

Disabled Children in Inclusive Classrooms

Behavioural Problems and Behaviour Management Strategies

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Abstract

Every child is unique and behaves differently in different situations. Most of these behaviours are normal and do not pose any threat for child. But behaviour such as regular temper tantrums or aggressive outbursts may become difficult to handle and often teachers regard these as behaviour problems. These behaviours prove hurdle for children as well as classroom transactions. Generally termed behaviour problems, these difficult behaviours are sometimes considered part of the expected developmental process and sometimes diagnosed as conduct disorders and affect a number of children. These behaviour problems significantly interfere with their ability to learn and develop. It is very difficult for a teacher to handle all sorts of behaviour problems in a classroom. The problem gets intensified if children with disability are included in the classroom as a part of inclusion process. Inclusion provides opportunities to these children to participate in education with non disabled children without any discrimination. But if the class comprises of a good number of children with one or other kind of disability along with normal children in inclusive classroom then the responsibility of teacher increases. Different types of disability bring with it various kinds of associated behaviour problems in the classroom. This complicates the teaching learning process. This theoretical paper focuses on the behaviour problems of children with different types of disability in the classroom after inclusion and also reflects on the challenging role of teachers in making classroom teaching effective. There are many strategies presented in this paper to help teachers succeed in their endeavour.

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INTRODUCTION

Every child is unique and behaves differently in different situations. Most of these behaviours are normal and do not pose any threat for child. But behaviour such as regular temper tantrums or aggressive outbursts may become difficult to handle and often teachers regard these as behaviour problems. Although behaviour problems include range of behaviours, which can be considered part of the expected developmental process, these are also sometimes diagnosed as 'conduct disorders' and affect a number of children and significantly interfere with children's ability to learn and develop.

BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS IN DISABLED CHILDREN

Disabled children like any other children also exhibit many behavioural problems and causes include the direct effect of disability upon the child, the severity of disability, the type of disability etc. The most common of these behaviours are the self-injurious and stereotypic behaviours. Self-injurious behaviours lead to physical harm and include banging head, biting, scratching self and many such responses that inflict direct harm on the individual. This may be the result of higher levels of pain tolerance, or to get attention, or may be organic. On the other hand stereotypic behaviour is the repetitive behaviour that persists for long periods of child and others. The reasons for growing

aggression may include fear, anger etc. Refusing reasonable requests, running off instead of coming when called, becoming limp and dropping to the floor, resisting transitions, not performing chores or duties are few of the non-compliant/ disruptive behaviours observed in children. The reason could be attempt to control others or it may be an attempt to exert independence. Disability also causes inappropriate social behaviour which includes failure to have learned more appropriate social skills and rules - stripping, showing affection to strangers, stealing or hoarding, lying, masturbating in public, swearing or shouting. These children also lack self-regulation over bodily functions and show copresis, enuresis, drooling, and tongue thrust like behaviours.

Other than the above, there are other behavioural issues of children suffering from disability. A child become drowsy and has impaired attention due to epileptic seizures. Epilepsy can also become the cause for unusual or challenging behaviour and lead to abnormal perceptions. Children suffering from hearing problems face difficulty in following instructions. Sometimes, not hearing what's been said can be mistaken for not doing what they are told. Tourette's syndrome involves repetitive, involuntary jerking movements of the face or body (motor tics) and sudden outbursts of noise or swearing (vocal tics). Repetitive obsessive behaviour and problems with anger control are sometimes seen. Autism and

Aspergers syndrome are associated with difficulties in verbal and non verbal communication, social skills, imagination and obsessive preoccupations. So, a child with Asperger's syndrome may hide under a desk when becomes overwhelmed from sensory overload due to being in a busy classroom. Depression and anxiety disorders can cause poor concentration, irritability and restlessness. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) children are hyperactive, feel difficulty in concentrating and sticking to tasks. A student with severe attention difficulties or extreme sensory processing disorders might be highly distracted or distressed by the presence of other students while they are at work. Students with behavioural problems may not feel accepted by other members of the class, and this puts them at high risk of academic failure. Children with learning disability may develop anxiety when asked to read in front of others and become very disruptive. A child with an Attachment Disorder may lash out when he feels threatened in any way. Behaviour problems in children are most often referred to as being either internalising or externalising in nature, and can include behaviours that are a danger to oneself or to others, such as self-injury, self-isolating or biting and hitting. A number of studies consistently have reported that children with learning disabilities have behavioural problems. About 39 to 54% of

learning disabled children had more behavioural problems than normal children and both internalising and externalising problems are associated with learning disabilities (Epstein et al, 1986). Other studies have found that perceptual motor difficulties, poor concentration, hyperactivity and low self esteem were associated with learning disabled children. Research has also shown that challenging behaviour has negative consequences for children, including rejection from peers, poor academic outcomes and increases in the risk of children becoming recurrent juvenile offenders (Bhavani K., 2007). Children with developmental disabilities often have communication difficulties and so may display challenging behaviour as a way of communicating their needs and wishes. Children perform well in one task while struggle to perform other tasks. This mismatch between ability, expectations and outcomes can cause terrific disappointment and upset resulting in a cascade of emotions and behaviours that can interfere with everyday functioning in school, at home and in the community. Children with disabilities perceive problems for social interactions. Children with neuromuscular diseases (NMDs) may be affected by a range of mental health problems, including personality disorders, social problems, attention deficits, affective disorders, anxiety and depression. (Darkea J., Bushbyb K, Couteurc A.L., McConachied H., 2006)

INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

Inclusion is not a new term today. Special education for children with special needs emphasises inclusion which, in broader sense, is about the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept the child. Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. International organisations particularly UNESCO, now see inclusive schooling as an effective approach in the education of this class of learners. Inclusion refers to the "full-time placement of children with mild, moderate and severe disabilities in regular classrooms" (Garuba A., 2003).

An inclusive classroom is comprised of students with special educational needs along with normal children. But all students with disabilities cannot be included in the regular classrooms because of their effect on other students. For example, students with severe behavioural problems, such that they represent a serious physical danger to others, are poor candidates for inclusion, because the school has a duty to provide a safe environment to all students and staff. However, most students with special needs can attend school, are not violent, do not have severe sensory processing disorders, etc and can be selected for inclusion. The students who suffer from physical disabilities that have no or little effect on their academic

work, students with all types of mild disabilities, and students whose disabilities require relatively few specialised services are generally included in a normal classroom.

TEACHERS' ROLE IN BEHAVIOURAL MANAGEMENT

Teachers are often faced with great rewards and challenges when supporting children in inclusive classrooms, particularly when problem behaviour may arise. It is very difficult for a teacher to handle all sorts of behaviour problems in a classroom. Different types of disability bring with it various kinds of associated behaviour problems in the classroom. This complicates the teaching learning process. The role of teachers in handling these problems is very crucial and they must know proper ways to manage inappropriate behaviours. First step is responding appropriately to problem behaviour. How should teachers respond when children with problem behaviour are included in the classroom? The most effective tool to handle problem behaviour is to prevent it from occurring in the first place. Teachers should respond by understanding why a child might be engaging in problem behaviour, and then establishing strategies that prevent that behaviour from occurring. Problem behaviour often occurs in children when they try to avoid something/work, demand attention from somebody and some internal reason within the child (e.g. constant

moving in the chair because the child has ADHD). Secondly, teachers should be creative enough to use different strategies for managing problem behaviours in his/her classroom. There are two types of approaches in behaviour management. Eliminating undesirable behaviour is one way while educative approach which encourages adaptive behaviour and promotes maximum participation of individual in meaningful, daily activities is another one. Instruction and process of behaviour control goes on simultaneously.

BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

There are effective strategies that can support teachers and their students who exhibit challenging behaviour. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1975) children with disabilities must be given education along with children who are not disabled and in the case of a child whose behaviour impedes his or her learning or that of others appropriate strategies including positive behavioural intervention strategies and supports must be used to address that behaviour. Behaviour of children can be shaped by concerted efforts by teachers who are continuously engaged with them. Few of the behaviour management strategies are as follows—

Giving Reinforcement— This is a most commonly used strategy for dealing with classroom behaviours. It includes positive reinforcement (presenting something positive that

increases targeted behaviour) and negative reinforcement (taking away something aversive that increases targeted behaviour).

Creating the Behaviour Plan— There is logic behind the behaviours. The challenge is to understand its context. The teacher must observe the behaviour; when does it occur, where does it occur and why he/she think it occurred, Individual differences should be recognised and considered as part of the inclusion process.

Exploring the Consequences— It includes teacher's observation regarding what happened when the behaviour occurred, when did these consequences take place and how did the student respond to these consequences.

Considering Alternatives— Moving student, regrouping class, rearranging environment, changing time of activity, changing class format etc. can help dealing with problem behaviours. In order to facilitate a better understanding of the things the student finds difficult or stressful, open communication between his/her teacher and parent/carer is very helpful.

Understanding Disability and Teaching New Skills— Children's behaviour problems point to the need for an understanding of the child's disability and the behaviours the disability may cause and teaching children new skills such as how to play friendly at recess instead of hitting others can work. Combining easy tasks with hard tasks is another way, as problem behaviour is likely

to occur with more challenging academic tasks. If behaviour escalates and the child is unable to follow the instructions/rules, teacher must minimise the verbal interaction and instructs the child to have some time in the quiet and safe place, and if necessary the child is led to the area.

Bringing Change in routine- As it is in the case of all children, following the same routine (though very important) may become monotonous for children with disability very soon. In such situation an excursion or other such activity can work in bringing the child's interest back. For the new situation the teacher must provide the child prior warning as possible so the child has time to mentally prepare; for example allowing the child some time looking at pictures of the place he will be visiting.

Minimising the Stress Level- The cause of increased stress in students (like noisy unstructured activities, new tasks or activities, changes in routine etc.), must be taken care of. Social interaction for a long period of time also overwhelms students who struggle with social skills. Teachers must arrange a screened off area with a bean bag and some boxes with activities that are soothing, such as building blocks, toy cars etc. for children when they are overwhelmed. Another good alternative is to provide a physical outlet for the stress, such as running an errand, or lifting and carrying something heavy in the classroom. It is important to understand the underlying cause

of the stress response and work accordingly. The student would benefit from taking part in structured group activities to help consolidate social skills. The student may need teacher explaining the rules and what to expect beforehand, therefore minimising potential anxiety/stress.

Keeping the Expectation Low- Children with disabilities often develop considerable stress or anxiety (about their performance and ability to complete school work) and exhibit difficult behaviours. In these instances, expectations need to be lowered to meet the child's current level of ability in order for him to experience success. This in turn builds confidence and better enables him to attempt harder work. Students must also be explained what exactly is expected of them when participating in some work to reduce their anxiety in relation to completing school work or other activities. Teacher can provide special job that the student can perform at the start of each day can boost the self esteem. Some children like re-ordering materials such as books in the classroom, and this can serve as a stress relieving activity, or having access to things they can fiddle with.

Proper Seating Arrangements- Seating is usually very important to help minimise distractions. The teacher must try to place the student where there are minimal visual and auditory distractions. Sensory processing difficulties cause a child to be either hypersensitive (over

response) or hyposensitive (under response) to various sensory stimuli, with each child vary in their sensitivity to different things and the degree of sensitivity. Due to an uncomfortable seating position, background noise, or even a smell, the child suffers considerable stress and anxiety. Behaviours are then generated in an attempt to reduce the stress or escape from the situation. Students may feel uncomfortable when sitting on the carpet and listening to the teacher. In such instances, alternative seating can be arranged to help minimise the difficulties and therefore help to minimise the distractions. It may be easier for the student to sit in a chair or cushion. Also a stress ball or something tactile may help satisfy

a need for tactile sensation and can help to reduce unwanted behaviours.

CONCLUSION

Behaviour problems are part of growing up and difficult behaviours are always challenging for teachers. Teachers need diverse thinking when dealing with both types of children (with and without disability). Different types of disability demand different management strategies. It is important for teacher in an inclusive classroom to design activities keeping in mind the requirements of children with disabilities. Understanding the problems and using proper management techniques can help in smooth functioning of all the activities in inclusive classroom.

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