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Suzanne Kelly

Meeker Elementary School

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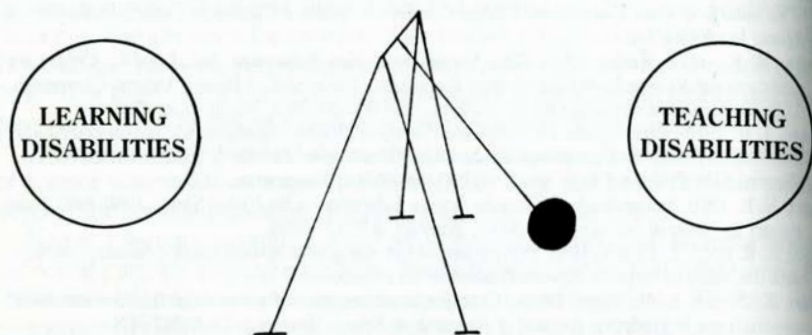
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TEACHING DISABILITIES

*Suzanne Kelly
Sixth Grade Teacher
Meeker Elementary School
Ames, Iowa 50010*



Educational pendulums are forever "swinging." During the past several years and to the present, the "swinging" seems to have been and currently is in the direction of student needs — with energy focused on individualized instruction, self-pacing, mainstreaming, pull-out programs, talented and gifted opportunities, and learning disabilities awareness.

Only recently have the pendulums started swinging in the direction of teacher concerns. Momentum is gaining on the awareness of stress management. Teacher burn-out is a common topic.

Whether we swing in the direction of student needs or teacher needs, the pendulum of education is the same. What happens to the student is not an experience isolated from the teacher. It is an involved experience resulting because of, or in spite of, the teacher. Children can experience science both in and out of the classroom. However, a science curriculum, with an organized, sequential approach to content and process learning, must involve a teacher. Excellence in science education demands awareness of both how teachers teach and how students learn.

Students with learning disabilities have been the object of studying, testing and writing. These students may have problems in collecting, sorting, storing and expressing information. Thus, learning disabilities are a concern receiving much attention from research grants, community involvement, government programs, and regular classroom teacher time and effort.

Yet, factors that inhibit the excellence in teaching have had, by comparison, little attention. Classroom teachers are aware of them, but administrators, researchers, and other educational experts haven't even invented the term "teaching disabilities." This topic has had little studying, scant efforts for improvement, and certainly, unfocused concern.

"Teaching disabilities" refers to problems which teachers have in collecting, sorting, storing, and expressing information. Hints are given to classroom teachers on how to deal with children who have learning disabilities. Wouldn't it be meaningful if we science teachers could have as much attention spent on our concerns with disabilities in teaching? These teaching disabilities are the distractions that impede the focusing of a teaching task. These are problems which inhibit the teaching part of the learning experience, so that it cannot as effectively be received by the learner. You know those disabilities of teaching — collecting money, passing out notices, making announcements, settling squabbles, accounting for absences for other programs, dealing with last minute changes in schedules, shuffling an overloaded curriculum, struggling with lack of planning time, attending inefficiently run meetings, surviving with inappropriate placement of students in classes, managing hall duty — the list, at times, seems endless.

If you are a science teacher and you have planned a super lesson for a student, it can be quite frustrating to have the student gone on a trip or absent for a pull-out program, to be interrupted by an unscheduled meeting, or to have the student dealing with requested work from a different teacher during your scheduled class time. It is discouraging not to be able to solve all the concerns of education. It is most discouraging to know solutions and not have the time to apply them. The educational experts might recommend enrichment, reinforcement and review. A major teaching disability is not having the student or not having the time to do it.

If you are a classroom teacher and you're not certain if you have teaching disabilities, take the following survey. The symptoms are similar to those of learning disabilities. You simply analyze whether the identified symptoms apply to your teaching. If they do, you have teaching disabilities. Examples have been given for further clarification.

IDENTIFICATION OF TEACHING DISABILITIES

Symptoms

Examples

Distractibility —

"Just a minute. Before we start class, these announcements have just come from the office. . . ."

Impulsiveness —

"Class, our science lesson for today was observation and classification of leaves. However, Joanie brought a snake to school, so let's observe the snake! What do you mean, 'Johnny fainted?'"

- Poor Attention Span — “Are there any questions on how to make a bar graph? Joanie, keep your hands to yourself. Remember to have each square of the graph paper equal the number of grams. Yes, Jason, I know someone is at the door.”
- Poor Memory Span — “Class how could we tell if a smoother surface reduces friction? What? Lunch count? I thought I did that this morning.”
- Poor Coordination — “I’ll come to your work areas if you have questions about the lab procedures. Whoops! Jeremiah, your notebook was NOT under your chair. . . .”
- Spatial Relationships — “Class, I know we didn’t have enough time for all your oral research reports today, but we DID discuss the proper handling and benefits of snakes, we DID have a fire drill and discuss the emergency procedures, we DID visit with Johnny’s parents about their recent trip to China, we DID share the morning news about the medical transplant and its related ethical issues, and we DID take lunch count.”
- Hyperactivity — “Group Six, I know Joanie was in your lab group yesterday, but she’s at a lesson right now so Jerry you organize your group’s tasks. Yes, John, I know you missed the first part of lab because you were with another teacher, but please join this group now. No, I am not wringing my hands because they are cold and I am NOT stamping my foot because it is asleep!”
- Poor Self-Image — “People, I know Mr. Lockwood did lots of singing with you last year, as he played his guitar for your unit on sound energy. . . . No, I don’t have a guitar. . . . No, and I don’t know how to play one either.”
- Upset by Changes in Routine — “Where is the rest of the class? What field trip? You mean they will be gone for a WEEK? . . . And I’m to take that teacher’s hall duty? I wish I could speak Spanish!”
- Significant Articulation Problems — “Please raise your hands for crunch lount. . . . I mean, lunch count. Joanie, I know Juanita doesn’t speak English, so she didn’t raise her hand, but she does eat, so I’ll add one to the total for cru . . . lunch crount! Wait! Don’t pass yet. I still have five announcements. . . .”

Unpredictable
Behavior and/or
Temper Outburst —

“What do you mean we have another meeting after school? I told students they could come in to make up labs. No, I am not screaming. I SAID, I AM NOT SCREAMING!”

Confused in
Following Directions —

“Homeroom, there are two announcements. The first is on this heavy full sheet of paper which says, ‘Due to budget cuts, teachers should conserve all paper. Put all written work on chalkboards.’ The second announcement is about student council. You mean student council is to meet in here after school tonight and not tomorrow night? But the first notice said. . . What second notice? Oh! On THAT full-sized sheet of paper!”

Destructive —
Easily Frustrated —

“Yes, class, I AM tearing up a lunch count slip.”

“Joanie, please take the snake AND this announcement to the office. I don’t care what happens to them. I’m going to China to learn to play the guitar.”

Actually, teachers do care what happens to snakes and announcements. They care very much what happens to students. They also care very much what happens to teachers. Just as learning disabilities damage a child’s ability to learn, teaching disabilities damage a person’s ability to teach. Let us work to eliminate the teaching disorders that help contribute to stress and burn-out. Let us turn teaching disabilities into teaching advantages.

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