers often put a student right in front "where I can keep an eye on you". Next to the teachers' desk might not be the best place if it is near an open door or window that might cause a lot of distractions. Depending on how your classroom is arranged, the back of the room might be a good place. The student could get up and walk to the bookshelf, sharpen a pencil and not disturb other students.

- Doodling is okay in case the student gets distracted, as long as it does not go overboard. If the student is doodling little circles during a social studies lesson while you are talking about the rivers in Africa that is fine. If she is doodling little circles instead of writing the answers on her social studies test, that is definitely NOT fine.
- For other ways to rid of energy constructively, the student can help the instructor around the class. Look for opportunities during the day for the child to get up and move around. He can pass out papers for the next assignment, sharpen pencils for the teacher or get up and collect everyone's work.
- Have all students get up and move around at their desks, doing jumping jacks, knee bends or stretching exercises. Teachers in the primary grades often do this. I used to do it with my junior high school students just to catch them off-guard. They whined and moaned about it, but it was a nice little break.
- Post educational materials all around your room. Have a poster of the Periodic table in a science classroom, a picture of the double-helix, a chart showing the different classes of the animal kingdom. In math classes, have different laws of mathematics. You can involve the students in making these charts and posters.

Modifications for attention problems

- Use a class signal to get attention. Many teachers do this for the whole class – saying "Eyes forward", switching the lights on and off when they are about to give instructions. In the movie, "Kindergarten Cop", the 'teacher' used a police whistle. I often say, "Raise your hand if you are listening". If not every hand goes up, I call out the names of the students without their hands raised. When every hand is up, I start lecturing.
- Use a signal to the individual student. An excellent teacher I knew had a student with attention problems in her class. She sat the student close to the teacher's desk. Before giving directions, the teacher would walk by the student's desk and tap on it a few times with her pencil. When the student looked up, the teacher, standing in front of the whole class, would begin to talk.
- Copies of notes can be given, as students may be able to pay attention to the teacher talking or pay attention to what they are writing down, but not do both at the same time.
- Allow students to complete assignments in shorter increments. If the test consists of three pages, it is better to give the student a page at a time so that it does not seem overwhelming.

- To keep their environment even more in order, the teacher should keep everything in the same place, such as desks, supplies, etc. For a child who is easily distracted, once she has to get up, search for a pencil or piece of paper and come back to the desk, she may have completely forgotten what she was supposed to be writing about with that pencil.
- Children with attention problems often lose their books or forget to take them home, so they cannot do their homework. If possible, send a separate set of books and supplies to be kept at the student's home.

Recommended website for more information: Accommodations & Modifications. Georgia Learning Connections: <http://edtech.kennesaw.edu/intech/accommodations.htm>

Strange Things to Do with Boxes

Many years ago, I taught at a special school for children with behavior disorders. Most had learning disabilities as well. Our school was on an extremely low budget and our students' families had even less money than the school did. Below are several suggestions for teachers and parents about how to use cardboard boxes to help with learning and behavior difficulties. (Yes, I am not kidding).



All books and school supplies should be kept in one place in the home, so that once the child sits down, he or she can just begin working without getting up again to get a pen, paper or glue.

Three such trips to look for some item can easily take an hour because the child gets distracted while walking around searching for the object. At the end of an hour, the child's homework is not one problem closer to being done, the parent is angry and the child is upset because that is one less hour to watch TV or play with friends and there is just as much homework as ever.

All of this could have avoided by having everything (and I do mean EVERYTHING – papers, pens, glue, pencil sharpener, school books, notebook, tape – in one place). If you have several children and not a lot of room, it is likely you don't have a desk, bookshelf and perfect study area for each of your children. Here is a simple solution.

Get a cardboard box. Put all of the child's books and school supplies in it. When it is homework time, pull the box out from under the bed or table where you keep it and work can start.

Make your own cubicle

You can do this in school or at home. You may wish to discuss this with the student first. There are two ways to do this. The first is to get a very large box; the kind refrigerators come in is perfect. Cut the top off and one of the sides. Put the student's desk inside of it. She may even want to decorate it with pictures or with schoolwork.

This cubicle prevents students from being distracted by what is going on to either side or in front of them. If the student's desk is put in facing away from the teacher, when she wants the class's attention, the student can turn her chair around.

Cubicles are probably best used at home or in a self-contained class where every student has one, or it makes too obvious a distinction between the child and his or her classmates.

It may not bother the child at all to be singled out. Whatever distinction the cubicle has, is often less of a problem than the learning difficulties he or she is having.

Cubicles may also be useful for children who have behavior problems because it makes it much more difficult to hit the child next to you or throw things at other children.

A second way to make a cubicle is to get a large box, say, the size a TV comes in, cut out the top and one side, and put it on the child's desk. Again, this blocks distractions from the side and front and makes it easier to concentrate. You can have these "cubicle boxes" in the classroom and allow any child to use it when he or she is finding it hard to block out distractions.

End of E-Newsletter

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