

## **Developing Social Skills in Children with Special Needs: Need of Equitable and Inclusive Education**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research paper is to explore the need of developing social skills in inclusive classroom. The social & culture values and attitudes regarding special populations are reflected in the ways in which these persons are treated within the social system. The development of special education serves as an example of how mores shape social programs. Prior to the 1800's individuals with special needs often fell victim to prejudice and neglect. Not until the 1800's did social values allow for persons with exceptional physical and mental needs (at both the high or low end of the spectrum of special needs) to have the right to an educating environment. It is within this time frame that the institutionalization movement came into effect. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was widely believed that these children would most benefit from living and learning with other exceptional children. Residential schools were so created to educate children in an environment where their peers also had special needs. After this, concept of equitable and inclusive education came which requires similarities in all aspects of education for children with special needs and their peers.

**Keywords: Social Skills, Children with Special Needs, Equitable, Inclusive Education.**

**Introduction:** Man is a social animal. The human infant shows a natural propensity towards pro-social behaviors beginning with spontaneous smiles, eye gaze and anticipatory motor responses to being picked up by caregivers or crying responses when left unattended. Latter, acquired social skills include responses to own name by turning head, gesticulating 'bye-bye', identifying members of the immediate family, indulging in co-operative activities and so on. The typical social response that can be expected of a child vary with the age/stage of social development.

**The Inclusion Model:** The main idea of inclusive education is that it makes each and every one so much capable to join the society with full confidence. Further, inclusive classrooms give a chance to students without disability to interact with their normal classmates who

are different somehow than these students with special needs. Students with special needs, have the chance to be an integral part of the school and get a “realistic” idea about the community. Thus, inclusion of persons with disabilities is a two directional process: one to make the special needs children to be part of the community and secondly to prepare the community to accept these special needs children.

The very beautiful part of inclusion model is about the community. Community refers to a group of people who have shared interests and who mutually pursue the common good. Usually community members share an acceptance of group standard and a sense of identification with the group. In relation to the scholastic context, the main objective of all participants is education and different types of learning. The main focus was on the equal participation in activities for each and every member of the community including the special needs people. Nancy Hutchinson, a Canadian author stressed on inclusive classrooms where all children are equal participants.

**Role of Teachers in Promoting Inclusion:** Teachers are crucial in determining what happens in classrooms and there are those who would argue that the development of more inclusive classrooms requires teachers to cater for different student learning needs through the modification or differentiation of the curriculum. For some, this approach has been interpreted as requiring individualization. Further, there are specialist teaching approaches for children with different kinds of disabilities and that specialist training is required.

Nevertheless teachers do have concerns about inclusion and many surveys have found that teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion are not particularly positive. It is due to their lack of preparation for inclusion and for teaching all learners. But in settings where teachers are encouraged to try out a range of teaching strategies, they report that they knew more than they thought they knew and, for the most part, children learn in similar ways.

Developing effective inclusive practice is about not only about extending teachers’ knowledge, but it is also about encouraging them to do things differently and getting them to reconsider their attitudes and beliefs. To conclude, it should be about ‘knowing’, ‘doing’, and ‘believing’.

**Social Skills-what are they?** Social skills are not the same thing as behavior. Rather, they are components of behavior that help an individual understand and adapt across a variety of social settings. Walker (1983) defines social skills as: (a) set of competencies that allow an individual to initiate and maintain positive social relationships. (b) contribute to peer

acceptance and to a satisfactory school adjustment, and (c) allow an individual to cope effectively with the larger social environment". Social skills can also be defined within the context of social and emotional learning-recognizing and managing our emotions, developing caring and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively and ethically. With this understanding, researchers and educators seek to evaluate and build students social skills within a variety of social contexts.

In school, the interaction may be with classmates, teachers and other school staff. In latter life the interaction may be with Co-workers, supervisors, friends and others that a person may meet. Children and adolescent with disabilities sometimes have behaviors that are awkward or unacceptable in social interactions. The lack of appropriate social behaviors may be characteristics of their disability. Students may lack a specific social behavior, apply an inappropriate social behavior to a particular situation, or not be aware that a particular situation calls for a specific behavior (Smith, 2001).

Important social behaviors include greeting other, sharing, asking for assistance when needed, initiating conversations, giving complements, following games and classroom rules, being able to talk about such things as current movies and television show, having sense of humor, helping classmates and knowing current slang words. Unacceptable social behavior includes not responding to peer social initiations, misinterpreting the approach behaviors of peers, and entering games of group activities uninvited.

Social skills are defined as interpersonal behaviors that help the individual in society. These skills are extremely important if one is to get along at school, at home, in the work place, and in social leisure contexts outside the family unit. It has been found with children, for example, that those identified as deficient in social skills are unpopular with their peers and are more likely to be unhappy, anxious, and maladjusted.

Social skills are discrete, observable, and teachable behaviors that initiate and sustain social interaction and that are decently associated to measures of social competence. For all children social skills include social initiations (behaviors that direct attention to another individual and that set the occasion for social interaction), social responses (behaviors that follow social initiation and that establish an interaction with initiator), and maintains response (behaviors that extend a social interaction beyond the initiation/response sequence). Social skills also include social problem solving skills (identification and resolution of interpersonal conflict), prosocial skills (sharing, giving

assistance, expressing affection), and other components of social discourse. Social skills including responses that are verbal, meteoric, or gestural; each is identified as ‘social’ to the extent that it establishes or maintains interaction with one or more partners.

**Why teach Social Skills?** Today’s elementary students deal with the same behavioral concerns students experienced decades ago-noncompliance, peer confrontations, failure to participate in academic or social activities, and so forth. Although these concerns continue, classrooms include increasingly violent and aggressive students, as well as students who in their profound social isolation lack a sense of belonging. It is not uncommon to hear teachers comment that students come to school with more problems than ever before and further ask, “How can we even begin to address these concerns?” School administrators often lament the amount of time they spend on student discipline, wondering where they will find the time for proactive leadership. Community members are involved as well, most frequently when violent incidents occur, and it is now somewhat common to read news reports about school violence.

How can teacher deals with these typical types of students concerns? Can teaching social skills change such scenarios? Research has demonstrated benefit for students across age and skill levels. For example, instruction in social skills has been shown to positively impact elementary-age children and adolescents. Benefit has also occurred for students with disabilities, including learning disabilities, and those with emotional and behavioral disorders. Additional evidence supports social skills instruction for individuals with lower incidence disabilities, such as traumatic brain injury, and Asperger’s syndrome. Social skills deficits have been the targets of considerable research scrutiny, and it is well accepted today that a child’s lack of social competence relates to later negative outcomes. For most students because of the length of time they spend in the school setting, the majority of socialization occurs in school. A positive relationship between social skills and school success has been repeatedly demonstrated, and students who are socially competent have a greater likelihood of graduating high school. Planned and direct instruction in social skills is of benefit to students themselves because it empowers them to get their needs met in desirable ways, helps them learn important social behaviors to deal effectively with increased social demands, and positively impact their learning. For peers and teachers, social skills instruction results in a more positive school climate and more time for teachers to spend on academic instruction instead of discipline, leading to a more rewarding learning and teaching experience.

Poor social skills are responsible for much of our unemployment and underemployment, whereas adequate social skills and high levels of emotional intelligence can lead to occupational advancement (Elksin & Elksin, 1998). Finally, violence in our schools communities as heightened educators' interest in social skills instruction.

Students with special needs can be as delayed in their social development as they are in other areas. Thus, poor social skills can be another factor in their rejection. Many students with special needs are not as capable as their general education peers of initiating and sustaining appropriate social relationship. It is found that students with learning disabilities were lacking in the language skill necessary for effective social communication. Students with disabilities may fail to develop appropriate social skills because they have fewer friends and are rated significantly lower in sociometric status than their peers, or it may be that they have difficulty using social cues; some misperceive their social standing and feel that they are better accepted by peers than they actually are.

Visual information plays an important role in the acquisition of social skills and the ability to interact appropriately with peers (Smith, 1998). This learning process begins infancy and continues to develop throughout childhood. Many visually disabled persons are rejected by sighted persons, as they might not have been taught what is expected in normal social interaction. Many visually disabled persons also exhibit various types of inappropriate behaviors (e.g., rocking, eye poking, hand flapping, head rotating, etc.) possibly because of their immature social behaviors (Smith, 1998). In addition, individuals with visual impairment have the tendency not to interact with other children naturally or spontaneously.

**Factors Affecting Social Skills Acquisition and Performance:** Elksins & Elksins (1998) assumed that the social skill deficits were the result of the student's lack of knowledge. Given this assumption, our responsibility as teacher is to teach the student the skill using the instructional sequence provided. However, there are other reasons which are given below due to which children fail to acquire and perform social skills;

- **Interfering behaviors-** Students in class may exhibit behaviors that interfere with learning and using social skills. At one end of the behavior continuum, student may suffer from such high levels of anxiety that they avoid social situations, denying themselves opportunities to become more socially skillful. At the other extreme, certain students who are impulsive and inattentive may be unable to

acquire and perform social skills. For these students, we need to address the interfering behaviors before teaching, or while teaching, social skills.

- **Lack of opportunity-** Some students fail to acquire or perform social skills because they have few occasions to use the skill. In this case, we must provide students with opportunities to use skills, including unstructured classroom activities such as cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and other group activities; as well as ensuring that our student have opportunities to informally interact throughout the day.
- **Lack of feedback-** We rely on feedback to maintain or change our behavior. In order for student with learning and behavior problems to become more socially proficient, we must provide with specific, informative feedback after a skill is performed. In addition, we need to encourage parents, teachers, peers, employers, co-workers to provide students with feedback when we are not present.
- **Lack of sensitivity to environmental cues-** Some of our students know how to perform social skills, but they are unable to identify appropriate times and places to use them. We can teach students to become more environmentally sensitive by eliminating behaviors that may interfere with attention, prompting the student to use the skill at an appropriate time, or teaching the student to generate situations, places, and times in which to use the skill.
- **Lack of reinforcement-** It is also major factor which affect social skills acquisition and performance. So students must be reinforced to continue to perform social skills. We can provide students with positive reinforcement following skill use by teaching.

**To facilitate social interaction for children with special needs in regular classes following three conditions are necessary:**

- The general attitude of teacher and the peer group needs to be made as positive and accepting as possible;
- The environment should be arranged so that the child with a disability has the maximum opportunity to spend time socially involved in a group or pair activity, during recess and during academic work in the classroom;
- The child needs to be taught the specific skills that may enhance social contact with peers.

**Conclusion:** Although some children with special needs are able to pick up positive skills through their everyday interactions with adults and peers, it is important that educators and parents reinforce learning of social skills with direct and indirect instructions. One must also recognize when and where children pick up the behaviors and they might be detrimental to their development or safety. In the past, schools have relied exclusively on families to teach children important interpersonal and conflict resolution skills. However, increased negative societal influences and demands on family life make it imperative that schools partner with parents to facilitate this social learning process.

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