

Learners with  
exceptionalities make  
up an important  
education essay



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Learners with an exceptionality differ from their peers through their differences in requirements to learning and the classroom environment in regard to factors such as support systems, teaching methods, and social interaction with other learners and teachers. Learners with an exceptionality include those with learning disabilities, communication disorders, intellectual disabilities, behaviour disorders, and also gifted and talented students. Each group needs a special level and type of support for their individual learning needs. Because these learners make up the extreme ends of the learning spectrum, sometimes all areas of a learner's schooling life have to be altered to cater for the individual. This can be from an intermittent, part-time basis to the learner requiring full-time support. However, the social interaction can be highly beneficial for students with an exceptionality, (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2007) and research shows this could be due to activities such as peer tutoring within classes. Because of these learners' extra requirements on the teachers and supporting caregivers at school and home, (especially those with disabilities) this can eventually result in not only the search for funding for these learners, but over the long-term a strain on teachers and other learning professionals to create a continual individualized learning programme, unless strategies are implemented to create a positive and effective learning environment for both the learner and teacher.

Exceptionality also has implications for the learner in school in terms of the learner's relationships with others, but also the implications on the relationships between these individuals. For example, if the classroom environment is becoming stressful because of a student's disruptive behaviour disorder, this can create negative relationships between other

students' parents and the teacher or school professionals. The spill over effect of only some learners' needs being addressed can be very negatively impacting, and so encouraging a positive learning environment is essential. There are certain strategies related to the social cognitive theory that can help to create a positive learning environment. Furthermore, these strategies in teaching can be applied to not only students with exceptionalities but also to all students in different contexts of learning environments within schools at all ends of the learning spectrum. These strategies are modelling, vicarious learning, and self regulation and can all be implemented into classroom applications at school as they help explain how learning happens.

Attention, retention, reproduction and motivation are some of the essential processes that are involved in learning, and also in the social cognitive theory. The social cognitive theory explains learning by “ focusing on behaviour resulting from observing others” (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010, p. 179). This theory stems from behaviourism, which agrees with the social cognitive theory in three main ways, firstly both theories maintain that experience, the ideas of reinforcement or punishment, and feedback are essential to learning. However, the core elements of the social cognitive theory differs to behaviourism also in three ways, social cognitive theorists define learning as “ a change in mental processes that creates the capacity to demonstrate different behaviours” (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010, p. 180) which can be demonstrated in the teaching strategy of modelling, compared to behaviourists who define learning as a change in observable behaviour.

Secondly, in the social cognitive theory beliefs, self perceptions and expectations are important. This is evident in the vicarious learning strategy

which is strongly linked to expectations of the learner. Thirdly, social cognitive theorists believe that the environment, personal factors and behaviour rely on and affect one another. This is also called “ reciprocal causation.” This is closely interconnected with self regulation, another essential learning tool. The main components of this theory are explained and discussed as teaching strategies which help learners to adapt their behaviour through seeing and interacting with others, therefore promoting a positive classroom environment for all students with and without an exceptionality.

The three teaching strategies that are based on the social cognitive theory can be implemented in a school setting in a number of different ways. Firstly, modelling is one of the central concepts of the social cognitive theory and can be a very effective way of teaching, especially in terms of different age groups, different cultures and learners at all ends of the learning spectrum. Modelling refers to observing then making “ behavioural, cognitive, or affective changes as a result” (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010, p. 181). Modelling can be taught in three main forms, direct modelling, where the learner simply tries to copy the teachers behaviour. This is especially effective for children with a learning or intellectual disability, as it promotes and encourages learning (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2007) and also can be particularly effective for children in the

pre-operational stage as it not only can work well as an effective form of instructional scaffolding, but direct modelling can also be effective when demonstrated through models, simulations, and demonstrations. The hands on approach can be highly effective in encouraging higher order thinking in <https://assignbuster.com/learners-with-exceptionalities-make-up-an-important-education-essay/>

children with a learning disability. (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2007) Modelling in general is also important to the learning of students with an exceptionality because it encourages social interaction and development, with the result being cognitive development through accommodation and assimilation (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010). Cognitive Modelling encourages social interactions between learners for both the students with exceptionalities and other students, and as the research and views of both Piaget and Vytkey suggest, social integration is essential for learning development. (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010, p. 181). This can be demonstrated in the classroom environment by a teacher's verbal or written explanation of the cognitive and thought processes used while solving a problem or applying knowledge to aim for a result. This is also effective because it gives learners an insight into the intrinsic processes of their cognitive development, encouraging them to be self aware. The effects of modelling are large, as learners can acquire new behaviours, use existing behaviours in a new and different way, and their perception of their inhibitions and emotional reactions can also change (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010). In a nutshell, modelling encourages learning through its positive effects on attention, retention, reproduction and motivation.

Vicarious learning is also an important core concept of the social cognitive theory as it affects students' expectations. Expectations are especially important for students with exceptionalities as a safe, supportive and routine environment are all essential factors in contributing to the learning and developmental achievement of these individuals within the school environment. (Buckley, Bird, Sacks & Archer. 2006). Vicarious learning is an

essential teaching strategy as people tend to imitate behaviour they see in others, so learners with an exceptionality can relate and learn effectively in this environment. This strategy can be implemented in the school or classroom environment by planning, implementing and monitoring rules and procedures in a variety of ways. Visual and written aids, such as charts, wall planners and visual cues can encourage positive and constructive learning behaviour and attitudes, as well as organizing groups within the class and using modelling or hands on activities. This has also been shown to lessen the frequency of behaviour problems occurring in some students with a learning disability (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2007).

Vicarious learning is also a link to another teaching strategy of self regulation, which affects the learner's motivation, ability to set goals and take responsibility for their own understanding and learning. By affecting learners' expectations of their own ability this can have an effect on their behaviour and their environment. Self regulation requires consistency in teaching, in order for the students themselves to become consistent in self awareness and self monitoring ability. Consistency is also important in the student's efforts to monitor their own progress and in their determination to succeed at their desired goals, making them accountable for their own learning. Reflective practice is also necessary for teachers with any strategy in the learning environment. This can be implemented in a variety of ways, such as conducting action research of the classroom environment in order to answer a specific question regarding learners with and/or without an exceptionality. Other ways teachers can use reflective practice is by using a diary or journal, creating aims and goals, testing those aims and goals,

monitoring the progress of the students and then reviewing those aims and goals. This is inclusive of teaching self regulation, as it requires the teacher to constantly adapt and develop as the learner does.

Understanding the issues for teaching professionals of learners with an exceptionality and their community is vastly important for all stakeholders involved. Openness, communication, knowledge and pedagogical knowledge amongst individuals is especially relevant in regards with decisions and plans relative to the learner, such as the I. E. P. These aspects are important and contributing factors to a learner's development. In other words, instructional leadership, and collaboration together are important within a school to ensure the learners' needs are met. Furthermore it is also important to note that although inclusive education in New Zealand can be effective with social and diverse benefits; many parents and families are choosing special education due to extensive resources that some inclusive education schooling environments may not have. Implementing the strategies discussed in inclusive education is costly. Adapting teaching strategies and the curriculum requires resources, and funding is an issue as there is a high demand from all different sectors such as inclusive versus special schools wanting a " piece of the cake". (Eades, Leech & Tuenter 2010). This is still being addressed for a number of reasons but could possibly be due to a general awareness of the " limitations" for learners with an exceptionality, and the effects and impact at large on the greater proportion of all other students in inclusive education.

In conclusion, both the teacher and students can benefit from the number of teaching strategies demonstrated by the social cognitive theory. However <https://assignbuster.com/learners-with-exceptionalities-make-up-an-important-education-essay/>

the present impact on the learner in New Zealand is limited by financial constraints to implement these, and other learning strategies for students with an exceptionality. With a focus on results over reasons, perhaps the future of these learners will see the equal and effective teaching resources of their peers, through a focus on the empathy and understanding of their unique but equally important needs.