

Classroom activities to facilitate inclusion of children with disabilities

Learning Process

Learning is change of behaviour and a positive change in the behaviour occurs when the learning environment is non-threatening. In such a conducive learning environment, learning becomes effective and the teacher and the taught mutually facilitate learning experiences. An effective teacher never assumes the role of just a giver of information and he will not treat the taught as the recipient of knowledge. Therefore, an effective learning environment reinforces good practices of the classroom. In an effective classroom, the teacher would address the needs of all children irrespective of their abilities or disabilities.

Normally, young children do not have the tendency to discriminate. They may be curious to know about disability conditions but do not have the tendency to isolate children on the basis of caste, religion, disability etc. As the child grows, prejudices also grow and as a result, discrimination takes place. In order to

reduce the discriminatory approaches, positive orientation can be given to non-disabled children. As children have a tendency to extend over-help to children with disabilities, they have to be informed to be natural and should not overdo when they help children with disabilities. This type of orientation is necessary when the child with disability is integrated in the general classrooms.

Cooperative learning approach addresses these issues and when it is followed, it produces better results. Cooperative learning approach adopts three fundamental hypotheses. They are:

- i) *Every child is a special child*
- ii) *A child with disability is MORE LIKE than UNLIKE.*
- iii) *A teacher becomes a facilitator of learning.*

When these principles are practiced in letter and spirit, the inclusion of children with disabilities would become natural.

In applying cooperative learning approach, a teacher may like to involve student participation in the learning process. Soon after teaching a lesson, the students may be asked to work in small groups on specific themes. The group formation may be based on the alphabetical order, height of the students, etc., and the teacher should ensure that there is a disabled child in each small group. On any account, the teacher should not leave group formation to the discretion of the students. The thematic discussion should be monitored by the teacher. Once the thematic discussion is over, the teacher should facilitate inter-group discussion by bringing one student from each group together to form a new group. In the inter-group discussion, each student including the disabled student will be assuming the role of a teacher when his turn comes and explains to other students, what was discussed in the thematic groups etc. This activity improves the communication skills of the learners and every student in the class is expected to speak. As all students in the class should take part in the learning activity, all of them should receive equal attention of the teacher. After a thorough inter-group discussion, the teacher should bring the class back and put questions to examine the understanding of the students. Based on the understanding level, the teacher can recapitulate the learning points and provide further assignments for enrichment. As evident from the description, cooperative

learning is not only a technique to facilitate effective inclusion of children with disabilities, but is an effective teaching methodology too to help all children.

Therefore, Cooperative learning is a carefully organised peer-to-peer learning activity in which the characteristics of group dynamics are thoroughly dealt with. This carefully planned learning activity through peer-group interaction is likely to enhance the learning experiences of disabled and non-disabled students.

Simulation exercises about disabilities

Simulation exercises about disability may be fun but they have profound educational values. In order to simulate disability conditions, non-disabled children in the general classrooms may be blindfolded for some time, their ears plugged for some time, and they can also be asked to walk using one leg, write without the help of thumb, etc., to experience disability conditions of different nature. Often, non-disabled children find simulating exercises as fun and therefore like to have them. At the same time, they can also understand how children with disabilities live and learn. This type of simulating exercises would improve the concern of non-disabled children towards their disabled classmates. These activities also facilitate better inclusion of disabled children in the classroom. Teachers can also experience these simulating activities to understand various conditions of disabilities.

Learning Plus Curricular Activities by non-disabled children

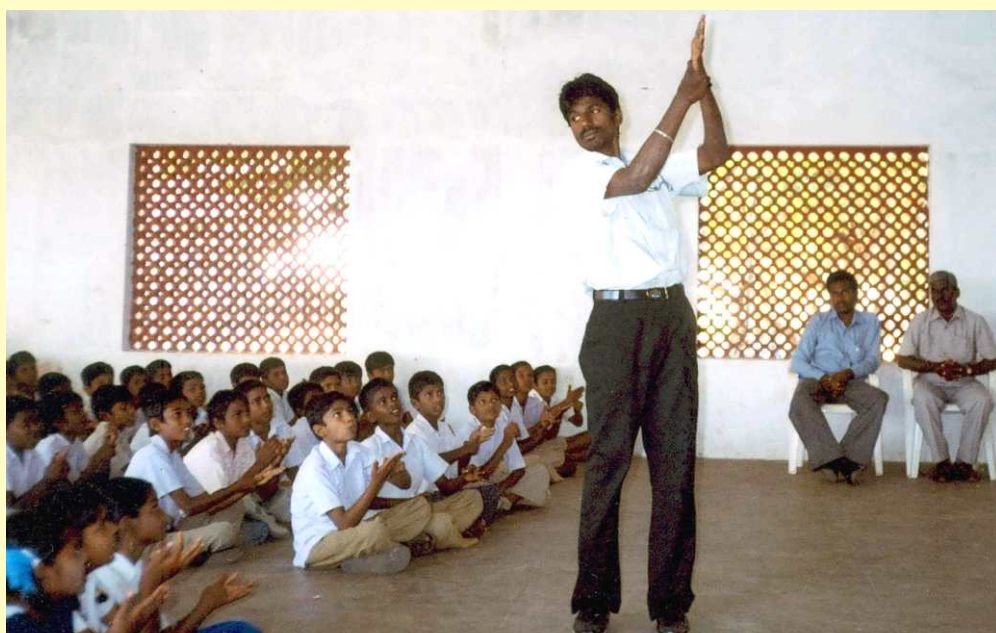
Plus curricular activities are those which are peculiar to specific disability conditions and they are expected to be mastered by children with disabilities for their effective inclusion. However, orientation of these to non-disabled children would facilitate better inclusion for children with disabilities. For example, the braille dots can be taught to sighted children. Similarly, a few basic signs used by deaf children can be taught to hearing children so that they can communicate with deaf children. Disabled children appreciate non-disabled children studying these skills as they bring them closer to the mainstream.

Reader and Scribe services

Due to disability conditions, some of them need assistance during examination time. For example, a blind child may not be able to read volumes of braille books at the time of examination. Moreover, many text books are also not available in braille and therefore, a

blind child needs a reader. A child with cerebral palsy and a child with mild mental retardation may also be benefited by reader services. At the examination time, a blind child and a child with cerebral palsy may require a scribe to write their answers. In inclusive setting many such examinations, class tests, term-end examinations, etc., are conducted and therefore, a number of non-disabled children from the same class, or from higher classes may be involved to assist children with disabilities. Similarly, non-disabled children who have picked up some signs may be used to interpret the language of deaf children to others.

The above activities provide ample opportunities for disabled children and non-disabled children to interact effectively in the learning process. The activities listed in this section are not exhaustive. Other activities such as drama, skit, role play, etc., involving disabled and non-disabled persons may also provide opportunities for effective inclusion of disabled children in the mainstream society.



UDIS Report Card for August 2008

- ☛ The UDIS Forum facilitated employment for 12 persons with disabilities during the month of August 2008.
- ☛ The representatives of UDIS Forum attended 6 panchayat level camps for persons with disabilities organised by the District Disability Rehabilitation Office, Coimbatore during the month of August 2008 to enroll adult persons with disabilities looking for employment and to create awareness on government concessions and facilities available for persons with disabilities.
- ☛ The officials of the UDIS Forum oriented 1 year MSW students of Dr. GRD College of Science and Sri Krishna Arts and Science College on the programmes of UDIS network during their field visit on 7 & 27 August 2008 respectively and they were motivated to involve themselves in disability services and rehabilitation.
- ☛ The representatives of UDIS Forum participated in the Private Employers Campaign conducted by the District Employment Exchange, Coimbatore on 8 August 2008 to collect details of companies and the occasion was utilized to persuade some of the employers and HR personnel to provide employment for persons with disabilities.
- ☛ Advisory Committee meeting of YWDIS was held at Dr. GRD College of Science on 14 August 2008. Representatives from four colleges and officials of UDIS Forum attended the meeting and discussed about the activities of YWDIS.
- ☛ Officials of the UDIS Forum visited Sri Narayana Guru College and Amrita University on 22 August 2008 and discussed with the respective Social Work departments heads on the possibility of involving their MSW students in YWDIS activities. The response was good and both the institutions agreed to involve their students in YWDIS activities.
- ☛ Office bearers of YWDIS visited Nehru College of Arts and Science on 30 August 2008 and discussed with the Social Work department head to involve their MSW students in YWDIS activities.
- ☛ Sri S. Subramania Siva, Vice-President (Administration) of UDIS Forum was elected as the Treasurer of Coimbatore Association of NGOs and Welfare Institutions for persons with disabilities (CANWIN) in the meeting held at KRISH on 30 August 2008.

For more details on the activities of the UDIS Forum, log onto www.davo.in
We value your suggestions.

Do you want to write in the Enabling Voice?
Send your brief write-ups on issues relating to disability to udis@vsnl.net

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