

Association for a Healing Education

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Factors Behind the Increases in Learning Challenges

by AHE Board Member Connie Helms

Parents and teachers are finding that outstanding numbers of children and adolescents are facing academic and behavioral challenges. Labels such as Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Learning Disabled and ADD/ADHD are frequently used, yet underneath these diagnoses lies a more fundamental problem. The root causes of many challenges that lead to these common labels have less to do with learning issues and more to do with the first seven years of a person's life.

In the critical neurodevelopmental phases from birth to seven, foundations are laid for healthy movement skills such as balance, coordination and spatial orientation. The first phase involves early movement patterns which all newborns possess; these automatic movements help the baby survive and develop in the first months of life. If these early movement patterns remain beyond infancy, they inhibit higher functioning postural reflexes from gaining control. A resulting weak sense of balance may prevent a child from sitting properly in a chair longer than a few minutes, or his ability to write is hindered by an early movement pattern that causes his arms to stretch away from the center of the desk. Learning in school is compromised because the central nervous system (CNS) has not reached full maturation.

There are many reasons why the early movement patterns do not relinquish control over the CNS. Birth stressors such as caesarian birth and

the umbilical cord around the neck are possible factors, as are environmental neurotoxins and excessive antibiotics. Also, if the crawling stage is shorter than three months, skipped entirely, or if crawling is not executed on all fours, this may have a significant impact on seated posture, pencil grip, and eye tracking. If these skills are not achieved, reading, writing, and math in school may be frustrating.

It is assumed by educators that children entering school are able to sit in a chair for long periods and track with their eyes across the board or a written page, but these capabilities are not possible for students with retained early movement patterns. The inability to progress through the complete developmental stages of early childhood may impact reading, writing, and math. The frustration is compounded when testing reveals average or high intelligence, yet the mere act of writing is a laborious task.

By addressing the underlying issues that form the basis for healthy development of the central nervous system, the physical body is given a chance to renavigate the sequential stages and work through hindrances. Learning, comprehension and written output become significantly easier.

Connie Helms, M.Ed. has been working with children for thirty years. Currently she has a private practice near LCWS doing Extra Lesson with children, adolescents and adults. Her website is www.balanceinchildhood.com