Inclusive Classroom: Helping Children with Learning Disabilities

Sukanya Chakraborty

A student is daydreaming in the class, not responding; unable to complete the work, and above all, being uncooperative. How often have we faced such situations?

No two children are alike— how often have we realized this? The variety of comments we write in the report card sometimes surprises us. As teachers, we come across many such circumstances and challenges.

There are instances when these students lag behind in studies, academic achievements are very low, and to complicate it further, there is no motivation from teachers. Most children develop behaviour problems at some point of their academic career. Behaviour problems arise from conditions within the child or from external effects of certain things often not noticed or understood by others. Behavioural problems range from extreme withdrawal to intense hostile aggression. In a classroom, students with problems try to cope up in their own ways, which at times, becomes troublesome for others.

These students also find classroom learning a difficult and painful process. The presence of their learning disability can make learning to read, write and do math very challenging for them. Learning disabilities are lifelong conditions that may require special understanding and support throughout school and beyond. They also lead to social disabilities that have important effects outside the classroom, interfering not only with academics but also with daily activities and forging bonds of friendship or other relations. Therefore, help for these children means much more than regular classroom teaching.

The need to help these students

The above mentioned problems could be an expression of maladjustment in the areas of physical, emotional, social, moral, intellectual development and as teachers, we need to understand these problems, and depending upon the intensity of a particular problem, provide necessary help.

Changes in the delivery of instruction in schools is required to facilitate a full time mainstreaming program for students who have learning disabilities that lead to poor scholastic performances and behavioural problems. It should be understood that having learning disabilities does not limit a person's ability to be expressive or creative.

Thus, one of the main challenges of education is to mainstream the students with learning disabilities and behavioural problems.

Objectives of inclusive classroom

- ❖ _Accommodate_- Reduce the impact that writing has on learning, without substantially changing the process or the product.
- ❖ _Modify_- Change the assignments or expectations to meet the students' individual needs for learning.
- ❖ _Remediate_- Provide instruction and opportunity for improving writing, reading and other learning skills.

Inclusive classrooms aim at bringing these students to the mainstream and then help find their potential.

Sample Lesson Plan to accommodate students with learning disabilities

Targeted disability: _Dyslexia_ and _Dysgraphia_
Task focus: Students will read the text on sources of history and develop a fact file.
Class: Sixth grade

1ˢᵗ step-

- ❖ Identify students who need accommodation.
- ❖ Use a small reflection sheet to understand how the student will need accommodation and modification.

*Accommodation: _The plan designed to maximize a child's engagement in the classroom and equalize or increase opportunities, access, or participation in experiences and routines without changing the expectations for learning._

S.No	Barriers to learning	Name of the student
1	Problems with letter and word recognition	
2	Problems with understanding words and ideas	
3	Problems with reading speed and fluency	
4	Problems with general vocabulary skills	
5	Problems with neatness and consistency in writing	
6	Problems with spelling consistency in writing	
7	Problems in organized writing and coherence	
8	Problems with accurately copying words and sentences	
9	Problems in reading aloud	

❖ Develop a checklist for the reading activity.

> ➢ Provide a recording of the required text/a reader to read the text aloud.
> ➢ Provide graphic organizers to note the required information.
> ➢ Present the required text in small sequential steps.
> ➢ Provide a key vocabulary list to enhance understanding of the required text.
> ➢ Provide colour code to match the information and the content.

❖ Develop a checklist for the writing activity.

> Provide
> ➢ a structured format for the presentation of the fact file.
> ➢ assistance in organising the facts.
> ➢ peer help if needed.
> ➢ a model fact file.
> ➢ a routine to complete the task.

Sequence the learning activity

Instructional method and material for reading activity

❖ List the sequence of the reading activity.

- ✓ Read the given text silently.

- ✓ Read slowly and make notes about the facts and sequence.

- ✓ Note each fact and sequence correctly.

- ✓ Highlight the important happenings.

❖ This step will include all the students.

❖ Special accommodation for reading and writing has to be implemented as stated here.

❖ Guide them to read the required text and note the points in the organizers.

❖ Instruct the students with disability to refer to the key vocabulary list to decipher the meaning.

> **Example of a vocabulary key**
>
> *Chronological*: present in sequential manner
> *Historians*: the persons who study history
> *Sources*: available information
> *Archaeologist*: a person who studies history by examining the remains of the past
> *Excavate*: unearth
> *Fossils*: remains of animals or plants
> *Monuments*: old buildings or ruins with historical importance
> *Inscriptions*: sayings written on monuments

Example of a structured sheet to note information				
Sources of history	**Information given**	**What are they**	**Examples found in India**	**Significance in history**

❖ List the sequence of the writing activity.

    ✓ Instruct them to keep the topic narrowly focused.

    ✓ State the purpose.

    ✓ Let them use the prewriting notes to make the fact file.

❖ Provide the structure format to students who experience difficulties in learning.

Example of a structured format

    ❖ Topic: _____

    ❖ Purpose of writing: _____

    ❖ Main points: _____

    ❖ Supportive evidence: _____

Revising:

❖ Ask them to re-read the work.

❖ Provide them the checklist to review.

    ❖ Re-read the work.

    ❖ Check the clarity.

    ❖ Look for errors in spelling and grammar.

    ❖ Write the final presentation.

3rd step-

Time demands and scheduling

❖ Note the fact that the students with learning difficulties might have problems in relating new information to their previously acquired knowledge.

❖ Break down the concept.

❖ Discover ways to understand abstract fact.

❖ Provide them with a schedule along with the time they should invest in each topic.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Expected time: provided by the teacher (for example)</td></tr>
</table>

Topic	Day	Work
Written sources	2 days	❖ State the different written sources ❖ Importance in history ❖ Example from Indian history

Example of time schedule for a student to keep record of his/her activity		
No of days taken	Work completed based on the routine given	Work to be continued the next day

4th step-

Evaluation:

- ❖ Record the progress of each child.
- ❖ Use a variety of evaluation techniques like:-

    - ✓ Monitoring their work
    - ✓ Asking review questions
    - ✓ Facilitating discussion
    - ✓ Assessing their final presentation

5th step-

Reflection:

- ❖ After the activity, reflect on how the accommodations were beneficial to the students.
- ❖ Fill in the small sheet to reflect the effectiveness of the lesson plan.

Reflection sheet for the teachers:

- ▪ Did the accommodation techniques work well in the classroom?
- ▪ Did the lesson plan need some more accommodation to include all the students?
- ▪ Did it fulfil the needs of the target group?
- ▪ Did I need some more practice to improve the implementation of the lesson?
- ▪ Did it fulfil the learning objective of the lesson?

Reflection sheet for the student:

- What did I learn about the sources of history?

- What I would like to know about the sources of history?

- What did I find difficult to understand?

Accommodations involve a wide range of techniques to support the students with learning difficulties. This is one of the factors behind planning effective lesson plans to include all the students with different learning abilities.

Sukanya Chakraborty is a teacher trainer based in Kolkata. She has taught for 15 years in ESSAR International School, Surat.

Words Section

Dysnomia (noun)

Meaning

➢ A marked difficulty in remembering names or recalling words needed for oral or written language; a form of aphasia in which the patient is unable to recall the names of everyday objects. *(Oxforddictionaries.com)*

Origin and additional information ~ The term is derived from the Greek name *Dysnomia*, imagined by Hesiod among the daughters of *abhorred Eris* (*Strife*), who is the daemon of *lawlessness*, and shares her nature with *Atë* (*ruin*); she makes rare appearances among other personifications in poetical contexts that are marginal to Greek mythology but later became central to Greek philosophy.

Dysnomia is also known as *Anomic Aphasia* or the *tip of the tongue* syndrome. The phrase, *tip of the tongue* is borrowed from colloquial usage. This phenomenon was first described as a psychological phenomenon in the text, *Principles of Psychology* by *William James* (1890), although he did not label it as such. *Sigmund Freud* also discussed unconscious psychological factors, such as unconscious thoughts and impulses that might cause forgetting familiar words.

The first empirical research on the phenomenon of *Dysnomia* was undertaken by Harvard researchers, *Roger Brown* and *David McNeill* and published in 1966 in the *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*. Brown and McNeill wanted to determine whether the feeling of imminent retrieval experienced in the tip of the tongue state was based on actual retrieval ability or was just an illusion.

Dysnomia is a learning disability present from childhood which can affect speech, writing, and/or math. Word recall problems are classified as *Dysnomia* when they are severe enough to interfere with learning or with daily life. Doctors use neuropsychological and speech-language pathology tests to diagnose the condition. *Dysnomia* diagnosis is extremely difficult as the symptoms can also be caused due to severe injury or trauma to the brain.

In 2005, the term *Dysnomia* was chosen as the name for the newly discovered moon of the dwarf planet, Eris.

<u>Words Section</u>

Usage ~

i)   *In <u>dysnomia</u>, the inability to remember words becomes a hindrance in daily activities, making it hard for people to communicate and accomplish tasks.*

ii)   *For learning disorders, therapies are available to help children manage <u>dysnomia</u>.*