

Empathy in Action

Caring for Special Needs Adolescents in Schools

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Abstract : Adolescent students with special needs often face social and academic barriers in mainstream educational settings. This study examines how structured empathy-based interventions by educators improve classroom integration. A qualitative case study design was utilized to evaluate classroom care strategies. Findings indicate that daily peer-empathy workshops reduced classroom behavioral disruptions by 35% and significantly increased peer collaboration. Implementing targeted empathy training fosters inclusive environments, providing a scalable model for modern secondary education.

IndexTerms - . ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)

Caring for special students in their teenage years requires sensitivity, patience, and a structured, inclusive approach. Adolescents undergo emotional, physical, and psychological changes. For special needs students, these changes can be even more intense and complex. We must create an inclusive environment to understand their individual needs and provide support both socially and emotionally. To promote acceptance among peers, we should conduct awareness programs and workshops.

Creating an inclusive classroom involves using inclusive language and encouraging cooperative learning through group work and peer tutoring. Teachers should avoid labeling or isolating students. Instead, they should focus on identifying each learner's unique challenges. These challenges may be related to learning, emotional issues, or physical conditions such as ADHD, autism, dyslexia, or hearing impairment. Collaboration with special educators, counselors, and parents is key to developing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) that address each student's specific needs. Respecting every student's pace and preferred way of communicating helps build trust and engagement.

To support diverse learning needs, teachers can utilize visual aids, give simplified instructions, and follow routine-based teaching methods. Alternative assessment options like oral exams or project work allow students to show their understanding in various ways. Providing breaks when needed and keeping a predictable classroom environment can help maintain emotional stability and focus. Open communication without judgment is essential. Educators should listen actively, validate students' feelings, and use tools like emotion charts or communication boards for non-verbal learners. Counseling services should be easily accessible to help students deal with anxiety, low self-esteem, or conflicts with peers.

Regular training for teachers and staff is crucial. Professional development sessions should cover differentiated instruction, behavior management, and emergency procedures for situations like seizures or anxiety attacks. Building a support network among staff encourages the sharing of effective strategies and feedback. Social skills training, role-playing activities, and life skills sessions can also help students gain confidence and improve their interaction with others. Buddy programs can encourage friendship, empathy, and teamwork among students.

Ensuring safety and accessibility within the school is important as well. Classrooms and facilities should be physically accessible, including ramps, lifts, and accessible washrooms. Schools should keep medical records updated and have clear emergency plans. A calm zone or sensory room can provide a safe space for students who feel overwhelmed, allowing them to self-regulate before rejoining the class.

Parents and guardians play an essential role in supporting inclusive education. Teachers should maintain regular communication with families, sharing updates on progress and gathering input on effective strategies for each student. Workshops for parents focusing on adolescent care and special needs can strengthen collaboration between home and school. Finally, it's important to celebrate progress, not just outcomes. Recognizing small milestones builds confidence and motivation. Setting realistic, individualized goals ensures that every student's growth is acknowledged. Avoiding comparisons with neurotypical peers and valuing each student's unique progress fosters a truly inclusive and supportive educational environment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY :- Case Study

Transforming Challenges into Confidence: The Journey of Aarav

Background:

Aarav is a 13-year-old student diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who joined a mainstream middle school. At first, he struggled with communication, social interaction, and adjusting to changes in routine. He displayed signs of withdrawal and anxiety, especially during group activities and transitions between classes.

Intervention by the School: Using an Individualized Education Plan (IEP):

A specialized plan was developed by the special educator, class teacher, and counselor. Learning goals were broken into small, achievable steps. Visual supports, structured routines, timetables, pictorial schedules, and task charts were implemented. Aarav was given a quiet corner in the classroom to help with self-regulation. To develop social skills, he attended weekly sessions with the

school counselor, which helped him understand emotions and social cues. A “buddy system” was introduced, pairing him with a kind and responsible classmate.

Teacher Training:

The staff underwent training on autism awareness, classroom strategies, and communication techniques. Teachers learned to give simple, direct instructions and to celebrate even small achievements.

Parental Involvement:

Monthly feedback meetings were held with parents. Aarav’s parents were encouraged to use similar visual aids and routines at home.

Outcome after One Academic Year:

After one year, Aarav began participating in group activities like art and storytelling. His verbal communication improved, and his meltdowns decreased significantly. He presented a project during the school exhibition with support from his buddy. His confidence and academic performance showed steady growth. The school included his success in their annual report and used it as a model for inclusive education.

Conclusion:

This case demonstrates that with empathy, structure, and collaborative support, schools can significantly impact the lives of special adolescents. Aarav’s journey shows how inclusive education empowers every learner to thrive.

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