

STRENGTHENING THE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS OF DIFFERENTLY ABLED BUT MENTALLY CAPABLE GRADE 1 PUPILS: BASIS FOR AN INTERVENTION PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to know how the interpersonal relationships of differently abled but mentally capable grade 1 pupils may be strengthened through intervention program. It is indeed that the people who influence one's development play a great factor in the contribution of developing a child holistically particularly his interpersonal relationships with others. It is indeed a challenge for the parents, teachers and fellow pupils to be a part of one's social development specifically children with physical disabilities for one way or another social competence affect the academic achievements of the child. No matter how intelligent the child is, physical appearance attributes in considering a person to be a friend and be accepted by others.

In this regard, the study seek to determine if there is a need to recommend intervention programs that will strengthened the personal relationship skills of differently abled children. The null hypothesis of the study is: The intervention programs do not significantly strengthened the interpersonal relationship skills of differently abled but mentally capable grade 1 pupils. The descriptive-normative method of research was employed in this study. It utilized the research made and validated questionnaire as the main instrument for gathering of data.

Public elementary schools in the 1st District of Malabon City were covered in this study. The six (6) schools are: Malabon Elementary School, Dampalit Elementary School (Main), Dampalit Elementary School, Panghulo Elementary School (Main), Panghulo Elementary School, and Santulan Elementary School. There were twenty (20) respondents including teachers, school coordinators, district coordinators and Special Education (SPED) adviser in the public elementary school and seven (7) differently abled but mentally capable grade 1 pupils and three hundred twenty four (324) abled- bodied children in the 1st District of Malabon.

The significant findings of the study are: The teachers and administrators significantly manage to develop the interpersonal relationships between the differently abled and abled-bodied grade 1 pupils, the respondents' perceptions vary as to the promotion of welfare of the differently abled but mentally capable children. Most of them failed to perform the undertakings stated in the questionnaire that are significant in accomplishing the said tasks. As perceived from the result of the questionnaire, school and district coordinators failed to initiate programs, facilitate evaluation of staff development activities, need to attend more training and seminars that would make them equipped and abreast of the current trends and issues of the SPED programs and to provide more effective solutions in case of violations of the right of differently abled children.

In the view of pedagogical qualifications of teachers, based on the result, it was found out that the teachers as well as the school and district coordinators need to be equipped and to have formal training on how to handle the said children. Furthermore, the significant findings from the view of the abled-bodied children in perceiving differently abled classmates, they accept, respect and they consider them as their friends. Though based from the result of the questionnaire, he

differently abled but mentally capable children claimed that they encountered bullying. Lastly, the respondents recommended different programs that would strengthened the interpersonal relationships of differently abled but mentally capable children.

Keywords: Differently abled, interpersonal relationship, children with disabilities (CWD), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), least restrictive environment (LRE).

1. INTRODUCTION

An interpersonal relationship is a strong, deep, or close relationship between two or more people. This relationship may be based on the observations of patterns of facts, love, interest, standard, regular business interactions, or some other type of social commitments. Interpersonal relationship progressively improve as people get to know one other and become closer. At first, they will get familiar with each other until mutual trust is developed which is important for sustaining one's relationship. In addition, the relationships children develop with peers serve multiple functions to the development of an individual's personal and social progress. This is the reason why children need their parents to take an active role in preparing them to interact successfully with his peers and providing him a firm foundation in order to develop their social skills.

Children with disabilities (CWD) or learners with disabilities are also called differently abled children. They are learners who required special education because of: autism; communication disorders; deaf blindness; emotional disturbances; hearing impairments, including deafness; intellectual disability; orthopedic impairments; other health impairments; specific learning disabilities; traumatic brain injuries; or visual impairments, including blindness. These physical disabilities interfere child's ability to attain the same developmental indicators as his or her age-mates particularly with his/her social development. They are quite capable of accomplishing a particular task or performing particular function, only in a manner that is different from or takes more time than that of people without disability. According to the Department of Education (DepED) and National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA) both government agencies advocate an inclusive education program in which the end goal is to bring children with disabilities to regular schools. Thus, in support of Republic Act No. 7277, Dep.ED Order No. 26, series of 1997 also known as Institutionalization of SPED Programs in all schools aimed to provide access to basic education among children with special needs in order to provide equal educational opportunities.

Furthermore, teachers play a vital role in developing children's social skills. An effective educator must be mindful that children go to school for a living. It is a place where the child also develop his/ her interpersonal relationship and recognized his self -concept and identity. It was where the teacher promoted social development among children for there were children who were rejected by the social group especially those children with disabilities. It is important for the teachers to have adequate knowledge on how to handle children with disabilities based on the DepED Order No. 53, s. 2008 - Maximization of Trained Teachers and Administrators in Special Education wherein the Bureau of Elementary Education (BEE) through the Special Education (SPED) Division, regularly conducted training of teachers and administrators for children with special educational needs to provide them with access to formal education.

In response to this concern, the researcher conducted a study on how to strengthen interpersonal relationships of grade 1 pupils who are mentally capable but physically disabled through intervention programs that can be used by the teachers and school administrators.

Statement of the Problem

This study answers the questions on how the interpersonal relationships of differently-abled but mentally capable grade 1 pupils may be strengthened.

Specifically, the study sought to answer to the following questions:

1. How may interpersonal relationships between differently abled and able-bodied grade 1 pupils be strengthened with the help of:
 - 1.1 teachers, and
 - 1.2 school administrators?
2. How may the welfare of the differently abled children be promoted with the help of:
 - 2.1 school coordinator,
 - 2.2 district coordinator, and
 - 2.3 SPED adviser?
3. What are the pedagogical qualifications of teachers handling differently abled children?
4. How do the able-bodied children perceive in having differently abled classmates in their classroom?
5. What are the programs that must be strengthened in order to enhance the interpersonal relationships of the differently-abled children?

Integrated Review of Related Literature and Studies

The study basically hinged with Social Exchange Theory by Homans (1974), depending on our perceptions, the theory contributed for better understanding of how we feel about a relationship with another person between what we put into a relationship and what we get out of it. Social exchange theory gave us the idea of how exchange of giving and receiving affects the kind of relationship we deserved. In the said theory, it emphasized the importance of receiving something whenever based on what we give in terms of establishing relationship with others. This kind of exchange will help us to feel that we deserve to be loved and be valued, whether in terms of material or not. With this theory of social exchange, children with disability find it hard to build a strong relationship with others for they can exchange less because of their limitations particularly in activities that involve physical attributions.

Another theory that deals with interpersonal development is **Uncertainty Reduction Theory** by Berger and Calabrese (1975), that explained the relationship development between strangers. Upon meeting the stranger, we tried to check out first the identity based on interaction with the stranger in order to reduce uncertainty about each other from an idea of whether one likes or dislikes the other. Furthermore, the theory indicates the different stages that the two strangers go through in forming a connection and then having a consideration if they want it to continue or to not. The stages include: (1) The Entry Stage, (2) The Personal Stage, and (3) The Exit Stage. In the entry stage, the persons involve get to know about each other's family, education and background, while in the personal stage, involves sharing attitudes and beliefs, lastly in the exit stage, both people consider if they are really compatible. The motivation towards wanting to reduce these uncertainties revolves around their expectation regarding the relationship. Whether you expect to interact with the other person again and then have a continued

interaction or having a purpose of accomplishing stated goal from the relationship, when that person turns out to counter your expectations, you would be most likely want to reduce uncertainty about the individual.

In addition, according to Davis (2017), educating a disabled children involves not only providing specialized services but also examining common perceptions that both teachers and learners hold regarding pupils with disabilities. The main piece of legislation concerning the education of students with disabilities is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires public schools to provide students with disabilities with free education in a "least restrictive environment." Educating a child with a physical disability is a multifaceted undertaking involving not only the provision of special services and the design of Individualized Education Programs, but also attention to the psychological and social factors.

Handling differently abled children who are included in a group of regular class is quite challenging. It needs a lot of passion and dedication in order to meet the need of two different group. Fortunately, there is such law that will support the advocacy of the teacher in strengthening the interpersonal relationship among the said children. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures that all children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.

Through Least Restrictive Environment which requires public schools to provide students with disabilities. According to IDEA, least restrictive environment (LRE) means that a student who had a disability should have the opportunity to be educated with non-disabled peers to the greatest extent appropriate. They should have access to the general education curriculum or any other program that non-disabled peers would be able to access. With this, the teacher can maximize the opportunity to make differently-abled children feel that they are different and they are also capable and able to develop their potentials and to make friends with abled bodied children without discrimination to gain their respect. From the book of "Development of Learning and Social skills in Children with Disabilities: an Educational Intervention Program" by Mafra of 2015, the author pointed out in her writings that in order to examine the influence of the social intervention program on academic achievement and to examine social status among the students in the homeroom classroom, before and after participation in the social intervention program, there must be considerable improvements in all dimensions of achievements with all the students who participated in the intervention program. The findings indicate continuous improvements in learning, organization and educational behaviors. The improvements were constant and monotonous, and the students' behaviors changed for the better.

In 2013, Brooks proved in her writings that extracurricular activities and the development of social skills in children with disabilities often lack appropriate social skills to fully participate in the social world of their peers. Brooks tried to explore the relationship between extracurricular activity participation and social skills acquisitions in children with disabilities. Given the potential for extracurricular activity participation to influence positive gains in social relationships. It was expected that greater time spent in extracurricular activities would predict a greater use of skillful social strategies, as well as higher ratings of social competence. Another aim is to investigate the potential positive impact of structured activity participation in particular, on ratings of social competence. It was anticipated that amount of time spent involved in structured activities would be a stronger predictor of social competence than amount of time spent in unstructured activities, due to the additional scaffolding provided by structured activities.

According to Dickinson (2016), schools are taking preventative action towards bullying as bullying behavior has become more aggressive. Schools provide opportunities for bullying to occur, particularly in unsupervised and unstructured activities such as lunch and recess. It is where the SPED district adviser should give attention to, knowing the characteristics of children who more likely to be victims of bullying, such as low self-worth, anxiety, impulsiveness, and poor social skills. Differently-abled children have many of these characteristics, and these children are more likely to be victimized. Interactions can be pleasant exchanges when positive social skills are used, or negative ones that may result in conflict. Some of these interactions turn into an imbalance of power and become bullying situations due to certain individual and environmental factors. The common place where bullying occur is at school where unstructured activities such as lunch, recess, and riding the bus where bullying and victimization are reported to occur frequently. Schools are taking a closer look at bullying behavior.

In order to respond with appropriate social behavior, children who are involve in social interactions need to interpret what is happening so they can respond with appropriate social behavior for bullying behavior is an aggressive form of social interaction or lack of social interaction skills. It is important to recognize the skills social interaction requires, and what may occur if those skills are not developed. Playing with peers, affective expressions, acceptance to others are social interaction skills. Social competence is a child's effective and appropriate use of social behavior in social interactions with peers. If the child has social competence, she or he will exhibit behavior that reflects successful social role. If a child does not recognize a social initiation correctly, the response may be inappropriate. Children who displayed more suitable and competent social behaviors are accepted by their peers and receive high status in their peer groups. When the children caused conflicts and interruption, they were not as accepted into playgroups.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study made use of the descriptive-normative method of research. It employed a questionnaire and interview as the techniques in data collection. This kind of research method involves the gathering of facts to test hypotheses or to answer questions about the present status of the subjects of the study so that the data will be effectively used in evaluating the program. This method meets the objective of this study which is how to strengthen the interpersonal relationship among differently-abled grade 1 pupils in the 1st District of Malabon City. There are six (6) elementary schools in the said district namely: Malabon Elementary School, Dampalit Elementary School (main), Dampalit Elementary School, Panghulo Elementary School (main), Panghulo Elementary School and Santulan Elementary School. The researcher involved seven (7) teachers who handle differently-abled children with mental capabilities, six (6) school administrators in which one of them is the SPED adviser, and six (6) school coordinators as her respondents for the first set of questionnaire which deals with the teachers pedagogical qualification in handling differently-abled children with mental capabilities, in promoting their welfare and the programs that need to be enhanced in order to strengthened the interpersonal relationships of the said children.

The study aims to recommend the various programs at a given point in time using documentary analysis and locally constructed questionnaire as well as technique. The study involves intervention of programs in order to strengthen the interpersonal relationships among differently-abled but mentally capable grade 1 pupils through the following: (1) developing the interpersonal relationships between differently-abled and abled-bodied grade 1 pupils with the

help of the teachers and school administration, (2) promoting the welfare of the differently-abled children by the school coordinator, district coordinator and SPED adviser, (3) the pedagogical qualifications of the teachers handling differently-abled and abled bodied children, (4) the perception of able-bodied children in having differently-abled classmates in their classroom , and (5) the programs that must be strengthened in order to enhance the interpersonal relationship of the differently- abled children. The study showed if there is a need for the intervention of programs which will be used by the teachers and be of help in promoting and developing interpersonal relationship among differently abled and able -bodied grade 1 pupils.

Research Instrument

There were two instruments used in the study. The first instrument comes in five parts. Part I is the Teacher and Coordinator Demographic Profile. Part II is all about the questions on the interpersonal relationship between differently- abled and able-bodied grade 1pupils. This part explains the essential of teachers' approaches in developing interpersonal relationship among children with physical disabilities. It describes the teachers' knowledge about his/her pupils, the way that the teachers must do in order to build positive attitude towards pupils with physical disabilities and to encourage them to have good relationship among others. This questionnaire helped in evaluating the pedagogical qualifications teacher handling differently-abled children with mental capabilities who are included in regular classroom set up to show equality and acknowledge importance of peers in school through providing activities that will help everyone to feel comfortable with each other as well as building respect among them.

Part III tackles about the promotion of the welfare of the differently-abled children. Questions involve the teachers' intentions in disseminating information about current research, initiating programs, coordinating with educational authorities and looking for remedies which will help promote the welfare and respect to differently-able pupils in order to develop interpersonal relationship among them.

Part IV is about the pedagogical qualifications of teachers handling differently- abled grade 1. This part is useful in the assessment of how qualified the teachers are in handling the said pupils. The adequacy of their knowledge, their trainings, being up dated with the current trends and issues in special education in promoting and improving the well-being of their pupils are also evaluated.

Lastly, Part V is about the programs that must be strengthened in order to enhance interpersonal relationship of the children. Since there are existing well-planned DepED programs tailored for differently-abled children, this part seeks for suggestions of programs which focuses on the development of interpersonal relationship that can be used by the teachers. Programs which they think will be of help in establishing good relationship between differently-able and able grade 1 pupils which primarily leading to self-concept of the person.

The second instrument evaluated the differently-abled but mentally capable children's traits and social skills and the perception of able-bodied children in having differently-abled classmates in their classroom. The questions assess how differently-abled children perceive the treatment of others. Second, how able-bodied accept and consider the differently-abled children as their classmates and consider him/her as their friends.

3. SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

The significant findings of the study were summarized as follows:

1. How may interpersonal relationships between differently abled and able-bodied grade 1 pupils be strengthened with the help of the teachers and school administrators?

The teachers and administrators significantly manage to develop the interpersonal relationships between the differently-abled and able-bodied grade 1 pupils. There are indicators that the teachers as well as the school administrators can manage and they are skillful in developing interpersonal relationship among their children and dedicated in doing their task not only to develop the cognitive domain of the learner but also competent in developing interpersonal skills as well.

2. How may the welfare of the differently abled children who have been being integrated into a regular school be promoted with the help of the school coordinator, district coordinator, and SPED adviser?

The respondents' perceptions vary as to the promotion of the welfare of the differently-abled children with mental capabilities. Most of them fail to do the undertakings stated in the questionnaire that are significant in accomplishing the said tasks. As perceived from the result of table 3, school and district coordinators failed to initiate programs, facilitate evaluation of staff development activities, need to attend more training and seminars that would make them equipped and abreast of the current trends and issues of the Special Education programs and to provide more effective remedies in case of violation of the rights of the differently-abled children.

3. What are the pedagogical qualifications of teachers of differently-abled children?

In terms of pedagogical qualifications of teachers handling differently-abled children, it was found out that based on the result of the questionnaire that they need to be equipped and to have formal training on how to handle the said children like the Special Education teachers and as well as to be updated with the current trends and issues concerning children with special needs. It means that, handling differently-abled children and developing their interpersonal skills are not easy tasks by a teachers without any background of the Special education programs. Nevertheless, teachers with the said pupils must be equipped in supervising them.

4. How do the differently-abled children cope up with the biases by other pupils?

The differently-abled children are not comfortable with the person bullying them and they are not confident that they capable of doing the task assigned to them. However, others respected and accepted them to be friends. And with all the love and support of their families and friends differently-abled children are able to overcome and cope up with the biases by the other pupils. On the other hand, able-bodied children respect, accept and consider to have differently-abled friend with mental capabilities as their friends.

5. What are the programs that can be strengthened in order to enhance the interpersonal relationships of the differently-abled children?

The respondents recommended different programs based on the questionnaire that would strengthened the interpersonal relationships of the differently-abled children with mental capabilities specifically intensive implementation of anti-bullying policies and programs that will help differently-abled children to discover their talents and develop to their full potentials

4. CONCLUSIONS

In view of the foregoing significant findings of the study, the conclusions were:

1. The teachers and school administrators are capable of strengthening the interpersonal relationships between differently-abled and able-bodied children.
2. There is a need for the school coordinators, district coordinators and SPED adviser to promote the welfare of the differently-abled children.
3. The teachers handling differently-abled children need to attend training sessions, conferences and workshops to keep them abreast of current practices, programs, trends and issues on special education.
4. Parents' love and support help the differently-abled children can be the strength of the differently-abled children in order to feel secure.
5. There is a need for an intervention program that will strengthen the interpersonal relationships of differently-abled children.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Give more opportunities to differently-abled children to lead the group in order to show their potentials in leadership, include in their lesson the value of giving importance and respect for the person with the disabilities and spending time with each student especially those who are difficult or shy are recommended in order to create a more positive relationship among pupils.
2. School coordinators, district coordinator and SPED adviser should inform and disseminate current research, trends and best practices to their teachers. There must be provision of laws and legal basis in case of violations of the rights of the differently-abled children. They must develop independent monitoring mechanism and conducting awareness-raising and educational campaigns for the public and as well as specific group of professional with the aim of preventing and addressing the factor of discrimination of children with disabilities in order to make the undertakings for the promotion of the welfare of the said children possible. Moreover the researcher recommends the teachers to use appropriate materials in their daily activities that will encourage the said children to participate to promote self-development and self-reliance among them.
3. It is recommended that teachers handling differently-abled children with mental capabilities should attend training sessions, conferences and workshops to keep abreast of current practices, programs, trends and issues on special education to make them efficient in the provision of access and sharing quality special education programs in which they will be able to develop necessary skills specifically interpersonal relationships skills.
4. The researcher recommends for the school administrators to have parents' orientation at the beginning of the school year. Through awareness of how they will express and show their support to their children with disabilities, it would be easier for the children to face and overcome all the struggles and obstacles they are going through with the biases by some able-bodied children.

In addition, able-bodied children would encourage to respect, accept and consider differently-abled children to be their friends if the teachers will give more opportunities to differently-abled children to join in group activities to show their potentials in leadership and for able-bodied children to express a positive attitude towards them. Give emphasis on

the importance of peers in schools, to encourage children to be caring and respectful to one another and refrain from comparing one to another

5. It is recommended to have programs that will strengthen interpersonal relationships among differently-abled and able-bodied children such as adequate trainings and seminars for the teachers, orientation for the parents, inclusion of programs that will uplift self-worth and confidence and provision of assemblies for the said children that will help them to discover their talents and develop their full potentials. However, it was also strongly recommended to have an intensive implementation of anti-bullying law not only inside the classroom but also within the campus.

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