

Effect of Disability Awareness Program on a Regular School in Ujjain India: An Action Research

Article by Pushp Lata Rajpoot¹, Pushpa Vaishnav², Yogita Sharma³ and Govind Chaparwal⁴

¹Assistant Professor, Faculty of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Jazan University
Saudi Arabia

²Assistant Professor in Clinical Psychology, Composite Regional Center, Ahmadabad, India

³Assistant Professor, Manovikas College of Special Education Ujjain, India

⁴Sport Instructor, Manovikas Special School Ujjain, India

Email: pushp.rehabpsychologist@gmail.com¹, pushpa.vaishnav@gmail.com²

Abstract

Background: Regardless of devastating trend of inclusive education, students with disabilities are not being accepted by the typical developing students as well as teachers. Somehow the rejection by their peers and teachers hinder in their social inclusion, achieving academic success, and becoming more independent.

Objective: The aim of the study was to see the effect of disability awareness education program on a regular school.

Methods: This study develops and implements a disability awareness program in 8th to 12th grade students and their teachers, through action research, determines whether the program was influential in shaping attitudes towards students with disabilities. The students were exposed to 21 disabilities and more focused on physical disabilities, and blindness, and accessibility. The program was designed and implemented in three steps beginning, middle and end, began with questionnaires on disability knowledge.

Result: As regard to attitude, the school environment became more inclusive, more welcoming environment for disabled students, and nurtured better friendships among all students. After getting knowledge about different disabilities, students without disabilities became more accepting and understanding of individual differences. The individual activities and discussions enabled students to think critically about how to deal with disabled individuals and the significance of inclusion to enhance their overall development.

Conclusion: Disability awareness programs are powerful to overall environment of a school. These programs foster acceptance, understanding and promote knowledge about different disabilities. Therefore, disability awareness programs must be incorporated into the regular school curriculum and received by the all individuals to create a more accepting and positive environment for disabled students which in turn will help them to achieve emotional wellbeing, social inclusion and academic success.

Keywords: Disability awareness program, Regular school, Inclusion, Typical developing students, Students with disabilities.

Introduction

Quality of life of children with disabilities became a major public health concern because of “stigmatization” and “discrimination” by their communities, and peers along with teachers in school. Stigma can be defined as an adverse reaction to the perception of a negatively evaluated difference (Susman, 1994), while discrimination occurs when stigma interferes with an individual’s ability to participate fully in the social life of her/his community (Green S, et.al, 2005). Evidence consistently shows that socially excluded children often experience negative physical, mental, and social consequences such as low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and risky behavior along with their academic needs (World Health Organization, 2001; McDougall J. et. al., 2004; Vreeman & Carroll 2007, Ginni & Pozzoli, 2009; Pittet, et.al., 2010). According to the United Nation Convention on Rights of the Child (1989), all children “should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which

ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community." In numerous developed countries, government policy advocates, "children with disabilities must receive inclusive education –"education in mainstream schools" (Emmanuelle, et.al, 2010) to improve the social inclusion and accepting climate with in the school environment by their peers (Panagitou, et.al, 2008). Consequently, the inclusion in schools became stronger than ever.

Inclusive education approach refers to teach to all students irrespective of their ability level in the same classroom by the same teacher through adjusting the curriculum and teaching methodologies (Gross, 2002). Inclusive environment promotes varied learning styles that support students to learn academic material as well as social skills essential for development of a range of strengths and needs (Belcher & Maich, 2011). Inclusion offers opportunities for better success both socially and academically for students with disabilities. Inclusive education play important role in changing peers and teachers attitudes in more optimistic way towards students with disabilities (Rillotta & Nettelbeck, 2007). Regular schools with this perspective are the most effective means of combating prejudice attitudes, building friendly communities and inclusive society, and education for all (Unisco, 1994).

Though evidence constantly shows that being placed in an integrated education setting does not assure that students with disabilities will be acknowledged, valued and included (Martinez & Carspecken, 2006; Rillotta & Nettelbeck, 2007; Lindsay & McPherson, 2012). The inclusion of disabled students is somehow be determined by their peers attitude that may be positive or negative depends on their perception built through the knowledge. Lack of knowledge about disability has been suggested a key determinant in developing adverse attitude and social exclusion which obstructs to individuals with disability to overcome and limit one's ability to achieve success and independency (Rillotta & Nettelbeck, 2007; Lindsay & McPherson, 2012).

Typically developing students' negative attitudes towards peers with disabilities have been extensively documented in varied school settings (Martines & Carspecken, 2006; Rillotta & Nettelbeck, 2007; Ison et. al 2010; Tavares, 2011), and recognized as a major barrier to social inclusion of disabled students in schools (McDougall J. et. al., 2004). Researches demonstrate that without education and sensitizing programs typical students have low empathy and acceptance of students with disabilities (Favazza, et.al. 2000). Disability awareness education programs have been found as potential tool to promote knowledge, understanding, and acceptance about different disabilities (Ison et. al 2010), which as a consequence leads to decline of adverse attitudes towards children with disabilities.

Disability awareness programs in schools may include wide variety of forms such as providing information about disabilities, classroom activities, simulation, literature programs, discussions, role playing, and real life stories but more successful when integrate hands-on activities representing what life with disabilities may be like (Mc Ginies, 2006). Awareness training programs are not always beneficial just for students, also important for teachers and administrative staff in developing their professional development, alter their negative perception, and built more positive and inclusive environment for all students. Therefore, the present research was intended to see the effect of disability awareness educational program in regular school that may help in combating the negative attitudes of peers and teachers towards students with disabilities, and creating a friendly and full inclusive environment.

Methods

Research design: action research

This study is action research intends to be more aware of the effects of educating students about disabilities in a regular school and how it would affect the overall school environment. It includes following process: 1) Selecting a focus, 2) Clarifying theories, 3) Identifying research questions, 4) Collecting data, 5) Analyzing data, 6) Reporting results, and 7) Taking informed action (Sagar, 2000).

Participants

The study included total 30 participants (20 students -10 males and 10 females students ranging in ages 12-18, 8 teachers and 2 administrative staff). The selection of participants was done through

convenient sampling from a regular school (Jay Amla Convent School) of Ujjain city, west-central part of India. According to inclusion criteria, students belonging to 8th to 12th grade, and teachers and administrative staff who were willing to participate in program were included. The school as a whole 650 students has enrolled in grade 8th through 12th. For delivering the disability awareness program, the participants were divided into 5 groups consisting 4 students, 2 teachers & administrative staff in each group. A team of disability professionals has led the disability awareness education program. None of the disability awareness program was offered in the school prior or during the time of study.

Procedure

The aim of present investigation was to study the effect of disability awareness educational program on a regular school. For creating awareness among students and school staff, researcher had developed a disability awareness educational program. Firstly, for conducting disability awareness educational program, permission was taken from the head of the school. After getting permission, data was collected from Jay Amla Convent School, Ujjain, India. This study was conducted in four steps: I) presenting a question paper to students and teachers to collect base line data; II) providing information about disability; III) Implementation of activities; and IV) again distribution of the same question paper to students and teachers for collecting the data.

Step I – Presenting a question paper to students and teachers to collect base line data

Giving Questionnaires were conducted at the beginning for assessing their disability knowledge, acceptance/ treatment of people with disabilities and sensitivity. Questionnaires were conducted before throughout 3 days educational period in the beginning to know the knowledge and attitude of all students regarding disability.

Step II – Providing information about disability

In this step 60 minutes lecture was delivered on different disabilities, types of disabilities or other important ideas surrounding disabilities like restrictive environment and accessibility.

Step III – Implementation of activities

In third step, following activities were executed with the teachers and students:

Activity 1st – During this activity, blind fold was tied on the eyes of students and teachers, sticks were given to each in their hands and some tasks like take drinking water, fill in the glass and drink, go in surrounding and come, use steps to go up and come down were assigned to do.

Activity 2nd – For conducting this activity, paper and pen were given to the students and teachers and instructed them to write their own name with the help of their dominant hand, and after that write with another hand and then hold the pen in a mouth and write the same thing after that hold the pen with leg and write the same.

Activity 3rd – In this activity a dance was presented by a child with disability to show his capability.

Step IV – Presenting the same question paper to students and teachers

Questionnaires were again distributed to the students and teachers for assessing their disability knowledge, acceptance/ treatment with people with disabilities and sensitivity.

Result and discussion

A number of themes were developed throughout my research. The students, the teachers and the administrative staff learned more about different disabilities and became more empathetic and accepting for disabled students. They were very enthusiastic to know about disabilities and were keenly involved throughout 3 days in each activity. At the preliminary stage, students, teachers and administrative staff had negative perception towards disabilities for instance, *“a disabled individual are inferior because they are not capable to function the same manner as a normal person”*. After attending the program, teachers understood the needs of a special child. *“The dance performed by a special child”* made them comprehend that *“every child is different and every child has different capabilities.”* Teachers also felt that diversity in school plays an important role in shaping the

attitudes towards disabled individuals and facilitate more accepting, understanding and friendly attitude.

Pertaining to typically develop students, they developed an empathetic attitude towards peers with disabilities and realized what and how much problems disabled people face in their life. Throughout each conversation, students were able not only to discuss about the difficulties or limitations of the different disabilities, but also were sensitized to think about the strengths that could be linked with each disability. During the tasks “*tying blind fold*” and “*writing with pen and paper*”, students developed a critical thinking and come up with the belief that “*disabled individuals can accomplish task better than normal individuals.*” At the end of the program, students formed ideas about diversity and realized that “*person with disabilities have different abilities, they needed support and acknowledgement, not sympathy.*” They developed positive feelings towards individuals with disabilities and accept that disabled children also can study with them in a one setting.

Administrative staff was also very much positive regarding this program. They provided guidance to the teachers, students and their parents. They also referred the disabled students for special needs and assured to the program team that in future they will take admission of special children in more positive way.

Conclusion

Achieving a better quality of life is the goal and right of each human being. But students with disabilities are differentiated and neglected by the teachers and their peers in school, and considered as less of a person to achieve equal education and a better quality of life. The findings of the study have shown that teaching about disabilities foster positive attitude among students. So, structured environment means providing awareness about disability promotes inclusion in the school. In conclusion, disability awareness educational programs in regular school may improve the knowledge about disabilities among teachers and students of regular schools, alter their negative attitudes towards students with disabilities, develop the feeling of warmth and acceptance towards disabled students, and can facilitate more inclusion in the regular schools to meet the educational need as well as improving the quality of life of students with disabilities.

This study was conducted with a small sample that limited the generalization. Future studies should be conducted with larger and more diverse grades. The present study was focused on physical disability and blindness/visual disability, other disabilities like autism and learning disabilities must be included. Conclusively, the study has shown improvement in positive attitudes, but length of the program in terms of session and time need to be extended for developing and facilitating deeper understanding of disabilities and needs of individuals of disabilities.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Father Tom George Director of Madhya Pradesh Viklang Sahayata Samiti and Sister Philcy Principal of Jay Amla Convent School, Ujjain India for their enormous support to conduct the disability awareness educational program.

References

- [1]. Belcher, E. C., & Maich, K. (2011). Using Picture Books to Create Peer Awareness about Autism Spectrum Disorders in the Inclusive Classroom. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 47, 206-213.
- [2]. Favazza P, Phillipsen L, & Kumar P (2000). Measuring and promoting acceptance of young children with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 4, 491–508.
- [3]. Gini G, Pozzoli T. (2009). Association between bullying and psychosomatic problems: a meta-analysis. *Pediatrics*, 123, 1059–1065.
- [4]. Gross, J. (2002). Special educational needs in the primary school: a practical guide. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- [5]. Ison, N., McIntyre, S., Rothery, S., Smithers-Sheedy, H., Goldsmith, S., Parsonage, S., et al. (2010). ‘Just Like You’: A Disability Awareness Programme For Children That Enhanced Knowledge, Attitudes and Acceptance: Pilot Study Findings. *Developmental Neurorehabilitation*, 13, 360-368.

- [6]. Lindsay, S., & McPherson, A.C. (2012). Experiences of social exclusion and bullying at school among children and youth with cerebral palsy. *Disabil Rehabil*, 34, 101–109.
- [7]. Martinez, R., & Carspecken, P. (2006). Effectiveness of a brief intervention on Latino children's social acceptance of peers with special needs. *J Appl Sch Psycho*, 23, 97–115.
- [8]. McDougall, J., DeWit, D., King, G., Miller, L., Killip, S. (2004). High school-aged youths' attitudes toward their peers with disabilities: the role of school and student interpersonal factors. *IntJ Disabil Dev Educ*, 51, 287–313.
- [9]. McDougall, J., King, G., deWit, D.J., Miller, L.T., Hong, S., Offord, D.R., LaPorta, J., Meyer, K. (2004). Chronic physical health conditions and disability among Canadian school-aged children: a national profile. *Disabil Rehabil*, 26, 35–45.
- [10]. McGinnis, J. (2006). Elementary School and University Collaboration for a Disability Awareness Workshop. *Delta Kappa Gamma*, 28-30.
- [11]. Panagitou, A., Evaggelinou, C., Doulkeridou, A., Mouratidou, K., Koidou, E. (2008). Attitudes of 5th and 6th grade Greek students toward the inclusion of children with disabilities in physical education classes after a Paralympic education program. *Eur J Adap Phys Activ*, 1, 31–43.
- [12]. Pittet, I., Berchtold, A., Akre, C., Michaud, P.A., & Suris, J.C. (2010). Are adolescents with chronic conditions particularly at risk for bullying? *Arch Dis Child*, 95, 711–716.
- [13]. Rillotta, F., & Nettlebeck, T. (2007). Effects of an awareness program on attitudes of students without an intellectual disability towards persons with an intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 32, 19-27.
- [14]. Sagor, R. (2000). *Guiding school improvement with action research*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- [15]. Sara, G., Christine, D., Elana, K., Pete, M., & Benjamin. (2005). Living Stigma: The Impact of Labeling, Stereotyping, Separation, Status Loss, and Discrimination in the Lives of Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families. *Sociological Inquiry*, 75(2), 197–215.
- [16]. Susman, J. (1994). Disability, Stigma and Deviance. *Social Science and Medicine*, 38, 15–22.
- [17]. Tavares, W. (2011). An evaluation of the Kids is Kids disability awareness program: increasing social inclusion among children with physical disabilities. *J Soc Work Disabil Rehabil*, 10, 25–35.
- [18]. United Nations. Convention on the rights of the child, in UN Document, A/Res/44/23. 1989.
- [19]. Vreeman, R.C., Carroll, A.E. (2007). A systematic review of school-based interventions to prevent bullying. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*, 161, 78–88.
- [20]. World Health Organization. (2001). *International Classification of Functioning, disability and Health*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.