



Education Insider Reveals The Secret System That Obstructs Learning

What you can do when a glitchy sensory system interferes with learning.

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Redding, California: It is not that the six million children who are part of the special education system can't learn. It is that they learn in a different way. Suzanne Cresswell, an occupational therapist with over 30 years of working with children with learning challenges, shares the surprising truth about what many of these students have in common in her new book, *Unique Learner Solutions*. (Hint: it has to do with the vestibular, proprioceptive and tactile sensory systems.)

Cresswell refers to this population as unique learners. Unique learners are people you know, work with, play with, and conduct business with. Maybe you have a boss, a roommate, a spouse, or a sibling who is a unique learner. "For most of these children and adults, it isn't that they can't learn, but rather that they learn in a way that is different from typical learners," Cresswell said. The parents of these children agonize over how to help their unique learner. In *Unique Learner Solutions*, Cresswell explains what is hindering learning and what to do about it. *Unique Learner Solutions* is a guide book and a self-help manual for autism, hyperactivity, dyslexia and other learning disabilities.

The number of children and youth ages 3–21 receiving special education services was 6.4 million, or about 13 percent of all public-school students, in the 2012–13 school year (the most recent data available from the National Center for Educational Statistics). Every year some of these students enter adulthood where they continue to struggle to different degrees. The learning differences of these students are a problem made even worse as they struggle to learn in the same way as everyone else learns and feel like a constant failure. Feelings of inferiority are only one by-product of the difficulties experienced by unique learners.

Unique learners make sense of the world in their own fashion. Frequently, they gather and collect information more quickly and in a whole picture fashion, leaving the more typical sequential thinker way behind. They draw unique and multiple conclusions based on data that the typical thinker may believe has only one logical outcome. Although their heightened sensitivities may sometimes seem to get in the way of learning, often these same sensitivities contribute to heightened awareness which ultimately allows them to make profound contributions that benefit us all.

Unique Learner Solutions: Suzanne Cresswell established Unique Learner Solutions as a division of her occupational and physical therapy practice, Cresswell Physical Therapy and Hand Rehabilitation, Inc., to provide parents and teachers with practical solutions. These solutions and strategies come straight from the work Suzanne does with students every day.

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Author Bio



Suzanne Cresswell is an occupational and physical therapist who has worked with unique learners for over three decades. Suzanne works to educate and provide proven solutions and strategies to those that parent, instruct and work with unique learners. By creating an understanding of unique learners and their learning behavior, she helps parents, teachers and the students themselves find the ability in learning disability.

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Book Bio

Unique learners struggle to do what others find simple. Their efforts to “try harder” don’t help. Their struggle isn’t a result of laziness or lack of trying. Rather, their struggle is literally inside their own brains and bodies.

When children struggle in school they often feel shame that they are not “normal”. The term learning disability reinforces their belief and suggests that they are unable to learn. Nothing could be further from the truth. They just learn in unique ways. The capabilities and talents of this population are frequently overlooked because their skills and abilities often don’t fit with the requirements of traditional education.

Unique Learner Solutions provides strategies that target what is really happening in the brains and bodies of unique learners. Parents and teachers can use these solutions to help their unique learner make significant improvement and make sense of the “why” behind their child’s behaviors and attitudes. This will not only make a difference in their scholastic world, but also in their family life both now and in the future.

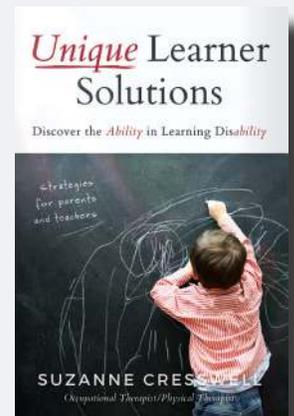


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Book Excerpt

Introduction

Picture yourself at a train station in Italy with no knowledge of the language, no understanding of the train schedule or monetary system. You must be at a specific destination at a pre-established time to meet a friend. You stand in front of the ticket station having painstakingly entered what seem like nonsense words into your smart phone to translate. Although you have the skill and ability to do this, it requires strict attention and focus because it is a novel experience. On several occasions, you had to re-enter the information because of train station distractions. The man behind the counter is clearly growing increasingly irritated with you. The echo of the Italian voice on the loud speaker, the bustle of the families gathering together and the persistence of the long lines at the information desks combine to challenge good concentration. People flow around you, jostling and speaking quickly, adding to your tension and confusion.

After what feels like a very long time, you finally decide which train you need and attempt to speak with an attendant. This involves more translation as he doesn't speak English. You hesitate, unsure if you understand correctly. You debate returning to your hotel and simply calling off the trip altogether. Stress has you feeling irritable and worried. When you finally sink into your seat, you are exhausted.

Now imagine that chaos every day of your life.

For those fluent, or even proficient, in Italian, the difficulty seems ridiculous. In the same way, many adults cannot understand why the child in their life is unable to do the simplest thing. Simple to them, that is, in the same way that boarding a train in Italy is simple for one who speaks Italian.

This is the case for many children who are unique learners.

Parents and teachers have admitted that they fail to grasp the difficulty of their child's day. Their coaxing to "try harder" and "just focus" is intended to help. The inability of the child to put the well-meaning advice into practice results in high levels of frustration for the child, the parent, and the teachers. Teachers are often focused on areas related to academics or behavior. The parents are often focused on problems with clumsiness or following directions. The child may have expressed difficulty with making friends and the three parties never realize that the underlying issues are all from the same root cause.

In my observations and treatment of hundreds of different unique learners, I have discovered some remarkable similarities between their behaviors. Nearly all of these learners have difficulty in a similar part of their brain and body system. The messages taken in through any portion of their sensory system can become compromised. The message cannot be coherently delivered to the brain. The brain, then, responds inappropriately. Input and output don't work. The loop between input to the brain through the sensory system and output by the body in an action taken doesn't flow smoothly. This can happen when just one small developmental building block doesn't fall properly into place.

Many of the differences in how these students learn is a problem made even worse when trying to learn in the same way everyone else learns. This book will help you develop your own strategies for teaching and parenting a unique learner. This book will help you realize that it is precisely these differences in how unique learners learn that can offer tremendous benefits to both the individual and to the world in which they live.

What to Know to Sound Like You Read the Book:

Unique learners around the world have a few things in common. First, they learn in different ways from their peers. This is true whether the unique learner excels or struggles at school. Second, many unique learners have problems in their vestibular, proprioceptive and tactile sensory systems (VPT). Everyone is familiar with the sense of touch, or tactile system. Less familiar to people are the vestibular and proprioceptive sensory systems. The vestibular system is basically your sense of balance and the proprioceptive system is your sense of movement. These three systems are foundational to learning. When these developmental building blocks don't fall into place properly, unique learners will struggle to effectively use their sense of sight and hearing, which provide the looking and listening ability so much a part of a typical classroom's learning environment. Suzanne Cresswell, an occupational therapist who has worked with students with learning disabilities for over 30 years, provides parents and teachers with solutions to many of the issues faced by students with learning disabilities. Time management and organization for ADHD, creating an optimal learning environment for autistic learners, and improving eye tracking for dyslexic learners are a few examples of the practical solutions and strategies Cresswell provides in her book, *Unique Learner Solutions*.

Book Benefits:

- Learn about the VPT and why you need VPT processing to learn
- Deal with specific challenges in parenting or teaching a unique learner
- How calming the chaos helps ADHD
- Why modulating the brain matters in autism
- What is at the core of gross motor problems
- Why messy printing is really a fine motor problem
- How to deal with reading problems
- Why unique learners are heroes and how they can change the world

Who Should Read?

Unique Learner Solutions is a guide for parents and teachers who want solutions to help their unique learners improve their ability to function in the classroom, the home, in relationships and in their every day life. Though chapters focus on ADHD, autism, dyslexia and fine or gross motor problems, if your child is struggling in school, but doesn't have one of those specific issues, the solutions provided can still be a big help. For example, strategies in the gross motor chapter can greatly benefit those unique learners with fine motor challenges, sensory processing disorder, or ADHD.

Interview Topics:

Why You Must Use "Detective Mode" to Understand Your Unique Learner.

Children do things for specific reasons, even when it doesn't seem to make sense. The minute you assume that they are just acting out, you've lost the opportunity to really help. Detective mode as a non-judgemental observer can help your child more than almost anything else you can do.

Try Harder Doesn't Work

This seems to be the number one assumption about unique learners from parents, teachers, and even themselves.

It's totally wrong. Try harder doesn't work for unique learners. If they could have fixed the issue themselves, they would have. Unique learners must *try different*, because nothing else is working.

What Do Pinkie Fingers Have to Do With Reading?

Can improving your balance change how you view yourself in the world? Does improving eye tracking make you better at math? There is a connection between the body and brain that must work properly for children to learn. That connection is the vestibular, proprioceptive and tactile sensory systems. When those aren't working, children struggle to do what comes easily to others. The good news is that there are real strategies and solutions that can make all the difference.

Interview Questions:

- What is the big deal about unique learners? Don't they just have learning disabilities?
- Can these unique learners contribute to society?
- What is really going on in the brain of a unique learner?
- Is there a brain and body purpose behind the unusual things children with autism do?
- What are the vestibular, proprioceptive and tactile systems (VPT systems) and why does dysfunction of any of these systems cause problems?
- How can a parent or teacher take a fresh look at the challenges of guiding and parenting a unique learner?
- How can you tell if your child's actions are just bad behavior?
- How can these individuals with ADHD move from brain and body chaos to a state of coherence?
- Is self-regulation possible for individuals with ADHD?
- How can "detective mode" help parents and teachers learn how to mindfully observe students with autism?
- How can parents and teachers promote the most ideal brain mode for learning, especially for children with autism?
- Why are some children so clumsy?
- Does clumsiness, or gross motor incoordination, really create a problem with the child's ability to learn?
- Are fine motor problems just students being lazy and needing to try harder?
- What are the common gifts and challenges of children and adults experiencing attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)?
- What developmental milestones are needed to develop fine motor control and what can I do if my child missed them?
- How can I get my child to care about reading?
- Can visual processing exercises really help my child read better?

Testimonials:

To Whom It May Concern,

Our son, Brian, just graduated from college. Not that long ago my husband and I weren't sure that was possible.

Brian was diagnosed with Sensory Integration Dysfunction (now called Sensory Processing Disorder) at age 4, after evaluation by a major urban medical center. Our small town medical professionals were largely unfamiliar with this unique brain wiring issue in December of 1996, so it seemed like a miracle to find occupational therapists specifically trained in sensory processing therapy in our small town. It was a true blessing because at that point Brian was unable to tolerate the typical activity of a traditional preschool setting and we were at our wits' end wondering why.

Following his diagnosis, Brian received occupational therapy from Suzanne and her fellow therapists for almost two years. We are convinced their treatment and the principles we learned started us on a course of better understanding and support for Brian's unique learning needs. Since that time, Brian has surpassed our expectations socially, athletically and academically.

The day our son successfully completed a Bachelor of Science degree, we visited Suzanne's clinic to say thank you for turning Brian's life around more than 20 years ago.

We now have high expectations for his future and for countless families like ours who, through this book, will also benefit from Suzanne's expertise, insight and caring treatment of unique learners.

Sincerely,

Bev Stupek

Hello,

I first met Suzanne Cresswell during an IEP for my son. Suzanne had assessed my then 16-year-old son for sensory processing disorder.

Suzanne "got" my son in a way that most people don't. She could see exactly what was going on with him and could even point out to him, and the rest of us, how much he had adapted to do things that weren't comfortable. She spoke directly to him, not about him, and pointed out that he had trained himself to make eye contact and respond to people, even when that wasn't a comfortable thing to do.

She made him feel validated and valued in a few short interactions. His response when asked how he liked her was, "She gets me." When you are a person who struggles to learn like others do, this says it all.

Over the next months, she started seeing my son in her clinic. The "goal" was to improve his handwriting, but she focused on his vestibular and proprioceptive systems through physical exercises.

What was most amazing to me is that in those following few months, he noticed, for the first time in his life, that his peers acted differently than he did. At first this made him feel very bad and self-conscious. He could suddenly see that certain things he did made others feel uncomfortable. Those were difficult times for him, but I was blown away with this progress.

When she discussed it with him, she explained that he might feel worse for a few months, but that he was making

huge progress and that as his body got used to new ways, he would feel better emotionally too.

My son is now almost 19. He has finished high school, much to his relief! More importantly, he has stopped hating himself and his life. He doesn't feel like a failure every day. He is still working on finding his way, but Suzanne's reminders that the world needs more minds like his has done so much to bolster his self-image. She helped him see that he was simply a unique learner, not defective or broken in any way. Suzanne even reached out to my son several times as she was writing her new book, *Unique Learner Solutions*, to get his perspective about certain things.

I am extremely grateful to Suzanne Cresswell for how she helped my son. When your child is a unique learner, it can be very painful. So often you hear everything that is "wrong" with your child. To have someone come along who saw my son as the extremely interesting, compassionate and intelligent person that he is was healing for me as well.

Sincerely,

Julie Marsh

Interview with Joel Marsh – an 18-year-old high school senior (at the time of this interview) with Sensory Processing Disorder

Question: What do you think people should know about unique learners?

Dealing with feeling that everyone else is superior to you is awful.

At school, you have this horrible constant feeling of inferiority that looms over you. (You feel like a lizard in the open and the hawk is looming over you.) You feel like you can't hide.

Question: What makes you feel like you are inferior?

Often you look at your test or something that was important or even a small thing that you didn't complete in time. You look around you and everyone is all happy because they most likely got good grades on their test. Unique learners aren't stupid, we can piece together what is going on with others and we assume that people who are happy after looking at their tests, succeeded or got a score that was acceptable.

The more you think and feel you are inferior, the more you become such a thing. What I have learned in these past few years, is the more we nurse our wounds the worse they get -instead of just fixing them and moving on. Most of us don't really realize this and could live our whole lives crippled because of the people who did better than us – because we let them and our own hurt cripple us. The more we grieve longer than necessary, or the more we stay all mopey – the worse it is going to get, by feeling that we are inferior.

The first thing – the first step in solving a problem is admitting you have one. The first thing that needs to be done is that unique learners need to take their parents aside and talk to them about their feeling of inferiority – instead of letting your parents think you are lazy or don't care – when in reality you just can't adapt to the curriculum – unique learners can't adapt because of the mundane and strict curriculum.

If you are a parent who feels like your kid is having trouble because he is lazy or just doesn't care – you need to go past your feelings and take your kid aside – try not to communicate in a way that shows that you are aggressive or accusatory.

You need to ask them if they feel inferior to everyone else.

You need to ask them if they are having problems with how they are teaching math or whatever.

The second thing is to ask the right questions – with the right tone. Not firmness, but being truly genuine and wanting to help your child.

The third step is to find someone who can help diagnose the issue – someone you can trust. And someone who knows what they are doing.

The fourth step is to let teachers know that your kid is a unique learner. The reason they aren't doing well in class is not that they are lazy or stupid – it is just that they aren't wired to learn things the way you are teaching them. It needs to be done, your teachers must know about it. Just in case, for your child's benefit, make sure that your child's teachers don't let the other students know about your kid being a unique learner. This doesn't happen every time – but the other kids in the classroom – if they find out – could use this information to hurt your child. They could call your child a “retard” or just bully them knowing that your child is not the same learner as they are, but is probably superior to them in intelligence.

The strong try to assert their dominance over the weak, who happen to be more intelligent, by force and by being flat out jerks.

The fifth one - the most important one of all, is to do everything you can to support your child and raise them to the best of your ability. Don't be overly firm or strict with them – because unique learners are, more often than not, different from your average teenager – from their siblings. They are often more mellow or gentle- even when their behavior is weirder than others.

Try to keep yourself from being constantly irritated or frustrated with them. They can't help making mistakes.

Most of all, keep believing that your child will do it – and make sure that they know you believe in them. Don't put pressure on them, but make sure they know that you are on their side.

They could and possibly will change the world someday for the better. You have to help them be prepared for that by helping them get through school, which may be the hardest part of life for a unique learner.

Question: What do you think about the claim people make that unique learners are using their learning struggles as an excuse?

I will admit that I did try to make myself get sick or have a fever multiple times to avoid going to school. It's not because we are lazy and just trying to get out of it -but that school is hell on earth for unique learners.

School really can be awful for unique learners. They can't understand what they are being taught very well because it is not being taught to them the right way.

Other kids might be treating them poorly or differently because they act different.

Often, yes, we will use being a unique learner as an excuse – I don't usually try to unless I am trying to keep myself in a funk. Parents should be prepared to hear that – poor self talk – they might say they can't do anything right, they are retarded, which is without a doubt, not true.

Try not to be accusatory to them if you do suspect that they are doing something that they aren't supposed to be doing. You should be serious about it, but not in a way that is threatening. Instead, try to calmly talk about it. The worst thing you can do is be accusatory to a unique learner, because it already hurts to be a unique learner in this society.

Unique learners aren't typically appreciated until they actually do something. Don't try to make your kid go to college unless it is something that they genuinely want to do. There are a lot of factors that make college difficult for all students. You shouldn't assume that your child is a failure if they don't go to college.

For one thing, there is a lot of drama in college, and unique learners either don't notice drama going on, or it is too stressful to even hear about or think about it. Sometimes it is both!

So essentially, work with your kids and help them combat the problem. Not by being strict but by trying to be the best you can be. Because in the end, what will truly matter when they look back is that you recognized that they needed help and that you actually cared and gave them help. That is what they are going to remember you by – that you cared and loved them. Even if they weren't good at typical school. Nowadays school doesn't teach kids things they will ever need to know in life. You have to teach them what you know – not to force it down their throats – not just about educational things but about life. Because that is going to matter most in their future. School is only a small part of their life.