
UNIT 3 EDUCATING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you are expected to be able to:

- State the different types of physical and intellectual impairments that may exist amongst children in you classroom
- Understand and list out their characteristics and procedures which help to identify them
- Identify the major causes of their learning problems
- List some action points for regular teachers to meet the educational needs of children with learning problems
- Understand that the teaching methods and strategies useful for these children help other children as well, and thus result in total school improvement
- Suggest follow-up action that you propose to undertake to meet the educational needs of such children in your classroom

3.1 INTRODUCTION

You as a teacher must have come across children with learning problems. These problems can be due to certain factors inherent in themselves, or in the learning environment. They could be a result of both these factors too! These create barriers in the child for achieving his/her maximum learning potential. Learning problems among children also lead to early dropping out of the school system. In order to help such children achieve the goals set for them, the teacher's role becomes very significant.

3.2 LEARNING ACTIVITIES

You may have been working as a teacher for sometime. While teaching in your class you may have encountered children who learn well without any difficulty. At the same time the performance of some children may have been a matter of concern. Some such

children have discernible physical and sensory disabilities. Despite your special attention, the learning problems of these children pose a problem. Of course these children are not only in your class. Over formal and informal discussions in the staff room or outside, other teachers may have also voiced similar concerns. Think over and list the types of children with learning problems in the light of your experience as a teacher. We have started the listing with naming one such group of children.

Activity No.: 1

I think children with physical and sensory disabilities having learning problems can be classified into the following groups:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

As a teacher we cannot continue to teach ignoring the problems of these children. We have to put our experiences together and think of suitable, corrective measures for helping these children overcome their problems. In the absence of such measures, the learning problems of these children will continue to multiply and, under the stress of frustration, they are likely to dropout sooner than later. These children are also likely to develop aggression and behavioural problems which are not only detrimental to their well-being but may disturb the educational progress of other children in your class, too!

Dealing with these children in ordinary regular schools is the focus of this unit. Some children with special needs, particularly children with mild disabilities like lower level of intellectual functioning and deficits in adaptive behaviour, visual impairments, hearing impairment, locomotor impairments and learning disability may already be in your classrooms. You may have listed these types in Activity 1. Dealing with these children and improving their performance is a challenge we want you to accept.

Can you reflect and list out some common causes that create learning problems among the special groups of children mentioned above? Please try. You can discuss the matter with your colleagues, parents and even the children themselves.

Activity No.: 2

As a teacher I think that children with special needs face learning problems due to the following causes/reasons:

1. <input type="text"/>	2. <input type="text"/>
3. <input type="text"/>	4. <input type="text"/>
5. <input type="text"/>	6. <input type="text"/>
7. <input type="text"/>	8. <input type="text"/>

An examination of your list of the causes indicates that some of them are related to the learning environment at school or home, while others lie in the child himself/herself. You might have come across parents with an unfavourable attitude. The social environment

with special reference to the learning environment at home and in the community also varies. There may be inadequate instructions, unlearned teachers, with reference to the learning environment in the school. The problem may also lie in the child himself/herself, for example, lower level of intellectual functioning, hearing problem or visual problems. These deficits also create learning problems.

3.3 HOW TO TEACH CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS?

The difference in handling these children lies in the methods adopted for curriculum adjustment and modification, classroom management, resources both human (such as use of child to child methods), and teaching/learning aids and appliances used. It depends greatly on your own preparation, planning and innovation as a teacher. Remember teaching is a challenging experience; sometimes daunting and at other times exhilarating.

When dealing with individual needs in the classroom, an important aspect to keep in mind is that there are no special teaching methods or specific strategies, to be used for handicapped children only. When deciding on the teaching method or strategies base them on the needs, interests and requirements of the particular child in question.

How, then, will you deal with the special needs of the mildly disabled, for example, visually impaired children including those with low vision, hearing or locomotor impairment, learning disabled or those with lower level of intellectual functioning? How will you help cater to their needs?

The first step in dealing with children with learning problems refers to their identification. Do you think that only doctors or specialists can do this? If yes, then there is a need to change your decision, since the identification is much easier than you have been thinking.

Children with special needs have some observable characteristics. Let us take one disability at a time and try to see how you as a teacher can identify the disabilities in children. This can help you as a teacher to teach them better and make their learning easier.

(There is also an audio cassette on this topic)

3.4 CHILDREN WITH DIFFERENT DISABILITIES

3.4.1 Children with Visual Impairment

There are children who are totally blind and those with low vision. The totally blind do not have sufficient vision and cannot find their way while walking. They need the Braille script (reading through touch) as they cannot read the usual text. These children also experience difficulties in learning due to problems in understanding concepts, processing information and establishing social relationships.

The low vision children do not require braille. Their vision may be corrected through a lens. Some can read only large print of 18 points and above. Some require magnifying glasses to read. A few children with low vision have a restricted field of vision. It is necessary to identify such children and provide special help towards their education.

Identification

- Observable deformity in the eye(s).
- Rubs eyes frequently
- Frequent reddening of eyes
- Covers one eye and tilts head forward
- Holds objects including the book close to his/her eyes

- Asks other children for help when taking notes from the blackboard
- Blinks frequently
- Eyes water
- Squints eyelids together
- Frequently complains about headache following close eye work
- Bumps into people or objects

As a teacher if you observe some of the behaviour listed above, the child may have visual problems. Refer the child to the PHC/hospital for an eye check-up. There is a need to inform the parents. Medical care and treatment become important. Till such help becomes available you can carry out functional assessment of visually impaired children, using the guidelines given in the Functional Assessment Guide brought out by NCERT

How You Can Help

- Practice in listening comprehension in order to reduce the reading load.
- Using auditory aids.
- Use of more tactile and three dimensional aids.
- No differential treatment after children have acquired mobility training.
- Using proper contrast and large print for low vision children and braille for the blind.
- Minimising sound when teaching.
- Reading aloud while writing on the blackboard.
- Ask a classmate to work together with the child realising his/her strengths and underscoring the lack of vision.
- Giving clear and specific directions and verbal clues while giving instructions and teaching.

As a teacher you may discuss the issue of helping the child with other children in the class. Together with them can you think of some other action points for help? Write down your thoughts in Activity No. 3

Activity No.: 3.

Action points for dealing with visually impaired children:-

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

3.4.2 Children with Hearing and Speech Impairment

If you observe learning in children you realise that listening plays a significant role in learning. The inability to hear interferes in the learning and performance of children. These children may also develop speech problems, and problems in their writing and

spelling become more visible. Reading correctly also becomes difficult. It is therefore necessary to identify such children with not as visible an impairment as visual or orthopaedic. For identification, salient observable behaviours displayed by such children are as follows:

Identification

- Has observable deformity of the ear(s).
- Frequent discharge from the ear(s).
- Complaints of pain in ears frequently.
- Scratches ear(s) frequently.
- Turns head on one side to hear better.
- Frequently requests teacher to repeat directions and questions.
- Makes many errors while taking dictation.
- While listening to the teacher watches her face carefully.
- Display speech difficulty

If you identify the above observable characteristics, refer the child for medical assistance to a doctor and tell the parents that appropriate corrective action needs to be taken. In your classroom you may also help to educate the child by carrying out Functional Assessment and incorporating the points given below.

How You Can Help

- Seat the child in the front row.
- Work on improving his/her listening skills.
- Talk clearly, slowly and loudly enough for the child to understand.
- Face the child as much as possible while talking and teaching.
- Do not speak with your face towards the blackboard.
- When you talk to the child see that there is sufficient light on you.
- Make extensive use of teaching/learning aids such as charts, objects while teaching.
- Encourage peer teaching.
- Provide opportunities for drill and practice for teaching children with speech defects.
- Use action-oriented situations while teaching.
- Avoid moving in the class while speaking.
- Use of a lot of visuals individually or in groups, to supplement general teaching inputs.

You as a teacher need to make sure that you plan the education of these children on the basis of curriculum adjustment, use of aids and appliances and keeping in mind the above mentioned hints. It is essential to ensure that the hearing aid functions properly, otherwise no amount of planning or improvisation will be of any use. The child often needs practice and time in order to adjust to an aid.

What teaching methods have you been using in order to help these children? Try to list them in Activity No.4. 0

Activity No. 4

As a teacher I have dealt with hearing and speech impairments among children in the following ways:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

3.4.3 Children with Low Intellectual Functioning

Some children consistently show low academic achievement. They may have no physical problems. Often they are poorly adjusted in the classroom. Short attention span, poor memory and slow in following instructions are other visible signs. Some observable behaviours for identifying such children are:

Identification

- Displays poor academic achievement.
- Forgets what is learnt after a short time.
- Is inattentive and distracted.
- Shows too much reliance on presentation of concrete objects.
- Seeks immediate reward.
- Displays fear of failure.
- Has poor self-image.
- Lacks in self-confidence.
- Has restricted communication.
- Has poor muscular co-ordination.
- Seeks repetition and practice.
- Has difficulty in doing things for himself/herself like eating, dressing, bathing and grooming.
- When the child is told to do something, s/he seems to have a problem in understanding what s/he has been told.
- Compared with other children of his/her age, the child appears to be dull or slow.
- Compared with other children, the child faces difficulty in learning to do things.
- Has difficulty in understanding abstract things.
- Seeks more repetition and practice compared to other children.
- Takes more time in learning a particular skill as compared to other children.
- Avoids participating in classroom activities like other children of his/her age do.

To make your task of teaching these children simpler, you can take up the following action points:-

- Provide concrete experience to these children while teaching.
- Use repetition, practice, and drill procedure, till mastery is acquired.
- Be flexible in transacting curriculum.
- Give rewards from time to time.
- Break up the task into small steps.
- While teaching, adopt a developmental sequence.
- Use a variety of activities to hold the childrens' attention and interest.

Can you think of some other action points. Use activity No. 5 to write your own ideas.

Activity No.5.

Write down some action points that you can take to help children with intellectual impairments to learn in your classroom.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

3.4.4 Children With Learning Disability

These children are of average or above average intelligence. They do not have any hearing, visual or physical deformity. But they have specific learning problems in reading, writing, spelling or arithmetic. These problems are due to impairments of their physiological processes, like perception and memory. They may frequently read 'b' as 'd', '21' as '12' and confuse '+' and 'x' signs.

These children need to be identified carefully and helped. Some observable characteristics are:-

Identification

- Does not read well although his/her oral answers are intelligent.
- Makes mistakes in spellings, especially omits letters in words or changes their place e.g. 'pat' instead of 'tap', or 'felt' as 'left', 'rember' in place of 'remember'.
- Writes numbers wrong e.g. '12' as '21'.
- Acts distracted and cannot remember his/her timetable.
- Is always untidy and late in submitting homework and coming to class.
- Does not do well in examination although s/he is clever and has no physical disability.
- Is so excited that s/he is unable to complete any task
- Omits words or lines in reading.
- Reads individual letters in the words but has difficulty in putting the sounds of the letters together. For example, s/he may say the sounds b/e/g and pronounce 'bad' or say the sounds f/o/g but pronounce 'frog'.
- In reading guesses the words.
- Reads the numbers wrong '6' as '9' and '3' as '8'.

These children need a lot of training, encouragement and practice to improve their attention span, perception and visual motor co-ordination. The following suggestive steps can prove to be useful. Try them out.

How You Can Help

- Make the learning activity interesting and challenging.
- Break an activity into smaller steps.
- Do not teach together letter/words/numbers that resemble each other.
- Use lot of activities to reinforce each learning step.
- Keep the child busy in activities that interest him/her.
- Have frequent starts/stop in an activity.
- Use multi-sensory approaches.
- Provide different coherent experiences with learning aids.
- Give credit and rewards for correct responses.
- Encourage participation.
- Be flexible in transacting the curriculum.
- Provide exercise for improving time concept.

Very often children with learning disability are confused with the educable mentally retarded children. However, they are different. The differences lies in the fact that the educable mentally retarded child faces difficulty in all aspects of learning, unlike the learning disabled child who shows a discrepancy in performance. The learning disabled child is normal in all aspect of learning except for a particular area.

Can you see the distinction? Activity No. 6. has some characteristics of both the types listed. Try to seperate them.

Activity No. 6

The sentence below describes the learning disabled and educably mentally retarded. Write LD against those applicable for Learning Disabled Children and EMR for the educably mentally retarded

S.No	Traits	Types of Disability
1	Cannot distinguish between his brother/sister and another child.	
2	Cannot put sweet into the mouth .	
3	Writes 'b' for 'd'.	
4	Intends to write 'left' but ends up writing it as 'felt'.	
5	Needs concrete objects all the time.	
6	Cannot recall the spellings of his first name.	
7	Cannot tie a knot/shoe lace.	

3.4.5 Locomotor Disability

Children with some physical disabilities have locomotor problems. These may relate to the muscles and joints. They may affect mobility of limbs and extremities. These children may find it difficult to move around. The learning capacity may often be like other children. The physical disability may result in problems with their posture bringing fatigue and limits to performing certain activities. A writing problem may result because of rigidity in the finger muscles. Adjustment problems because of non-acceptance or ridicule by peer may however exist. Since the disability is visible, identification becomes easier.

Identification

- Observable deformity in any part of the body, such as the neck, hand, fingers, wrist, or legs.
- Has difficulty in sitting, standing or walking
- Has difficulty in picking up, holding and putting objects on the ground
- Complaints frequently of pain in the joints
- Has difficulty in holding a pen to write
- Walks jerkily
- Involuntary movements of limbs
- Has amputated limbs

If you observe any locomotor disability refer the child to the doctor and tell the parent. In order to move about and function properly the child may require aids.

How You Can Help

Firstly, it is important that you accept the child. Call him by his/her name. Avoid sarcasm and taunting the child for his/her disability as other children also notice it.

- Involve the child in all learning activities as an equal partner with the peers.
- Encourage peer interaction on the basis of mutual respect.
- Make suitable seating adjustments in the class.
- Seat the child keeping in mind the need for more space for wheel chair/crutches, etc.
- Allow ample space for movement.
- Let the child participate in physical activity, games and recreation.

With proper aids and appliances, and positive reinforcement these children can be dealt with easily.

Final Points

Read and think over the identification characteristics and "How you can help". You must by now be convinced about being able to work with these children. Remember that every child must be catered to individually. Can you specify what steps you will now take with any such child in your class?

Activity No. 7

Steps to involve and help the child with learning difficulties due to impairments to learn in my class:-

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

The steps that you have written are logical and sequential. There is a need to:

- I. Prevent deterioration in disability conditions which is most likely to happen if not attended to in time.
- II. Prepare these children for education through early stimulation programmes which improve their educability.
- III. Prevent dropout of such children from schools due to frustration arising out of repeated failure in academic learning.
- IV. If required, refer the child to a medical practitioner.
- V. Involve parents as equal partners and be honest about the special need of the child.
- VI. When assessing the child do not just concentrate on what s/he cannot do. Equally important are the potentialities and capabilities.
- VII. Innovate and make the curriculum accessible.

VIII. Work on classroom management, curriculum adaptation and make and use appropriate aids with the children.

IX. Encourage activity based co-operative learning approaches.

X. Try to seek full co-operation from other teachers and students.

3.4.6 Consolidation and Self Evaluation

You have just studied what some other teachers and professionals have suggested on the basis of their experience with such children. Would you like to revise the list of actions that can be taken to improve the learning of these children in your classroom. Review your earlier suggestions and complete the activity sheets.

REVIEW ACTIVITY SHEET

Special Needs Children	Action Points For Improved Teaching and Learning
Locomotor disability Visual impairment Hearing and Speech impairment Low level of Intellectual functioning Learning disability	

3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have given you a brief description of some of the disabilities that some children in your class may have. We have shown you ways of identifying these children, given you suggestions to help these children - as well as methods to integrate them in the normal classroom.

3.6 SUGGESTED READING

Jangira, N.K. and Mukhopadhaya, S. 1987. Planning and Management of IED Programme, NCERT, New Delhi.

Jangira, N.K., Ahuja, A and Sharma P.L. 1992. "Children with Seeing Problems: Focus on Remaining Sight", Central Resource Centre, PIED, NCERT, New Delhi.

Jangira, N.K., and Ahuja, A., 1992. Functional Assessment Guides, NCERT.

Mukhopadhaya, S., and Jangira, N.K. 1987. Source Book-Training of Teachers of Visually Impaired,, NCERT, New Delhi.

Sharma, P.L., 1988. Handbook on IED for Primary School Teachers, NCERT, New Delhi.

Sharma, P.L. and Jangira, N.K. 1987. Source Book for Training of Hearing Impaired Children, NCERT, New Delhi.

The Primary Teacher. Vol. 12, No. 1, January 1987. (special issue brought out by NCERT)

Bhartiya Adhunik Shiksha, Vol. 5., No. 1, July, 1987. (special issue brought out by NCERT)

Communication: Equal Education Opportunity for the Disabled, quarterly PIED Newsletter from NCERT.

The Video Programme given below can be used to help you to visualise and understand how a disabled child can be educated in an ordinary school. It can be procured from the Central Institute of Educational Technology, NCERT, New Delhi.

Dishayen : Advocacy for Integrated Education for Children with Disabilities.