

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES FOR CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

In every classroom from primary to collegiate level one can find students with specific learning disabilities. Specific learning difficulties refer to oral language difficulties, learning difficulties, writing difficulties and arithmetic difficulties. A single model of educational programme is not suitable for all children having different types of learning difficulties. Any model that provides right materials and technology in the right time and place makes the education of learning disabled children as meaningful as that of non disabled children.

INTRODUCTION

When a child enters the world, he is unaware of its complexities. His mind is in a clean state and gradually with the increase in his interaction with his environment, he keeps assimilating and accommodating concepts and thereby adjusts to his surroundings. During the process of interaction and adjustment he is able to learn certain things and faces a problem in learning certain others. Thus, a child seems to be in a disabled and problematic situation where learning of different things essential for his development and progress are concerned.

The present education system does not segregate learning disability as one of the disability areas. Unlike other disabilities learning disability is the hidden invisible handicap, which cannot be identified until the child enters the formal schooling. Poor marks in examination indicate that the child suffer from a learning problem and they are labeled as under achievers. These children may have normal or above I.Q. The discrepancy between children's good intelligence and their poor academic performance is the nucleus of the matter in learning disability.

Children with learning disability are the children with special needs. Once a learning disability is identified, three categories of assistance such as psychological, technological and educational are to be provided. In educational programs, children must be provided optimum educational experience and remediation to overcome the lacunae. Educational programs should be well planned

with learning disability specialists and adequate infrastructure facilities to impart education to these children.

UNDERSTANDING THE TERM 'LEARNING DISABILITY'

Learning Disability (LD) is a term that denotes a group of disorders manifest as difficulties in the acquisition and use of disabilities such as reading, writing, reasoning, listening, arithmetic or of social skills. These difficulties arise from inadequate development of minuscule brain areas, so called 'Specific Delay in Development'. The term learning disability was given by Samuel A.Kirk in 1962.

Various definition of the phrase 'learning disability' has been given. In view of Kirk, "A learning disability refers to a retardation, disorder or delayed development in one or more of the process of speech, language, reading, spelling, writing or arithmetic skills resulting from a possible cerebral dysfunction and emotional disturbance and not from mental retardation, sensory deprivation, cultural or instructional factors.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, defines learning disability as "Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written which may manifest themselves in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal

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brain and dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning problems due to visual, hearing or motor handicaps, of mental retardation or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantages”

The learning disabled children has often been referred as an individual with an “invisible handicap”. These child usually appears normal in every respect expect for the fact that his/her learning difficulties limit progress in school. Learning disabilities are if various types such as :

1. Oral language disabilities (dysphasia, aphasia)
2. Reading disabilities (dyslexia, alexia)
3. Writing disabilities (dysgraphia, agraphia)
4. Arithmetic disabilities (dyscalculia, acalculia)

Specific learning problems of the child should be identified so adequate training, appropriate environment, teaching strategies and proper remedies can be provided. Atleast five different types of tests should be used in assessing learning disabilities such as:

1. Norm referenced test
2. Process tests
3. Informal tests/ reading inventories
4. Criterion referenced tests
5. Direct daily measurement

Out of these five, first two are used to measure the child general ability along various dimensions. Last three tests are used to measure the specific skills and behaviors that a child is to be taught.

EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

Curricula and teaching should be planned and designed so as to optimize the simultaneous acquisition of knowledge, skills and feelings. Myklebust gives thirteen principles of remediation planning such as:

1. individualize the problem
2. teach to the level of involvement
3. teach to the type of involvement
4. teach according to readiness
5. remember that input precedes output
6. consider tolerance levels
7. use multisensory approach
8. teach to remove deficits
9. teaching only to and through integrities is limited
10. do not assume the need for perceptual training

11. control important variables
12. emphasize both verbal and non verbal learning
13. keep psycho neurological consideration in mind.

The planning of educational programs should mainly concentrate on the points specified above in order to provide maximum experience and reduce the impact of disability.

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

The learning disabled children get education in general classroom even after the specialization that emerged in special education. This field get an evolutionary process from traditional approach of special segregated classrooms to recent approach of “inclusive schooling”. The various educational services for children with learning disabilities are mentioned below:

1. Resource Model

In this program, the child remain in the regular classroom most of the time and receive special instruction from the resource teacher in the resource room for limited periods each day. The resource teacher concentrates on skills peculiar to learning disabilities and leaves curriculum to the regular classroom teacher. It allows teachers to serve more children so it is more cost effective approach. This approach encourage disabled children to do interaction with non disabled children, so it is helpful in sharing of information and development of social skills. This model has many advantages as:

- (i) The resource teacher is always available at the campus for providing services to LD children.
- (ii) learning disabled children attained normal life and education with the help of peer group, regular teacher and resource teacher.
- (iii) The natural set up in the integrated education program develops all aspects of the personality of these children.

2. Itinerant Model

In this model, a special teacher called travelling/itinerant teacher travels between many schools bringing teaching aids, materials and equipment and holding consultation with regular teachers and head of the institution. Teaching materials, aids and appliances are stored in one

school where he/ she is assigned a room. The resource materials are brought to the schools where there is need. There is no resource room in each school on full time basis. Each child is attended by the itinerant teacher twice or thrice a week. Itinerant program is cost effective as it enrolls more children in the locality.

3. Dual Teaching Model

In dual teaching model, the regular classroom teacher play the role of special teacher also and take the responsibilities of LD children in addition to regular classroom work. The teacher who meets the special needs of the children is given some incentive. Time to time in service training is given to such teachers.

4. Self Contained Classrooms

In this setting, children with LD spend all their school time in special classroom with limited no. of classmates. Children receive special benefits from special teachers and individualized instructions. Moreover, the rapid growth of the disability with the accompanying increase in the no. of children found in need of special services makes self contained classrooms financially nonviable. Although some children require a complete self contained classroom placement throughout their school career but most of the children can be integrated for part or full day in regular classroom.

CONCLUSION

A single model of educational program is not suitable for all children living in different areas. The service provided is based on need and accessibility. Various factors such as nature and degree of disability, age, transportation, culture etc. influenced the selection of suitable model. Any model which provides right materials and technology in the right time and place makes the education of LD children as gainful as that of non disabled children.

In global era, if we have to achieve the goal of education for all (EFA) than inclusive education is most appropriate method of extending education to children with all disabilities.

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