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LEARNING DISABILITIES: A CHALLENGE TO EDUCATORS

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Abstract:- Education is fundamental right under the constitution of India. The programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan launched by the government has the goal of educating each and every child without any kind of discrimination. Therefore, children with special needs also have right to education irrespective of their type of disability, its degree, category etc. There are many types of disabilities such as mental retardation, hearing impairment, visual impairment, orthopedically impairment and learning disability etc. learning disability is a hidden disability that affects almost every aspect of life but badly affected area is performance of such children in schools. In comparison of other major handicapping or disabling conditions, learning disabilities are the most vague and mystifying. Teachers often neither notice learning disabilities with these children are not able to trace the causes of these disabilities. Due to lack of knowledge about learning disabilities, teacher feels troubled to teach such type of children. An effort has been made in this article to conceptualize the term Learning Disabilities and to understand the various needs of such children.

Keywords: Learning Disability, Identification and Assessment, Teaching Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Let us consider a typical class-room situation. In a class where there are children with learning disabilities, a teacher comes to the class, teaches the topic for the day, gives some home work to be done and leave the class after over the topic is over. Next day, the teacher asks for the home work done by the students, some students do not submit their workbooks. Teacher scolds them for not doing the work. The basic reason for not doing the work is that these students are not able to understand the lesson taught the teacher, as these children suffering from learning disabilities. In this situation it is essential that we should know- What is learning disability? How will identify and asses the learning disability? After completing the above process, How to teach learning disabled children? Let us now we discuss one by one.

Learning Disability: Learning Disability shows discrepancy between Intelligence and achievement. The phrase "Learning Disability" was coined in 1963 by Samuel Kirk while addressing a group of parents at the conference on exploration into the problems of the perceptually handicapped children. He used the phrase Learning Disability to refer to children who were hyperactive and who had reading difficulty or disorders of language. It was the beginning of the Learning Disability movement which was to bring about considerable social, educational, economic and legislative changes.

Learning Disability refers Learning problems which manifest in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write or to do mathematical calculations which are not primarily due to visual impairment, hearing impairment, mental retardation, environmental or economical disadvantages, but due to a disorder in the psychological process involved in understanding or in using language.

Learning Disability is a disorder that affects people's ability to either interpret what they see and hear or to link information from different parts of the brain. These limitations can show up in many ways: as specific difficulties with spoken and written language, coordination, self control or attention. Such difficulties extend to school work and can impede learning to write, read or do math.

Usually learning problems may occur due to any one or a combination of the following factors-

- Low level of intelligence
- Mental retardation
- Visual impairment
- Motor handicapped
- Economic difficulties
- Cultural disadvantage
- Poor instruction, etc

Learning problems caused by the above mentions factors are not considered to be learning disability and if there is evidence that the learning problems under consideration are primarily a result of poor teaching, lack of opportunities to learn, deprived environments, lack of poor teaching and learning methods or cultural differences, the problems should not be called learning disabilities.

The phrase learning disability refers to conditions which were previously called brain injury:

- ❖ Minimal brain dysfunction
- ❖ Sensory aphasia (the loss of the power to understand spoken words, sign, gestures or print)
- ❖ Expressive aphasia (the loss of the ability to speak)
- ❖ Alexia or word blindness (the loss of the ability to read)
- ❖ Dyslexia (a mild degree of alexia)
- ❖ Acalculia (the loss of arithmetical ability)
- ❖ Dyscalculia (the lower level of arithmetical ability)
- ❖ Agraphia (the inability to learn to write)
- ❖ Dysgraphia (a mild degree of agraphia)

Identification and Assessment of Learning Disability: Tests commonly used for identification purposes includes intelligence tests, achievement tests and diagnostic tests. The classroom teacher can identify such children by observing their behavioral characteristics consistently over a period of time. Observations by the team of teachers are useful in identifying such children.

The learning disabled children are usually identified by the following methods and techniques-

- ❖ Interview with children and their parents
- ❖ Observing by teachers
- ❖ Informal testing by teachers
- ❖ Formal testing by the assessment team

NCERT, New Delhi recommended checklist for identification of learning disabled children:

- ❖ Has difficulty in telling the time, renumbering the order of days, months and seasons and mathematical tables.
- ❖ Finds it difficult to organize his work and is often late in submitting his class work.
- ❖ Seems dull and slow in responding to others.
- ❖ Can't correctly recall oral instruction when asked to repeat them.
- ❖ Does not seem to or understand instructions given at home or in the classroom (ask for repetition)
- ❖ Show excessive inconsistency in the quality of performance from time to time seems to be bright in many ways but still does poorly in school.
- ❖ Gets easily distracted even by sight disturbance.
- ❖ Confuses between left and right.
- ❖ Get so excited that he cannot sit still in the classroom even a short period.
- ❖ While reading, misses out lines or them twice
- ❖ Has difficulty in synthesizing a word after spelling its components letters.
- ❖ Makes wild guesses at words whether they make sense or not (for example 'huge' for 'hurt', 'turned' for 'trainer')
- ❖ Reads words backwards (for example 'on' for 'no', 'saw' for 'was')
- ❖ Puts letters in the wrong order (reading 'felt' as 'left', 'act' as 'cat')
- ❖ Shortens words ('sunly' for 'suddenly', 'member' for 'remember')
- ❖ Misreads words which looks similar ('help' for 'held', 'house' for 'horse')
- ❖ Has difficulty in recollecting words automatically.
- ❖ Misreads number ('6' as '9', '3' as '8'); writes letters in the wrong order ('time' for 'item')
- ❖ Mirror writes ('ram' for 'mar')
- ❖ Reverses letter ('b' for 'd', 'p' for 'q')

- ❖ Omits letters ('limp' as 'lip', 'went' as 'wet')
- ❖ Adds letters ('want' as 'what', 'what' as 'whart')
- ❖ Does not write the appropriate letters when given the sound.
- ❖ Does not pick out letter of the alphabet when the name of the letter is called out.
- ❖ Does not match the letters when asked.
- ❖ Difficulty in academic subjects. Sometimes the student is deficient in only one subject or a combination of subjects.

After identifying learning disabled children by using the checklist mentioned above, the teacher should see that experts assess such children properly. As far as possible testing of a learning disabled child must be done on an individual basis and not in groups because the characteristics of each child are unique. Assessment defines the degree of disabilities and not is an end in itself; it is an aid to learning.

Strategies to teach learning disabled child: Once an assessment has been done and conclusion drawn, the student should participate in a well organized remedial programme. Now we describe some teaching strategies that can help to teach learning disabled children:

- ❖ Use of multi-senses: Learning disabled children learn better when they are taught in a manner where multi-senses are used. An example of multi-sensory teaching is where child is taught to see a word like 'Apple'. It should be said by name and sound, and write it as well as show the real apple or picture of the apple.
- ❖ Structured in small steps: Lessons need to be highly structured. Structure should be based on small steps, with a proper sequence.
- ❖ Gradual learning: Skills are developed gradually. One skill is taught at a time. New things are taught only when the child has perfection on the old one.
- ❖ Practice: Learning disabled children need regular revision.
- ❖ Learning with activity: Learning material should have clear objectives. A number of varying activities should be introduced to teach the subject.
- ❖ Learning and utility: Children need to understand the relevance and purpose of their lessons. They should be able to identify with the learning material. Learning should be related with their daily life.
- ❖ Teaching with phonics: Phonics is an educational technique that is often used to help teach, or improve, reading in children with dyslexia. In phonics, the emphasis is on sounds that the letters represents.
- ❖ Self-reading: Children should be encouraged to go for self reading. This independent reading provides confidence. They should read the books and material they like.
- ❖ Use of computers: Use of computers helps the learning disabled children. Word processing programmes are helpful as they have a spell-checker and an auto correct facility that can help highlight any mistakes in writing.
- ❖ Use of colours: In 1980, it was discovered that children with dyslexia could focus better on a page if a colour overlay was placed over it. Transparent colour overlays are available if the child complains that words seem fuzzy or dance about, when they try to read. Different children respond to different colours, so it is worth experimenting with a number of overlays in order to find the one that achieves the best result.
- ❖ Mastery model: This model developed in India by NCERT in 1983. In this model, the teacher has to ensure that students have mastery of all the concepts taught in the class. The model is a teaching process which involves presentation (cues), feedback (mastery testing), and correction (follow alternative approach) till the students learn and attain desired level of mastery.
- ❖ Direct instructions: Direct instructions to the learning disabled have to be structured with scripted lesson plan. It should emphasize small learning at a time. Teacher should have frequent and continuous interaction with the child and correct mistakes immediately made by him.

CONCLUSION:

Researchers in the field of special needs children have provided powerful observations by studying academic problems of learning disabled children who lag behind their normally achieving peers. The academic achievement of learning disabled children is also influenced by the attitude of their parents and school teachers. The multifaceted problem of understanding, comprehension, grasping the concept etc. pulls them back in academics and they are often wrongly labeled by their teachers and family. They will benefit from assistance and support in the form of positive reinforcement and words of praise from teachers, parents and their peers.

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