



LEARNING DISABILITY : A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The present investigation was carried out on a girl name Harshita who has been identified with learning disability. She is presently studying at 'Udaan' a school for the special children in Shimla. The girl was brought to this special school from the normal school where she was studying earlier when the teachers and parents found it difficult to teach the child with other normal children. The learning disability the child faces is in executive functioning i.e. she forgets what she has memorized. When I met her I was taken away by her sweet and innocent ways. She is attentive and responsible but the only problem is that she forgets within minutes of having learnt something.

Key words : *learning disability, executive functioning, remedial teaching*

Introduction

Learning Disability : The National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children (1968) defined Learning Disability (LD) as “Children with special learning disabilities exhibit a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written languages. These may be manifested in disorders of listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling, or arithmetic. They include conditions which have been referred to as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, developmental aphasia, etc. They do not include learning problems which are due primarily to visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, to mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or to environmental disadvantage”.

The learning disabled child has intelligence of any other normal child but he faces problems in learning. As defined by Samuel Kirk (1962), “Learning disability refers to a delayed development in one or more of the process of speech, language, reading, spelling, writing, or arithmetic resulting from a possible emotional behavioural disturbance and not from mental retardation, sensory deprivation, cultural or instructional factors.”

A learning disabled child may face problem in reading, writing, spelling, speech or the power of memorization. In the present case the child is able to write well. She can do mathematics fairly well, can speak very clearly and is socially active. She is quite neat in her presentation

too but her the stumbling block is her memory. She forgets as soon as she learns. Due to this problem of hers she is not able to cope up with the peers in her normal school.

We may categorize learning disabilities into dyslexia (difficulty in reading), dysgraphia (difficulty in writing), dyscalculia (difficulty in arithmetic), dysphasia (difficulty in speaking) to name a few and also executive functioning in which the child is not able to memorize. He does make an effort to learn but after some time he totally forgets each and everything that he has learnt so far. In the present case we are dealing with a child who has the last kind of learning disability i.e. executive functioning. Such a child therefore fails to keep up with a normal class. A learning disabled child is of average I.Q. but his only limiting situation is his inability to learn.

Learning is a process that involves steps which are all cognitive and use the brain. Steps involve observation, describing what one has learnt and then finally putting all that one has learnt into practice. When the child is learning disabled this faculty of his brain is not in a position to carry out the above operations therefore the child cannot learn well and is labeled as learning disabled. Problem may be in input, processing or in execution. But the reason for this is not known. We have the case of such a child with us here with the following features:

CASE HISTORY

NAME : Harshita

Date of Birth : 29 / 4 / 2003

Father's name : Sh. Sohan Lal (Age 45 years). He is in a government job and has studied upto class 10.

Mother's name : Mrs. Sita Thakur (Age 38 years) . She is a home maker and has also studied upto class 10.

Mother Tongue : Hindi

Other language : Pahari

Religion : Hindu

Locality : Urban

Type of family : Joint

Number of members in family : 12

Sibling : Older brother aged 12

Cardinal position of child : Second

Problem noted first : At the age of 7 years

Pregnancy : Wanted

No infection to mother during pregnancy

NATAL HISTORY

Birth place : Home

Delivery : Full term and normal

Birth cry : Normal

Birth weight : Normal

Colour at birth : Pink

Proper feeding in neonatal period : Yes

Baby respiration : Normal

Proper immunization of mother : Yes

POST NATAL

Any infection at birth : No

Head injury : No

Convulsions : No

Jaundice : No

Nutritional disorder : Yes

Proper immunization : Yes

From the above investigation one realizes that there was no problem whatsoever during pregnancy and also the pregnancy was a wanted one. The special teacher at Udaan reported that Harshita is a very social child. She enjoys the company of her peers. She likes to do her work first of all. She enjoys controlling her group. She conducts the morning assembly very well too. She is loud and clear in her voice. She likes to participate in each and every activity like dancing, singing etc.

Earlier she studied in a normal school in Ghanahati (a place in the outskirts of Shimla). But her teachers were not able to help her much due to her inability to learn. They would make her learn but next moment she would be totally blank. It was very frustrating for the teachers and also the parents since their efforts were all going down the drain. It was then suggested to the parents that the girl be shifted to a school which provided extra help to the child. Udaan is

a school for the special children where teachers are specially trained to take care of these children.

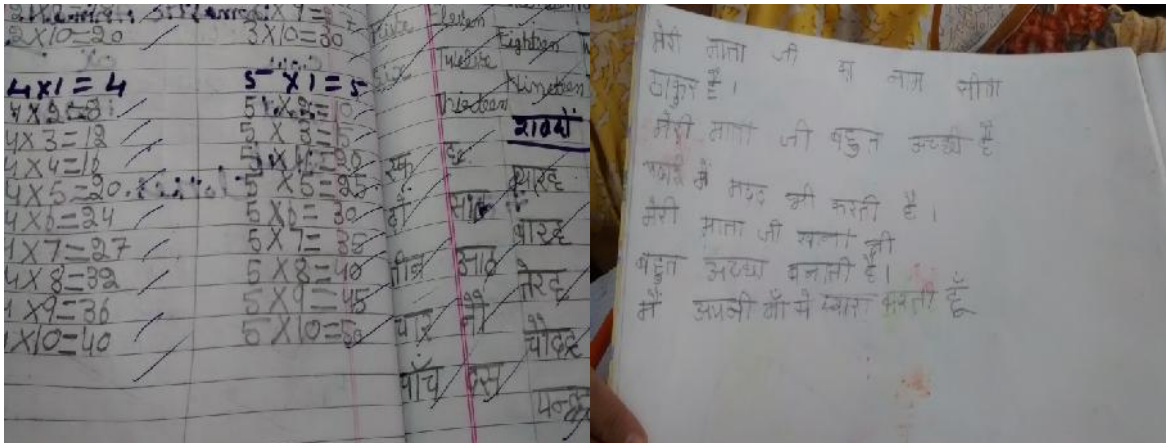
At Udaan her teachers spend a lot of time with her. They repeat the same thing time and again. They do not pressurize her to learn and remember too many things at the same time. They allow the child to learn at her own pace so that they donot get stressed. Also a positive re-inforcement is given to her at regular intervals so that she feels encouraged to learn. Whenever she is able to memorize she is given a reward in the form of some praise or a sweet. This greatly boosts her morale and she takes even more interest in her work.

Harshita joined Udaan in 2013. In one year she has shown considerable improvement in her writing and reading. She is able to write English and Hindi words. She is better at Hindi than English. She knows names of animals, days of the week, months of the year, people at work etc. But she can write these things only when some hint is provided. She is able to write five lines about herself and her mother. She can also write few lines on common things like cow. She copies from the blackboard accurately. With regards mathematics, she is able to do 3-digit addition sums. Also 3-digit subtraction sums, and multiplication sums with single digit have been taught to her. She knows the tables till 5. The teacher is going slow with her so that she is able to learn only few things but memorize them well. Along with this she is also taught names of common things which one uses.

According to the teacher, Harshita is a very sensitive child and feels very hurt if scolded or ridiculed. So the only mantra with her is love and patience.

The parents too have a very positive attitude towards the child. She takes keen interest in all the activities of the school and makes sure that the child keeps abreast of all that is being done there. She provides full help and support to her. This is evident from some charts that she helped her make. The father too takes interest in all her activities. The parents want that the child should become independent in life and would make their daughter do some vocational course or training so that she is able to earn her livelihood easily even when they might not be around.

Following are some illustrations of her work which she has done with some assistance.



Class work

Essay



Card making

Different Types of Petals

CONCLUSIONS

The child does suffer from a special kind of learning disability which we label as executive functioning wherein a child forgets as soon as he learns. This condition is definitely very restricting as the child is not in a position to equal other children even though the I.Q. level may not be poor. Such a child needs repetition of the content that is taught time and again. He cannot retain what he has learnt for a long period of time. In such a situation the teacher and parents have to be patient with him and have to devote time with the child so that he revises again and again so as to memorize well. Again here scolding and reprimanding will not help as the child will only get demoralized as he is already trying his level best and cannot do better than that. Also comparing him with others would put him on the backfoot.

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