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MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

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Most classrooms of today are inclusion classrooms which have a blend of students with special needs and general education students. The students with special needs in inclusive classrooms often present with mild to moderate learning and/or behavioural challenges. Children with autism spectrum disorder and other learning disabilities, such as ADHD, perform better, both academically and socially, if the classroom is set up to accommodate their special needs [2; 4, p. 928].

Managing an all-inclusive classroom is easier if simple, personalized teaching strategies for the special needs student are implemented.

The aim of the research is to generalize the management strategies which can be used by a teacher in an inclusive classroom.

Students with special and exceptional needs are placed in inclusive learning environments more frequently than in the past. For general educators with a limited special education background, this can often be anxiety provoking and stressful. Every teacher wants to provide the best instruction and education for her students [1].

Here are some strategies that have been successful for working with students and managing their activity in the inclusive classroom.

The strategies that have been presented by S. Polirstok [4, p. 928–932] provide an approach to classroom management that is relatively easy to implement.

They are:

Using Selective Ignoring. It provides teachers with an opportunity to focus on appropriate behaviours and to recognize students for their compliance. By choosing to adopt this perspective, teachers can limit the constant negative barrage often seen in classrooms where teachers are continuously naming students who are off-task and

noncompliant. Selective ignoring provides the teacher with an alternative strategy that can help to limit disapproval and focus on keeping the classroom emotionally safe and well regulated.

Creating a Reinforcing Classroom Environment. Creating a climate conducive to students complying with behavioural expectations, volunteering answers or taking on more challenging assignments is closely tied to the “emotional temperature” of the classroom. Students need to know that if they take a risk and respond to a challenging question or assignment, they will be “safe” from criticism. A classroom where the “emotional temperature” is warm and congenial is a classroom where students will be more willing to take on academic and/or behavioural challenges – more willing to venture a bit outside their comfort zone.

Focusing on Structure and Routine. Creating an emotionally safe classroom environment where students can be successful involves not only high approval interactions between students and teachers, but also requires an emphasis on structure and routine. There is safety for students, especially those with mild to moderate learning and behavioural challenges, in structure and routine.

Post classroom rules in a conspicuous place in the classroom, and review the regularly. Ask students to take turns reading the rules aloud as part of the daily routine. Make sure all students understand the rules of the classroom and the consequences for not adhering to them. It may be helpful to allow the class to help formulate the classroom rules.

Give verbal prompts frequently, and be sure your instructions are easy to understand. Repeat instructions if the student does not seem to comprehend what you are saying.

Use visual aids such as charts, graphs, and pictures.

Children with autism tend to prefer predictable routines. Give advance warning if the daily schedule is going to change. If there is going to be a field trip, a special guest in the classroom, or a substitute teacher, try to let the class know in advance. Unexpected changes in the routine can be difficult for the child with autism.

Provide opportunities to take a break. Read a story, play a short game, stand up and stretch, or have casual conversation. Sometimes an opportunity to get out of his seat and walk around the room can be very calming for the child. Try to be aware of the signs that your student may need a short break.

Be aware of environmental triggers. Loud noises, bright lights, and hot or cold temperatures can disrupt a child’s thinking pattern and cause an unnecessary classroom outburst. Be mindful of these environmental triggers and eliminate them whenever possible [2].

De-Escalating Behavioural Crises. When teachers are confronted by students who are verbally abusive and/or threatening, teachers need to be aware of their own responses to this behaviour. When a teacher responds to a student’s abusive behavior on a personal level and not on a professional level, the likelihood that the teacher might say or do something that would be less than professional is increased. It’s important for teachers to maintain professional control and not respond on a personal level. When the controls are absent, teachers often respond to student verbal abuse and/or

threatening behaviour with hostility, thereby increasing the volume of the exchange and contributing to the “dance of anger” described earlier. If this exchange continues to be more and more hostile, then it may set the stage for the student to become physically aggressive. To avoid the chance that a student could become aggressive and to avoid the chance that a teacher could say or do something that is less than professional, there are actions teachers can employ that can help to prevent the crisis.

Increasing Student Locus of Control. An important component of classroom management is helping students to recognize that some of the choices they make regarding their behaviours are better than others. When they make good choices, these need to be reinforced and celebrated. When they make poor choices, they need to understand why what they chose to do is a poor choice and what alternative responses they could have chosen that would have been better choices. For many included students who have learning and behavioural challenges, accepting responsibility for the choices they make is identified in the behavioural literature as “internal locus of control”. Most students with learning and behavioural challenges typically blame others or external factors for the problematic choices they make – it’s everyone else’s fault, certainly not theirs! This is referred to in the behavioural literature as having an “external locus of control”.

Limiting the Use of Punishment. All too often, classroom teachers use punishment strategies as a first option in managing challenging behaviour. That translates into teachers saying the following things to students “if you continue this behaviour, you can’t go on the trip on Friday”, “you just lost 15 minutes of recess time”, “you won’t be able to participate in the art show next week”, etc. Most of the time when privileges are lost, they are typically activities that involve the arts, or physical education, or some school event or service. These are the very activities that students with learning and behaviour disorders look forward to the most in their school day because they are less academic and students tend to excel in these activities. Overreliance on removing privileges or favoured activities like these carries emotional resentment and produces “punishment resistant kids”. When students have nothing left to lose like privileges they have earned or points they have acquired for following the rules, students can become resentful and deliberately challenge authority.

Here are some more strategies.

Use computer based programs to hold the interest of students

Teach social skills, such as hand raising, taking turns and sharing as part of the learning curriculum. All students will benefit when reminders are given. Children with autism often engage in self-stimulating behaviours such as hand flapping, rocking or even slapping themselves in the face. Help the other students in the class understand these behaviours.

Focus on student strengths. If a child is interested in dinosaurs, baseball, dogs or water sports, he or she needs the opportunity to exhibit expertise in that subject [2].

So we can come to the conclusion that teachers become cognizant of management strategies that will allow students in inclusive classrooms to succeed. In fact, educators who wish to become effective classroom managers in inclusive classrooms should remember that those teachers who are most effective are those who are prepared and

address the issue of classroom discipline prior to disruptions [3]. Planning and implementing preintervention strategies can help teachers to create a learning climate in which there is trust and in which students believe they can learn. When this occurs, the number of classroom disruptions will decrease, and the learning of all students will increase, whether or not they have been identified as needing special services.

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