

Directionality – Another important building block in an individual's life



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Body awareness is critical in a child's development and movement. Children progress through different stages to develop good body awareness, all essential building blocks for future academic success in the classroom. Body awareness can be divided into 6 important building blocks, including:

1. Body image
2. Body concept
3. Body schema
4. Laterality and lateral preference
5. Midline crossing
6. Directionality

Body awareness is critical in a child's development and movement.

Laterality, the 4th building block, is the internal awareness of both the left and right side of the body working together and in opposition to one another. Directionality, the last building block takes this internal awareness of left and right a step further. The book '[Physical activities for improving children's learning and behaviour](#)' written by [Cheatum and Hammond](#), explains that once a child has developed a well-defined sense of laterality and knowledge of the body, directionality can be built.

During this developmental step, the child transfers knowledge of the right and left sides of the body into the physical space.



Why is directionality important?

Directionality is part of our everyday life as adults. It impacts us daily in one way or another. Directionality helps us to find where we have parked our car in a parking lot, by knowing where you are in relation to the other cars and the location of the stores in the shopping centre. Our ability to follow Google maps is dependent on following directions, turning right, or left when instructed. Now just imagine how directionality impacts a child's still developing body awareness and a sense of direction.

Directionality involves three references namely, 'right and left', 'up and down', and 'before and behind'.

There are various prepositions of direction that are part of our lives, for example left, right, top, bottom, above, below, besides, under, over, between, through and behind. Directionality involves three references namely, 'right and left', 'up and down', and 'before and behind'. These references are firstly in relation to our own body and then it is projected into space and onto other objects (Cheatum and Hammond).

By what age does directionality start?

According to Cheatum and Hammond knowledge of directionality enables a child to become the centre of their own universe. A child will now learn to refer to people and objects in relation to the centre of their body (egocentric localization). This is a gradual process that usually occurs between the ages of 6 and 8. A child will begin to make references such as, "The cat is in front of me" or "Dad is to my left". A child should progress to the ability to refer to objects and people in relation to each other (objective localization), between 8 and 11 years. The child may observe that, "The cat is under the couch" or "Mary is standing behind the tree".

Now that we have a better understanding about what directionality is and by what age it should be in place... How do I know if a child has a deficit? What signs are there to be on the lookout for in a classroom or at home?



A child that has difficulty with directionality has a directional discrimination problem. If proper directionality is not in place, the child will battle with directional discrimination. Screening for this is mainly done through clinical observation. These difficulties can be observed during movement exercises in the children who cannot seem to stay in step with rest of their peers. They find balance, spatial awareness and visual perception activities challenging, as it is directly related to one's sense of direction in space. They will have difficulty with direction of objects in relation to themselves, such as "to my left" or "behind me". Many times, these children are accused of not paying attention or listening to the instructions given, but on many occasions, they simply do not know what is expected of them. They may get overwhelmed easily. It may even be a challenge for them to get from one place to another. Getting from their class to the administration office or sports field may be confusing, as they need to take a right and then a left to get there.



According to [Cheatum and Hammond](#), a child who is still in the laterality stage (does not know right and left) or lacks directionality (has not gained a sense of up and down, before and behind) will continue to get these letters confused. Copying from the blackboard is also very challenging for them and will be more difficult if they are left-handed. Left-handed children with a directional discrimination problem, copies the teachers' writing exactly like it is seen, from the midline to the outside. This usually results in reversals of letters. All the above frustrations will hinder them from being successful in learning the academic material, and instead become frustrated and perhaps resort to inappropriate behaviours.

Other children may write from right to left or even backwards. As mentioned before, English is meant to be read from the left to the right and top to the bottom. A child with a directional discrimination problem will find simple words like 'bat' difficult to read. They might read the word from right to left as 'tab' or the word 'mom' might be read 'wow'. Directionality has a direct impact on reading comprehension skills and your ability to read fluently ([Bonnie Terry Learning](#)). In these cases, the directional discrimination problems are called dyslexia, dyspraxia, or dysgraphia.

A photograph of a piece of lined paper with the sentence "I like to play doll." written in a child's handwriting. The text is written from right to left, appearing as a mirror image of the original sentence.

A child with a directional discrimination problem can also be picked up in the academic phase of a child's life. The child will find it difficult to follow direction on writing tasks, for example: "write your name and surname in the top right corner of the page" or "start in the middle of the page". Many times, the child will also be confused with certain numbers such as 13 and 31 or when they look at the letters p, q, b, and d. These number and letters look similar except for the rounded part facing different directions.



How to improve a child's directionality?

When choosing activities to improve directionality, one should always remember that a child with a directionality problem find balance, spatial awareness and visual perception challenging. Choosing activities that also incorporates these aspects will also improve directionality in children. Activities that increase awareness of directionality cause children to move their bodies up, down, around, under or in specific directions through space. The children need to sense which way is appropriate to move in order to complete a task, as well as where other people and objects must move ([Cheatum and Hammond](#)).

Activities to build directionality

- Play twister.
- Do the Hokey-Pokey.
- Agility games with cones.
- Dance to music with directional cues.
- Play Simon says and incorporate different directions in the movements.
- Obstacle courses where the child moves in all the directions.
- Play sports like rugby or soccer, where one changes direction all the time.
- Map fun: Have the child write directions to a location by looking at a map.
- Learning to read the time on self-made clocks.
- Crossword puzzles.
- Play blindfold games with a partner. One friend is blindfolded and gets guided by the other friend. One can move through an obstacle course or play a sport.

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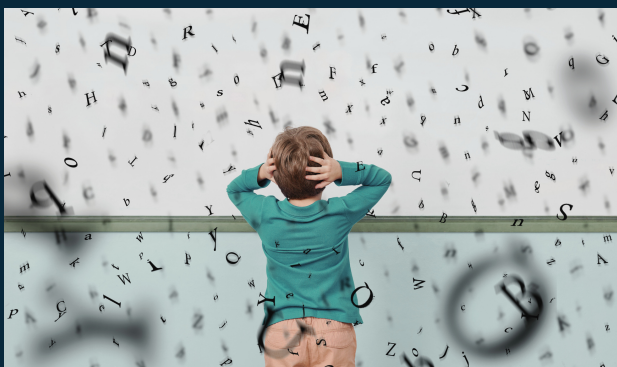
There is always more one can do to help a child with a directional discrimination problem in the classroom setup. Sometimes a small adjustment at their desk can make a big difference. Below are a few [practical tips](#) that may just make the difference.

Practical tips for the classroom:

- Mark the child's desk with left and right arrows.
- Let the child try different writing tools to determine which one is the most comfortable.
- Provide the child with letter and number charts to help him remember how to form symbols when writing.
- Indicate on the paper where the child must start and stop.
- Provide different kinaesthetic experiences like finger-paint, chalkboard, movement activities etc.
- Remove any distraction on the child's desk and working space.

Further intervention

If you still notice that a child has a directionality problem, after you have implemented the above strategies, further assessments and intervention may be needed. These assessments will help determine if there is an underlying cause that is hindering the child from building good directionality. Current research indicates that some children with reading difficulties, such as difficulties related to dyslexia, have co-existing visual and language processing deficits. Getting to the root of the problem, will help the child on the sports field and in his academic career.



That is the end of our discussion about directionality. I am sure that you have a better and clearer understanding on the specific building blocks a child goes through, to have good body awareness. Well established body awareness plays such a vital role in every facet of a child and adults' life. Once again, I am so impressed on how every detail of our lives are planned to perfection by our Creator.

About the author:

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