

Good description and conceptualizing of issues surrounding intellectual disability...

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Intellectual Disability/Mental Retardation

Intellectual disability is a generalized disorder that often appears before the onset of adulthood. This disorder is characterized impaired cognitive functioning as well as deficits that occur in either one or two adaptive behaviors. The condition was previously known as mental retardation, although the term was deemed disparaging and politically incorrect, hence the change into the more sensitive name. People with intellectual disability lack the skills that are necessary for daily life activities. However, these people can learn, and do actually learn new skills, although this is achieved at a slower rate compared to people without the disability. This is conceptualized in the two main areas where they face limitations (Harris, 2005).

Firstly, due to their inhibited intellectual functioning, people with disabilities are limited in their problem resolution skills, reasoning, learning and decision making. Secondly, they are limited in their interaction with other people, caring for themselves, and the ability to communicate effectively because of their impeded adaptive behaviors. The most common signs that are used in the identification of the disorder may appear during the infancy stage or later when the child goes to school. This is dependent on the severity. They include impaired ability to connect one's actions with the consequences, inhibited logical thinking and problems skills, delayed milestones like rolling over, crawling, sitting and walking late, behavioral problems and poor memory.

The causes of this disorder range from iodine deficiency, problems at birth, problems during pregnancy like alcoholism and rubella infection. Delayed or

inadequate medical care for diseases like meningitis and whooping cough can also affect a child's mental ability. The presence of the above named symptoms is not a clear indication of the disorder. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders lists three criteria that must be sufficiently satisfied in order to diagnose intellectual disability (Harris, 2005).

The first criteria is an Intelligent Quotient that averages below 70. The Intelligent Quotient of an average person is 100. An average of between 70 and 75 shows significant mental retardation. The other criteria is the presence of momentous limitations in either one or two areas of adaptive behavior. This criterion is measured after an assessment by a professional is carried out on the child. This determination is made against parameters like interpersonal skills, communication and self-help skills among others. The third criterion that needs to be met is indication that the limitations established become apparent before the child becomes eighteen years.

Effective Classroom Strategies, Services and Resources

As explained above, intellectual disability inhibits the ability of a child to learn meaningfully. Nonetheless, even with the handicap, students with mental disabilities still need to be taught because as explained, they can learn though at a slower rate. In this regard, teachers should adapt their instructional methods and educational resources in order to meet the special needs of children with disabilities. The following instructional strategies are recommended in order to enhance learning: -

- Rather than giving verbal directions, the teacher should demonstrate what

he means. This enables the students to relate the new information with a picture or other materials that used in the illustration. It is recommended to use things that the students like because if the inhibited memory (Bradford, Shippen, Alberto, Houchins & Flores, s2006).

- When introducing new tasks, it is recommended for the teacher to do it in small steps. As espoused above, it is important to illustrate these steps with tangible or visible material. This will allow the student the opportunity to understand the demonstrations. Additionally, the steps should be demonstrated one a time, and the student allowed to repeat the steps as instructed. This helps to reinforce the concepts in the child's mind.

The resources needed in teaching children with disabilities are also as different as the instructional methods. The instructional methods call for the use of visual aid in order to enhance understanding and learning. As such, these are some of the materials that are required in the classrooms.

Additionally, it is important to have clubs and workshops where the students can learn vocational skills that they can use to earn a livelihood when they come of age. This is recognition of the fact that the mainstream labor market is skewed against their needs (Foreman, 2009).

John Hughes is a sixteen year old boy diagnosed with Down syndrome earlier in in life. In as much as I would have waned to talk to the boy to get his experiences, this was impeded by his shyness. This disorder is characterized by mild to moderate intellectual disabilities manifested in the signs and symptoms discussed earlier. As such, I employed my observational skills as well as placed questions to the boy's mother. Instead of mainstreaming with other students, Hughes attended a special school for children with mental

disabilities. According to the mother, the child showed remarkable improvement in both his motor coordination and mental capabilities. This was evident through the activities that Hughes undertook while at school and at home. Some of the projects that Hughes had completed included the use of electric hand tools to assemble bookcases and coffee tables of simple designs. The report cards from his instructors indicated improved vocational skills, although he was lagging behind in his social skills. Nonetheless, the mother was impressed with the improvement since he joined the school.

Interactive Activity Summary for a Mainstream Grade Two Class

According to the New York Education's Curriculum, learning in the second grade is made up of skills strand, learning and listening strand and accountable independent reading and guided reading. With this in mind, the summary of interactive activities for a mainstream class include spelling, word association, vocabulary work, handwriting. These activities are necessary to build the skills strand and the learning and listening strand. The word association is important for all students because it allows the students to associate words with the physical forms in order to enhance learning. Such an activity is both interactive for students with mental disabilities and also informative. For the accountable independent reading and guided reading, the students will be grouped according to their abilities in order to identify and nurture capable readers and also identify those that need additional effort and attention (Foreman, 2009).

Statistics on Students with Mental Disabilities

According to the Census Bureau in 2010, the American Community Survey carried out then indicated that four percent of the school age children enrolled in metro areas experienced cognitive difficulties while five percent of school going children outside the metro areas suffered from the same disability. Additionally, one percent of school going children enrolled in and out of the metro areas suffered self care difficulties. In the same survey, it was found that the enrollment rate in public schools for children living in metro areas with self care difficulties was 86. 2% while that of students with cognitive difficulties was 89. 7% (Census Bureau, 2010).

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National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities