

This manual is an invitation to see beyond the labels, beyond the struggles, and into the incredible hearts and minds of children who experience the world differently. Some children learn through movement, some through music, some through deep focus, and some through a million distractions. You, dear teacher, hold the power to unlock this learning

- **DEEPIKA MOGILISHETTY, Chief - Policy and Partnerships, EK Step Foundation**

As a mother to an autistic child, I have personally experienced the challenges of finding environments where our children are truly seen, understood, and supported. While I firmly believe that special needs schools are the right choice for my child today, I dream of a future where inclusive classrooms are not the exception but the norm. Supporting this resource book is my small step toward that vision—where every teacher is empowered, and every child, regardless of their neurotype, has a place in the classroom

- **MUGDHA KALRA, Award-winning Media Professional, Autism Activist, Special Needs Mom and BBC 100 Women'21**

The caregiver and classroom resource is definitely going to be a game changer for creating inclusive classrooms, classrooms which will benefit not just those with disabilities but all children to feel accepted and thrive. We are extremely happy to have contributed to creating this resource and hope teachers across the country can benefit from it

- **SONALI SAINI, Founder, Sol's ARC**

All kinds of learning support is a learner's right!
They are not privileges or favours

- **CHAMPA SAHA, Founding Principal of Samhita Academy**

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Voices of Practitioners Driving Inclusion in Classrooms

Author- Shwetha Srivathsan
Designer- Pooja Saklani

Publisher-

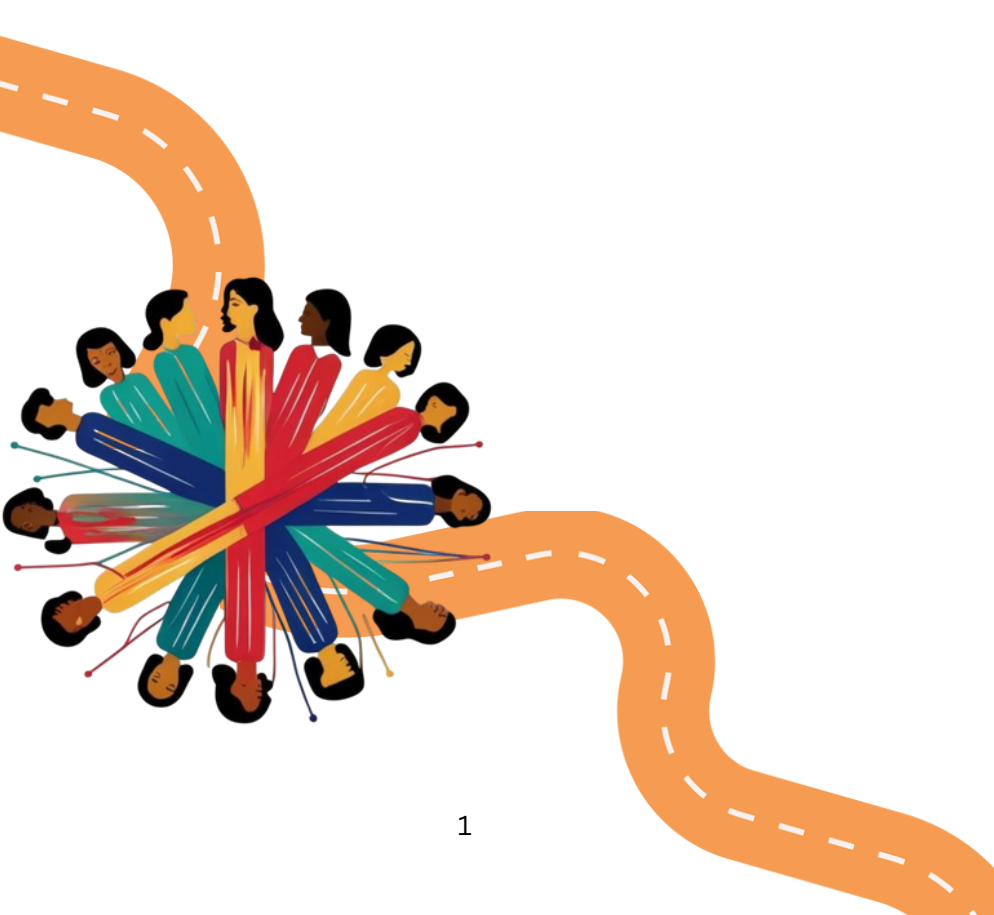


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Voices of Practitioners
Driving Inclusion in Classrooms





Dhwani - Voices of Practitioners Driving Inclusion

This book is powered by EkStep Foundation of India's well known philanthropists Nandan Nilekani and Rohini Nilekani. The Foundation has developed an open source digital infrastructure for learning called Sunbird that enables the development of platform solutions to support creation of education and learning platforms and host education resources. DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing), an initiative by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, was built using Sunbird. DIKSHA is designed to provide a digital platform for teachers, students, and parents that supports more than 1.5 million schools across all states and union territories and is available in 36 Indian languages. To learn more, please visit www.bachpanmanao.org. **This resource is created as a free digital good**, licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

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Dhwani ध्वनि

Voices of Practitioners Driving Inclusion in Classrooms



Dear Teacher,
inclusion is a continuous journey. While the journey and destination are incredibly important, so is ‘the company’ of those on this path. In your journey, you are not alone. Best wishes from every practitioner who contributed to this book.



A note from EkStep Foundation on *powering* this resource

What is a child's relationship with space - be it a classroom, school, park, library, or any other? It perhaps is connections with people and how they are made to feel in that space, starting from the moment they enter to the moment they leave. Maya Angelou once said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

As you engage with **this book**, see it as an invitation to **create spaces where every child no matter their ability, feels seen, feels heard, and simply feels happy every day**. An invitation to celebrate the opportunity to create a thriving childhood for every child, to be that person who has the power to create such an experience for every child.

This manual is also an invitation to **see beyond the labels, beyond the struggles, and into the incredible hearts and minds of children who experience the world differently**. Some children learn through movement, some through music, some through deep focus, and some through a million distractions.

You, dear teacher, hold the power to unlock this learning. With small adjustments, deep observation, and a willingness to adapt, you can create a classroom where every child feels seen, valued, and capable. An opportunity to see how a softer word, a different way to give instructions, or a moment of patience can create a classroom where every child feels valued and capable. A classroom where neurodiversity is not a challenge, but a strength.

This manual isn't here to tell you how to teach—you already bring so much to the classroom. Instead, **it's here as a companion, a reflection of what others like you have seen, tried, and are now sharing.** It will help you build a classroom that is not just inclusive, but joyful. Because learning is about an experience of wonder, play, connection, curiosity and therefore growth — for every child.

It is also a celebration of you the educator, the one who is choosing to celebrate childhood with joy. **Here's to a world where every child thrives. Let's Bachpan Manao, Celebrate Childhood together.** Share your journey to help others like you join in the celebration. I would like to congratulate the team at Bookosmia for listening deeply and curating ideas, documenting the journey of many for all of us to learn and grow.



Deepika Mogilishetty

As Chief of Policy & Partnerships, EkStep Foundation, works on diverse projects associated with the creation and adoption of digital public goods & infrastructure, leveraging the power of networks and narratives to bring focus and attention to the growth and development of children in the early years via the Bachpan Manao, Badhte Jao mission.

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Voices of Practitioners Driving Inclusion in Classrooms



Dear Teacher,
Before moving forward,
let's go back to reflect what
the word 'school' brings to
people's minds.



We asked people, what came to their mind on hearing the word 'school'

Wrapping school books with brown paper before start of new school session



That hug from my class teacher when I lost at the inter-school competition



The nervousness of
speaking on stage
for the first time



The feeling when you
heard the school bell
ringing for the last
period



Learning how to
make the top
spin with my
sports teacher



More beautiful memories ...

Rainy Day Holiday!
Puddles, raincoats and
paper-boats



A partner who didn't move to
the next page till I finished
reading mine.

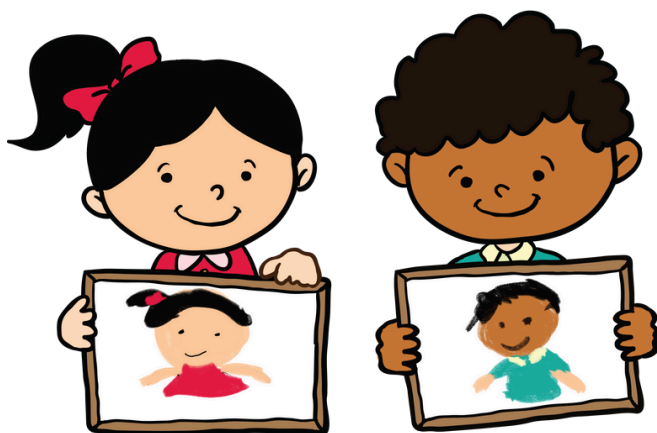


Spending hours
making shapes in
the sand tray



What are your favourite memories from school?





**School memories
bring a smile to
all our faces,
don't they?**

***Everyone*
deserves these
memories and
moments.**

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Voices of Practitioners Driving Inclusion in Classrooms



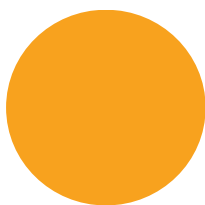
Dear Teacher,
'School' brings back such beautiful memories, isn't it? It is more than our workplace. It is the place which gives every child in our class a right to have their own bright, colourful and warm memories.



Diversity is the cornerstone of humanity and a classroom is but a microcosm of the larger society, and like the larger society, it is diverse.

Diversity can exist in multiple forms in a classroom. Some differences are obvious - like a student who uses a wheelchair to move around or a hearing aid to hear better. Some differences are influenced by socio-cultural factors. Many **other differences, which are not obvious to the naked eye, are caused by a difference in the way a student perceives the world around her, and herself in relation to the world around her, which in turn determines the way she interacts, learns and grows. This is neurodiversity.** Just like anyone else, we neurodivergent have our own set of strengths that we bring to table.

While working with a neurodivergent may seem like a very different ball game to begin with, at the end of it, it is all about helping the neurodivergent student learn to the best of her ability.



Incidentally, isn't that the same end goal for all students? This manual has a few quick pointers about some such differences that you might see in your class and about how you, as the classroom teacher, can accommodate for some of these differences to help the student learn to the best of his or her ability, for you, dear teacher, hold the power to create a society where everyone has a valuable role to play. Happy Reading!



Aditi Sowmyanarayan

An award winning neurodivergent author who loves to write slice of life stories that spotlight the hero in the girl or boy next door. Aditi has been invited for her thoughts on policy level changes on disability in India and represented autistic voices at the United Nation. She is the winner of the Tata Changemaker Sambal Award 2024.

Note from the publisher

Bookosmia(smell of books) started with a simple thought- that every child deserves to be heard. As we grew to publish children from 150+ locations every single day, making us India's largest publisher 'for kids, by kids', we realized we were not catering to *every* child and had overlooked those with diverse needs. Hence came along Not That Different- our dedicated label and child-led movement to embrace inclusion through mainstream publishing of neurodiverse voices, an annual festival focusing on strengths and building caregiver support. All with the objective of changing how all of us, perceive neurodiversity. It did not take us long to realize from listening to our young audience that when it comes to inclusion, children are natural ambassadors.

As you notice, we did not start off knowing all about inclusion, we are still constantly listening and learning, all along mindful this is a journey, much like the curvy path lines through this book that remind you on each page, that inclusion is a journey every day with highs and lows, a few tough bends but lots of joyful turns and milestones.

We feel grateful that this child-led movement has since been appreciated by Stanford Neurodiversity Programme, featured by BBC Worldwide, won awards and endorsed by stellar organizations and celebrities bringing it to the mainstream, but we do know that real impact is on the ground, in the classrooms where children and teachers come together as one. This is where learning happens, yes, but also where memories are made, confidence is shaped and first bonds are created.

We are aware that early years are the most crucial period in a child's life to introduce them to diversity. Other than parents, it is the teacher who plays the most crucial role in shaping a child's understanding of inclusion.

But amidst pressure of finishing portions, correcting papers and managing different classes, are we empowering teachers enough to support their learners regardless of ability, background, and learning style? That is the genesis of Dhwani.

This resource was created to empower teachers with the tools, insights, and confidence to foster truly inclusive classrooms. Curated by experts and special educators with vast experience of inclusive classrooms, our goal is to recognise the challenges faced by educators and offer practical strategies to counter them.

As we publish Dhvani, we are grateful to the author of this book and our parent advocate Shwetha Srivathsan for bringing together voices of many who have walked this path before, reflected on their hits and misses and shared them as everyday strategies for our teachers to hold dear, as their own companion on this journey.

We are also thankful to the EkStep Foundation for their ready support in giving life to this resource, our talented designer Pooja Saklani and each and every expert for their valuable time and insights that have made this a wholesome resource for teachers.



Founders at Not That Different- Mugdha Kalra, Nidhi Mishra, Archana Mohan

The women-led founding team at Not That Different is a super-charged and perfect blend of lived experience and activism with special-needs mom and BBC 100 Women'21 Mugdha Kalra joining hands with Bookosmia founders- IIM alum Nidhi Mishra and award-winning author Archana Mohan to run a dedicated label for neurodiversity and inclusion Not That Different under Bookosmia- India's largest publisher for kids, by kids.



A Bookosmia Initiative

INTR ODUC TION


When I look back at the years that I taught children, the theme that has stayed with me is the sheer joy of making an impact, of shaping young minds, of mentoring them to ask questions and hone their natural curiosity, and the satisfaction of having played a tiny role in shaping them as the wonderful adults that they are today. Such is the joy of being a teacher, a role that brings satisfaction like none other.

The best part about being a teacher is that we get to learn something new every single day of work. Sometimes, this learning can come in the form of students who do not ‘conform’ to our idea of what a child that age should be able to do or how a child that age should behave and children who look very “normal”, but throw a few curveballs our way in the classroom. Humanity is best described as diverse and a classroom is just a microcosm of this diversity. Diversity can exist in the way a student perceives the world around her, processes the information that is being doled out to her and communicates her understanding of what has been taught. Often times, making a few tweaks to the content, delivery or both and simple accommodations in the classroom can help most diverse learners learn to the best of their ability.

The term ‘Neurodiversity’ was first coined by Australian sociologist Judy Singer in 1998, to describe the diverse ways in which human brains are wired, thereby creating a diversity in the way a neurodivergent person perceives the world around them and themselves in relation to the world around them, which in turn impacts every aspect of their living and learning.

Put simply, the senses of neurodivergent people perceive and understand the world very differently as against the senses of us neurotypicals. The term neurodiversity is an umbrella term that is used for neurotypes like Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and more. Each of these is a spectrum condition, meaning a person can be anywhere along the spectrum of mild, moderate or severe.

This book is an attempt to list out a few such differences that we see in our classrooms, categorized into pre-primary and primary school age groups, and certain tweaks and accommodations that the classroom teacher can provide to ensure a meaningful learning experience.



Neurodiversity has always existed in the world and it exists in our classrooms as well. It manifests in the form of certain challenges in the classroom environment. With simple accommodations and support, more often than not, most neurodivergents with mild differences can succeed in the classroom.

I have attempted to capture **common classroom differences by simulating situations, capturing the thoughts that the classroom teacher might have, the strategies they could follow and documenting the progress for future use and exchange of knowledge.**

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Ms Puja Sood, Head Additional Learning Support, Candor International School Bangalore, Ms Varsha Ramdas, Special Educator and Resource Head, Greenwood High Bangalore, Ms Champa Saha, Founder Principal Samhita Academy and Sonali Saini, Founder Sol's Arc for their invaluable inputs and the expertise they bring in to making a classroom truly inclusive for diverse learners.

A huge thank you to Ms Bhargavi Raman, Expressive Arts Therapist and Founder of Arts for Mental Health Initiative for sharing her perspective and mindfulness strategies that are easy to practice.

Last, but not the least, this book is dedicated to neurodivergent students who motivate us to think outside the box and make our classrooms a truly interesting place. Here's hoping that this book plays a tiny role in making education a meaningful experience for all!



Shwetha Srivathsan

Author of this resource

Dhwani.

A tax consultant by profession and an educator by choice who is passionate about making learning an enjoyable experience for all learners. Shwetha is regularly invited to train teachers on inclusive classrooms across schools and colleges.

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Dhwani ध्वनि

Voices of Practitioners Driving Inclusion in Classrooms



Dear Teacher,
'Before we prepare our classrooms to be inclusive, how about we prepare ourselves- tell ourselves we can do this, allow ourselves some tough days but also learn to take care of ourselves. So here is **step zero**.



O



PREPPING YOURSELF

SELF CARE AND REFLECTION

You cannot pour from an empty cup

It is acceptable to feel uncertain following a difficult discussion with a parent or to feel frustrated when a youngster has a tantrum. It only indicates that you care, not that you are failing. And that even on the most difficult days, caring matters.



Supporting students who have different learning needs might make teaching difficult. On certain days, you may feel exhausted, worry if you are doing enough, or wonder if you are doing it correctly. This is not unique to you.



Bhargavi Raman

Bhargavi is a faculty at Azim Premji University, a practicing expressive arts therapist (SMART EXB 2022, FECAT 2020) and experiential learning facilitator. She works one-on-one with adults and adolescents, and also with groups, through inter-modal expressive arts and mindfulness. She is passionate about promoting the role of arts in mental health and well-being. Lawyer by education (NLSIU 2013), she has a daily practice of yoga, movement and meditation.

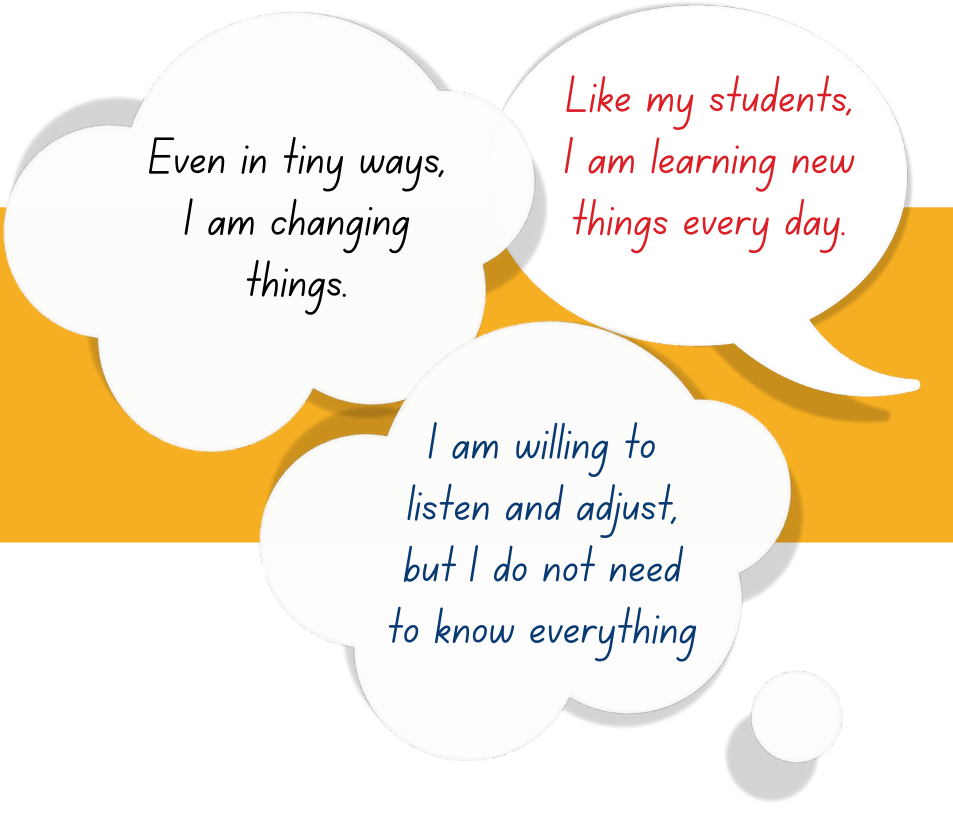
Here are a few easy strategies to look after yourself as you look after your students.

1) SELF-AFFIRMATION TO REDUCE ANXIETY

When working with children that have varied needs, it is acceptable to feel uncertain. Recognise your efforts.

During the day, try writing one sticky note and putting it somewhere visible.

COMPASSION FOR YOURSELF



*Even in tiny ways,
I am changing
things.*

*Like my students,
I am learning new
things every day.*

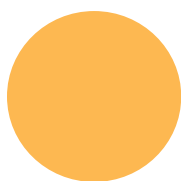
*I am willing to
listen and adjust,
but I do not need
to know everything*

Self-compassion exercises promote
resilience and lessen stress.

2) UNPACKING UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

We all carry biases based on our experiences. The term ‘unconscious bias’ refers to presumptions and assessments we automatically form about other people—often without realising it—based on stereotypes, cultural upbringing, or prior experiences.

These prejudices have the power to shape expectations and reactions in the classroom by affecting our perceptions of and interactions with pupils.



Ask yourself:

- Do I expect less from certain students?
- Am I more patient with some children than others?
- Do I assume a child's abilities based on labels?



What helps?

We all have unconscious biases, shaped by our experiences. Noticing them without guilt or judgment is the first step in creating a more inclusive classroom.

- Approach every student with curiosity: “What does this child need to feel safe and engaged?”
- Engage in open conversations with colleagues. Sometimes, just sharing your thoughts can offer new insights.
- Remind yourself: You are learning alongside your students. It’s okay not to have all the answers.

3) COPING WITH TOUGH DAYS

Regulate- ability to control one's behavior, emotions, and thoughts. Manage disruptive emotions and impulses—in other words, to think before acting.

When a meltdown happens with a student:

1) You need to be regulated in order to help regulate the child emotionally. Step away if needed to regulate yourself first.

2) Take a Sensory Break with 5-4-3-2-1

Notice:

5 things you see,

4 things you hear,

3 things you feel,

2 things you smell,

1 thing you taste.

This helps bring you back to the present.

3) Hold a textured object (like a smooth stone or fabric) and focus on how it feels in your hands.

4) Step outside: If possible, take a quick **breath of fresh air**. Changing your environment, even briefly, can help reset your mind.



After a tough conversation with parents:

Take a moment to relax before beginning the next task or activity.

Recognise your feelings and remind yourself that assisting the child is what you and the parents are both trying to do. You are both working towards the same goal.

it's okay to feel



your feelings

When Feeling Overwhelmed

Take micro-breaks—step outside, stretch, sip water, or take a few mindful breaths.



Shake it out: Stand up and shake your hands, arms, and legs for 30 seconds—this releases built-up tension in your body.



Stretch and Breathe: A simple shoulder roll or neck stretch can release stress.

Pair it with deep breathing: Inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 4.



Find calm in music: If you can, take a minute to listen to a song that soothes or energizes you. Even humming a favorite tune can shift your mood.



Tactile Reset: Carry a smooth stone, fidget toy, or textured fabric to touch when feeling overwhelmed.



You can practice any of these mindfulness-based regulation exercises along with your students too!

4) FINDING LONG TERM BALANCE

You can't pour from an empty cup. **Taking care of yourself is not selfish—it's essential.**

Some days, you will feel like you've made a breakthrough. Other days, you will feel like nothing is working. That's okay. Inclusion is a journey, not a destination. You don't have to be perfect. You just have to show up, try your best, and keep learning.

- **Build small moments of rest into your day.** Even a two-minute pause to sip tea or close your eyes can help.
- **Don't carry the weight alone.** Talk to school community, fellow teachers, or friends when things feel too much.
- **Set boundaries.** It's okay to say no to extra tasks that drain your energy.
- **Celebrate small wins.** That one child who made eye contact today? That's progress. That parent who smiled at the end of a meeting? That's a step forward.

HELP NEEDED

It's an essential skill to know when to **ask for help**. Although some days may feel uphill, you don't have to face it alone. Make connections with counsellors, other educators, or online support groups for educators. Promote teacher well-being in your school; peer talks, mental health days, and frequent check-ins can all help.

Dhwani ध्वनि

Voices of Practitioners Driving Inclusion in Classrooms



Dear Teacher,

In a pre-primary classroom, you are more than an instructor—you are a bridge to the outside world for the child who would be stepping away for the first time from the familiar world of parents. Young children learn best through play and hands-on experiences. Inclusive teachers use multi-sensory activities, storytelling, movement, and interactive games to engage all learners, making education both effective and enjoyable.



1



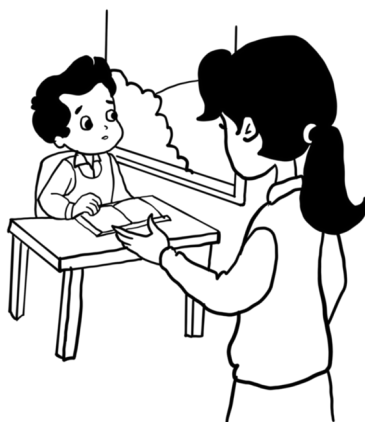
**PRE-SCHOOL (AGE
2.5 - 6 YEARS)**

1. INABILITY TO FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS

Classroom Scenario

Vineet is a happy 4-year-old, who goes to a leading pre-school. He waves his mom a happy goodbye when he is dropped off at the school gate and rarely has a day when he is upset at school.

However, his teacher Ms Sudha has observed that Vineet finds it difficult to follow even single step instructions, preventing him from doing age appropriate activities. She is wondering how to help him.



UNABLE TO FOLLOW SINGLE STEP INSTRUCTIONS

Teacher's Dilemma

Why is Vineet finding it difficult to follow instructions? Is he not able to understand the instruction?

Is he not paying attention to what is being told and thus finds it difficult to follow them?

Does the fact that he is constantly on the move impact his ability to pay attention and follow the instruction?

What Can You Do?

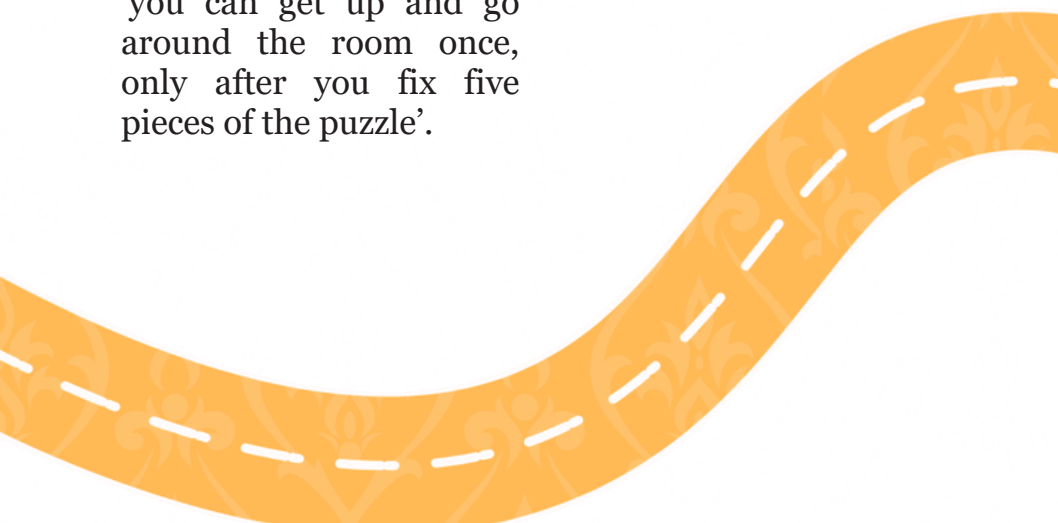
1) Ask Vineet to come and sit in front of you and ensure you have his full attention.

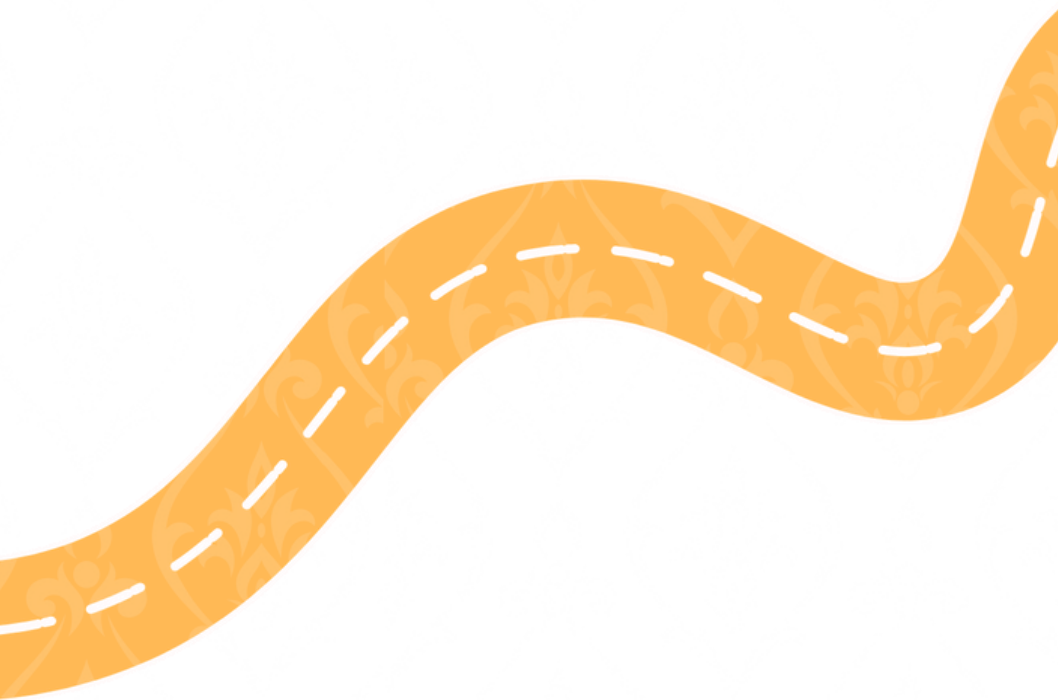
2) Model a simple one step instruction for him -
Eg. Using any puzzle
Pick up the India puzzle and put it in front of him and begin working.

Break the task into smaller tasks and set realistic goals. Example, 'you can get up and go around the room once, only after you fix five pieces of the puzzle'.

3) Acknowledge small successes, praise him for getting up only after he fixes five pieces.

4) Gradually work on increasing the complexity of the instructions.





Documenting Progress

1. Write down your observations
2. Document what has worked
3. Record timelines to increase the complexity of instructions

2. INABILITY TO SPEAK CLEARLY

Classroom Scenario

Shreya is bubbly 5-year-old, who is a new admission to the class. She is the cute girl with a perennial grin on her face.

Shreya is also the girl who just cannot answer the questions asked to her, and is the girl who does not have too many friends in class.



LACK OF AGE APPROPRIATE SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SKILLS

Teacher's Dilemma

Why is Shreya not talking in full sentences?
Is it an inability to understand, an inability
to speak clearly or a combination of both?

What Can You Do?

1) Have Shreya come over and sit next to you and start a conversation with her.

2) Observe her while she responds. Is she understanding what is asked of her? Is she able to pay attention when someone is speaking to her?

3) Is she able to respond better in phrases than in sentences? Is she struggling to form full sentences and is her

speech not coherent when she is asked to speak in full sentences? Does she stammer? Observe Shreya for all of the above when she interacts with her peers.

4) Begin by asking Shreya to respond clearly to what is asked of her, in phrases only, do not insist on full sentences. Ask Shreya to slow down while she tries to express verbally.

5) Encourage Shreya to express, not just in talking,

but also in other forms like drawing, colouring, singing etc.

6) Create opportunities where Shreya can present in phrases in front of the group- Eg show and tell

7) Encourage other children to wait until Shreya finishes to say something, even if she

takes longer or cannot say it in full sentences. Use social stories

8) Work on Shreya's receptive language skills by introducing her to story books that are richly illustrated.

9) Applaud progress for every small win in this journey

Documenting Progress

slowly and gently increase the expectation from responses in phrases to responding in simple sentences.

Document the learning and growth trajectory.

3. UNUSUAL REACTIONS TO LIGHTS, SOUNDS, MATERIALS, SMELLS ETC

Classroom Scenario

Abhay is a 5-year-old who is 'different' in the way he does things. He does not enjoy playing in the sandpit. He hates it when his clothes and hands get messed up. He doesn't like activities that involve

using clay. He lines up the toys when he is asked to play with them, cars being a particular favourite. He spins pieces of puzzles on the floor when he is asked to solve them.



SENSORY HYPERSENSITIVITIES

Teacher's Dilemma

Why does Abhay get upset with certain touch, light, sounds?

What sensorial experience does he enjoy and what can be uncomfortable for him?

Observe the kind of clothes that Abhay wears to school. Are they of a specific kind of texture? Are they appropriate for the weather?

Observe Abhay during snack time. What does he do when he accidentally spills food on his clothes?



What Can You Do?

1) Observe Abhay to understand the way his senses react.

2) Make a mental list of the kind of activities that a typical day would involve. How many of these activities would involve using materials that Abhay might be sensorially uncomfortable with? Eg tracing on sandpaper alphabets and numbers, making models with playdoh.

3) List out alternative activities that can be provided to achieve the same learning outcome. Eg: tracing alphabets with a pencil on paper by joining the dots.

Documenting Progress

Explore the possibility of gently introducing certain sensory activities for Abhay. Example: trace three alphabets a day using sandpaper alphabet and then take a break. After the break, continue tracing by joining dots on paper.

Watch out for other sensory differences. Is he reacting differently to noises, light and taste? If yes, list out what and how and ways to accommodate for that in class.

4. CONFUSION WITH USING TERMS 'YOU' AND 'ME'

Classroom Scenario

Megha is a chatty 5.5-year-old who loves to talk. But sometimes people get confused when she talks! For when she has to say, 'I am fine', she says, 'you

are fine', when she has to say 'he is crying', she says 'who is crying', almost as if she is repeating the question asked to her.



PRONOUN REVERSAL

Teacher's Dilemma

Is Megha just repeating what is told to her or is she getting confused with her pronouns?

Does she understand well when others use the pronouns correctly?

Is she reversing pronouns only when she is talking or does this extend to her writing as well?

What Can You Do?

1) Observe Megha's interactions.

2) While talking to Megha, use gestures So point to yourself when you are using 'me' and to Megha when you use 'you'.

3) Use a mirror to re-iterate the concept of me and you.

4) Break down an instruction to make it devoid of pronouns – Eg 'roll the ball to me' can be broken down to 'roll the ball'. Once Megha follows that instruction correctly, begin introducing instructions with pronouns in it.

5) Ask her, if you are talking about yourself, will you use 'me' or 'you' and take cue from her response to use that as an opportunity to correct. If she says 'you' re-iterate by pointing and explaining that when someone talks about themselves they use 'me' and about the person with whom they are talking, they use 'you' Once the concept of 'me' and 'you' and its usage is clear, extend the same explanation and practice to other pronouns.



Documenting Progress

Document progress to check for patterns. Look for simple picture books that re-iterate these concepts of pronouns and introduce the same to Megha. Send the books home as a reading assignment and ask questions the next day about what she read.

5. CLUMSINESS

Classroom Scenario

Atharva is a 5.5-year-old friendly child who has been nicknamed as 'Goofy' by his family. He seems to be in a hurry and has frequent falls. He extends the same rush to using a staircase and slips, especially when he is getting down the stairs.

His handwriting is clumsy and seems like he wrote it in a hurry to finish. He has issues buttoning his clothes, tying his shoelaces and anything that involves a greater level of focus. He even spills a lot of food while eating.



MOTOR PLANNING CHALLENGES

Teacher's Dilemma

Is Atharva slipping because he is in a hurry and is not looking?

Is it because he stands at the edge of the staircase, especially while getting down and is struggling to perceive the staircase properly?

Observe Atharva when he is writing. Is he writing in a hurry? Is he not perceiving the lines on the book properly? Is he unable to form alphabets properly, or is it a combination of all the above?

Is he spilling because he is eating in a hurry. Observe Atharva while he is eating. Is he struggling to maneuver the spoon and fork?

What Can You Do?

1) Remind Atharva consistently to slow down every time he rushes, until he follows the instruction and slows down at that point.

2) Get Atharva's attention when he is coming down the stairs and tell him, 'Look down,' and once he looks down at the staircase point with your finger that he is at the edge. Slowly hold his hand and help him get down properly for two steps. At the third step, just give the verbal instruction, 'Watch your step' and point to the step to help him slow down and perceive the step better. 3) Teach Atharva to count aloud each step as he goes up. This will help him slow down.

4) Offer notebooks with wider lines and larger squares for Atharva to write, to begin with. Remind him to slow down and write within the lines, squares. Do this consistently until he begins to slow down.

5) Offer activities that work on visual perception and fine motor skills like beading small beads using a thinner thread. Dressing frames are a great way to build the skill to manipulate zippers, buttons and shoe laces. 6) Remind Atharva to slow down while eating. Help him manipulate the spoon and fork, by using physical prompts (hand on hand) to begin with and slowly fade to verbal prompts and eventually to no prompt.

6) Encourage Atharva to play ball games, ride a bike, swim, run and climb on monkey bars.

Documenting the progress

Remember, consistency is the key to building focus, perception and fine motor skills. Document progress and increase complexity gradually until Atharva gets better.

6. INABILITY TO WRITE PROPERLY

Classroom Scenario

Neha is a friendly and happy 5-year-old, who is happy until she is asked to write. Writing is a huge challenge for Neha, or so it seems, for she does not even hold the pencil the way it should be held.

She struggles with forming numbers and alphabets and does not even consistently identify the numbers and alphabets correctly, when asked to.



FINE MOTOR AND WRITING CHALLENGES

TEACHER'S DILEMMA

Can Neha identify the alphabets
and numbers correctly?

Assess her present
level.

Does she hold her pencil
properly?

Observe her while she is
writing and watch her
grip.



What Can You Do?

1) Re-iterate basic number recognition and understanding by hands on counting activities, picture based counting activities and activities that promote the understanding of number-quantity association.

2) Use materials like sandpaper alphabets and alphabets based puzzles, besides pictures and flash cards to re-iterate alphabet understanding.

3) Introduce writing only after the skill of recognizing alphabets and numbers is in place.

4) Give activities that build on fine motor skills like clay modelling, beading, sorting and cutting with scissors, coloring and more.

5) Encourage parents to introduce activities like peeling, cutting vegetables and fruits, manipulating buttons, zippers, shoe laces etc.

6) Encourage parents to introduce activities like riding a bike, playing a ball game and swimming. These activities promote better co-ordination and focus, which in turn improves the ability to focus and write.



DOCUMENTING PROGRESS

7) Give a gripper. Teach to write in print and not in cursive.

8) Remind her to reduce the pressure on paper, if she puts too much pressure, tearing paper sometimes.

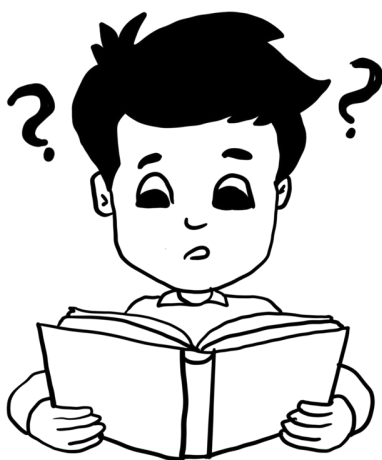
9) Demonstrate it by holding her hand and doing it, so she understands how much pressure to put.

The challenges with writing stem from many reasons and is oftentimes a combination of lack of fine motor skills, inability to form an alphabet or a number and inability to identify an alphabet or a number. Observing the child to understand the cause and providing activities to help build on fundamental skills will gradually bring about improvement in writing skills.

7. INABILITY TO READ PROPERLY

Classroom Scenario

Vijay is a 5.5-year-old happy and friendly boy. He loves to run, play with his friends and help others. He also finds it challenging to read simple Consonant - Vowel-Consonants CVC words and is inconsistent with recognizing alphabets.



**CHALLENGES WITH READING AT AGE
APPROPRIATE LEVELS**

Teacher's Dilemma

What is Vijay's present reading/
alphabet recognition level?

Is he able to identify all the vowels
consistently? Does he have
challenges with both vowels and
consonants?

Write down the alphabets that he is
able to consistently identify.

What Can You Do?

1) Introduce letter sound associations , begin with vowels and move onto consonants once his understanding of vowels is clear and consistent.

2) Introduce picture based activities for CVC words where he has to list out the starting sound, the vowel sound and the ending sound.

3) Once the understanding of sounds is consistent, introduce reading and spelling of CVC words, one vowel at a time.

4) Use materials like scrabble tiles and Montessori moveable alphabet boxes to teach him to spell simple CVC words.

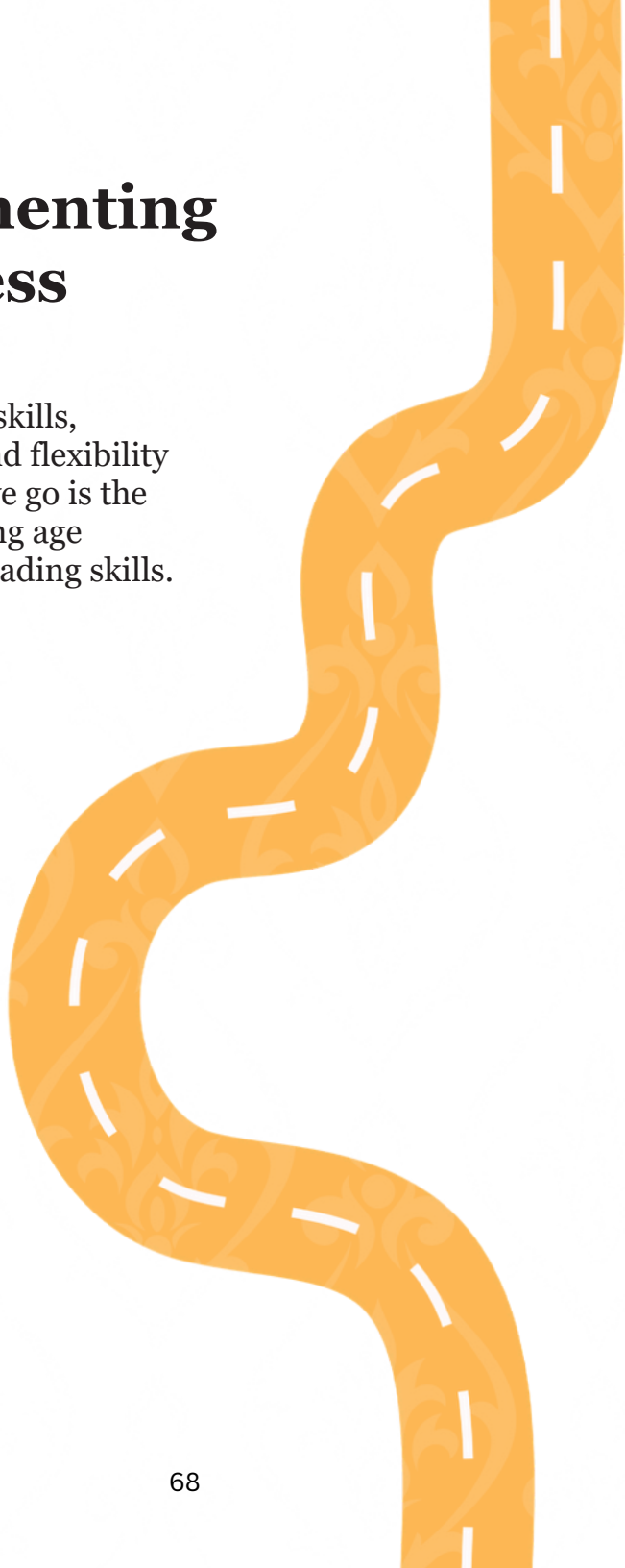
5) Once he is able to read and spell simple CVC words, introduce sight word reading using Dolch List. Begin with the first list and introduce 5 words at a time.

6) Link a sight word to a CVC word and make a small phrase to practice reading- Eg a car , the bag, the big van, the red tap etc

7) Introduce illustrated books with simple CVC words- Eg Ladybird Phonics Books Introduce blends and digraphs only after the ability to decode and read basic CVC words is in place.

Documenting Progress

As with other skills, consistency and flexibility to modify as we go is the key to achieving age appropriate reading skills.



8. DIFFICULTY WITH NUMBERS AND MATH

Classroom Scenario

Anitha is gentle 5.5-year-old who loves to make friends, play make believe and talk. She enjoys coming to school, but absolutely does not like math, to the point that asking her to do math reduces her to tears.

While Anitha can recognize and sequence numbers, there is little else that she can do. She finds it difficult to indicate which of the two given numbers is bigger and which is smaller.



**CHALLENGES WITH AGE APPROPRIATE
COMPREHENSION OF NUMBERS AND MATH**

Teacher's Dilemma

Is Anitha able to make basic
number- quantity associations?

Assess Anitha's present level
of understanding numbers.



What Can You Do?

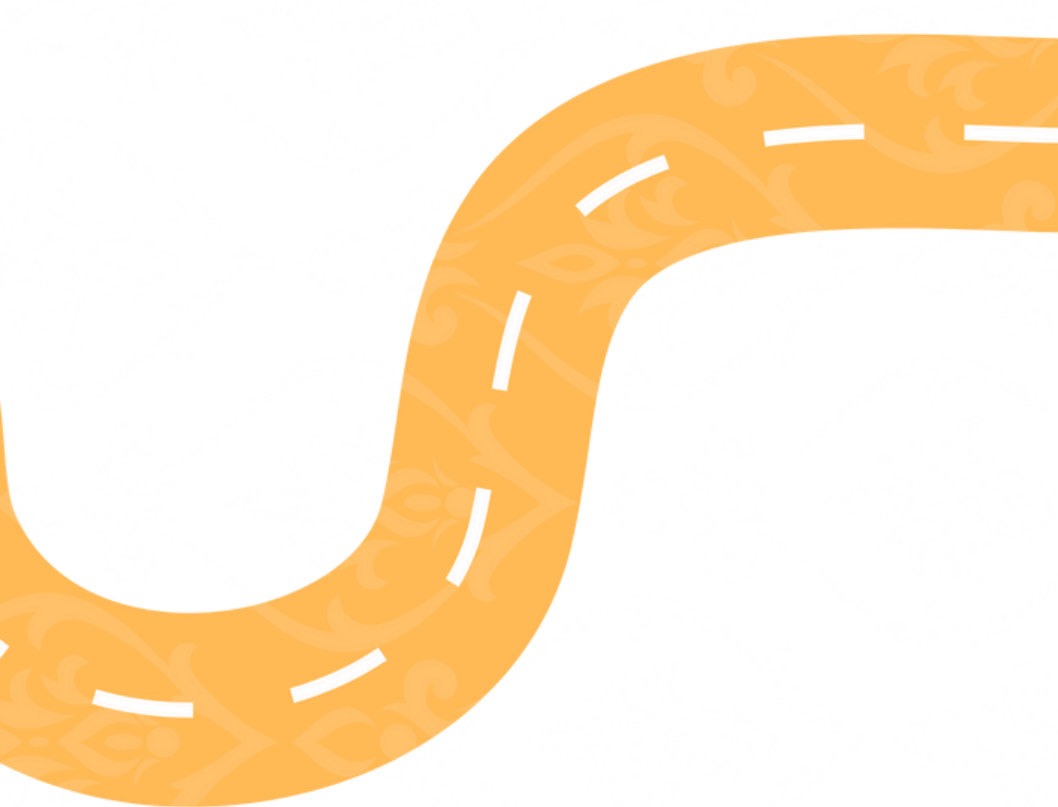
1) Take a step back to introduce materials that re-iterate basic number quantity association.

2) Introduce Number rods and spindle boxes to help achieve number quantity association.

3) Once the understanding at concrete level is in place, introduce picture based counting and matching activities

4) Use numbers to describe objects while having a conversation with her. For example- do you have three idlis in your snack box today? Are there are 6 colour pencils in your pouch?

5) Once the understanding of a number as a certain quantity is in place, introduce the concept of big and small numbers.



DOCUMENTING PROGRESS

6) Begin at a concrete level with materials like number rods, numbers and counters etc.

7) Move to abstract level, indicating the bigger of two numbers on a worksheet, once the understanding at concrete level is achieved.

Number quantity association is a key understanding that needs to be in place to build on further math concepts and it's important to remedy for the lack of this skill.

9. GIFTEDNESS

Classroom Scenario

Ananya is a very intelligent 5.5-year-old, who can read at the level of a second grader. She is also very good at math. But the one thing that Ananya finds very difficult to accept is making mistakes.

Making a mistake triggers an emotional outburst and non stop crying. There are also times at school, when Ananya begins to cry for seemingly no reason and it takes a long time for the crying to stop and for her to settle down.



SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DIFFERENCES

Teacher's Dilemma

What are Ananya's triggers?

Stay calm, observe Ananya and
write down the triggers

Is there a pattern to her
outbursts? Look for patterns

Are there any unusual
sensory responses?

What Can You Do?

1) Re- frame the feedback given to Ananya. For example, rather than saying the second sum is incorrect, you could say you have done a good job. Just check the second sum again to see if it is correct.

2) Do not have a conversation when Ananya is having an outburst. Help her move away from the situation by requesting a trusted adult to take her out, walk around until she calms down. Once she is calm and back, have a conversation with her, in a calm voice, where you encourage her to communicate the trigger.

3) Once she communicates the trigger, help her understand that it's okay to make a mistake or lose a game.

4) Use social stories to help cope with errors and other triggers. Factor in sensory breaks during her day. It can be a break of five minutes in between classes or activities where she gets to do what calms her, like playing in the playground or reading a book.

5) Assign her place to a quieter part of the classroom.



Documenting Progress

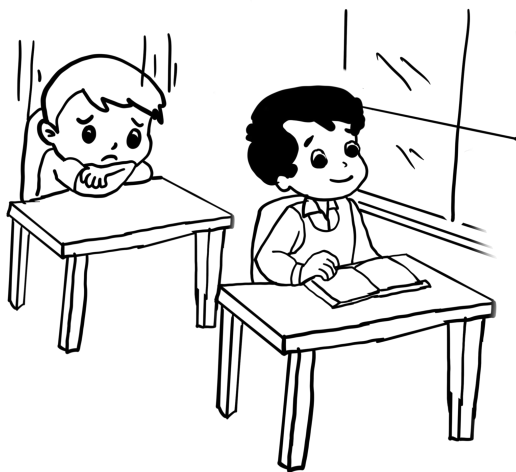
Consistency is the key to helping a child deal with rejection sensitive dysphoria. Praising the child for activities that she has done well while normalizing the concept of making mistakes helps the child to slowly deal with the situation.

10. LACKING CONFIDENCE

Classroom Scenario

Vihaan is a calm 5.5-year-old child who stands out in that he speaks very little, to very few of his peers and he prefers to stay by himself.

He responds to questions asked but barely initiates a conversation with anyone in the class. During the break, he prefers to play by himself with toys or reads a book.



INTROVERTED AND LACKING SELF CONFIDENCE

TEACHER'S DILEMMA

Is Vihaan unable to hold a conversation or is he too shy?

Observe Vihaan to understand why he is aloof.

Does it indicate a lack of confidence?

Observe his body language.

What Can You Do?

1) Assign activities to Vihaan that involve him presenting to the whole class, E.g- Show and tell.

2) Praise him amply when he makes a presentation and highlight the positives.

3) Assign group activities to the whole class . Assign Vihaan to a group where the peers encourage him to speak, wait for his response and take his inputs.

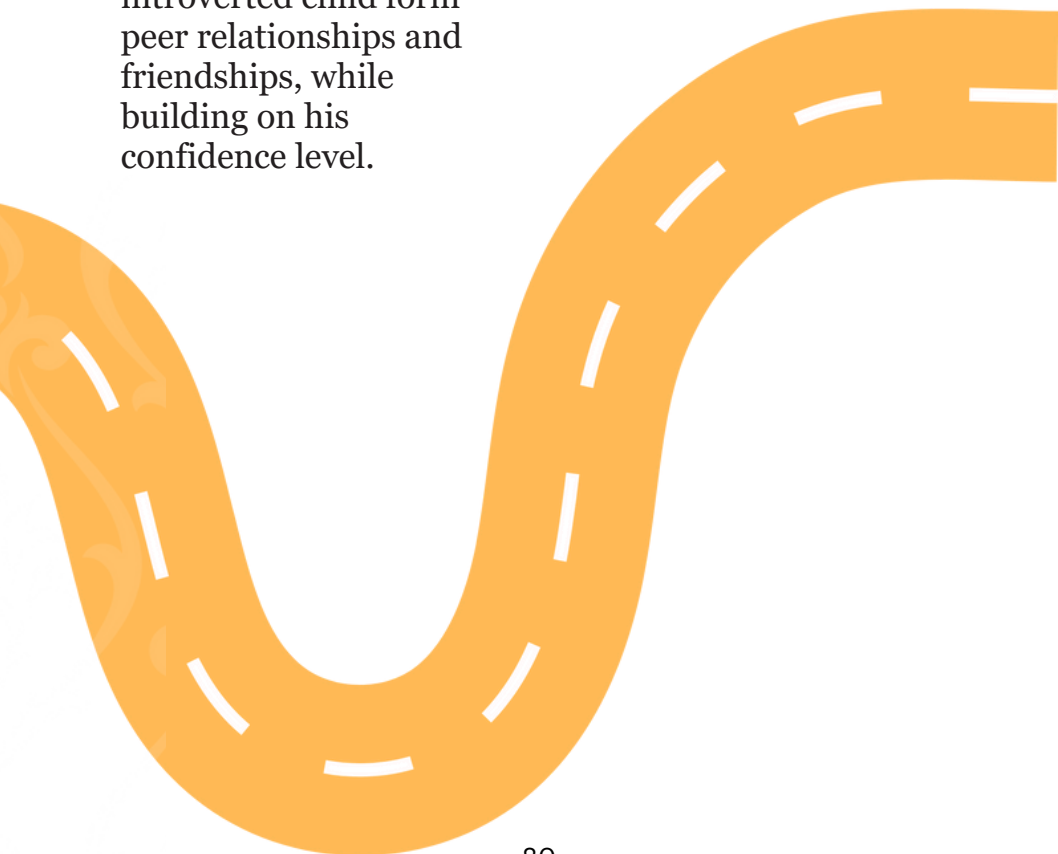
4) Assign an informal buddy, a peer who can initiate conversations with Vihaan during the break time.

5) Encourage parents to set up play dates for Vihaan.

Documenting Progress

As with us adults, many children are extroverts while a few of them are introverts. The aim should be to gently help the introverted child form peer relationships and friendships, while building on his confidence level.

If a child is excessively aloof to the point of not responding to anyone, it might help to indicate the same to the parents.



Practitioner's Musings

What worked for me....



In my Montessori environment, we embrace the unique journey of each child, especially those navigating sensory sensitivities with great care and attention to detail. This is essential as in the pre-primary environment children are often first time school goers who are in the age group of 2.5 to 6 years where the sensory needs are greater even for a typical child. So the children with sensory processing challenges need that extra handholding and attention.

We understand that settling into a new space can be challenging, and we prioritize creating a haven of comfort and security. Starting with the simple yet profound act of defining a personal space—a mat against the wall. Or a chair and table against the wall with we minimize distractions and foster a sense of safety. This thoughtful arrangement allows children to focus, reducing anxiety and mitigating social clumsiness.



Dr.Sumathi Ravindranath

Chairperson of the Indian Montessori Centre & Founder-Director of Discover Montessori. As the Editor of Follow the Child, she actively contributes to Montessori education discourse. Also a member of the Focus Group for the National Education policy 2020, Karnataka, working towards shaping progressive educational frameworks.

Dhwani ध्वनि

Voices of Practitioners Driving Inclusion in Classrooms



Dear Teacher,
Grades 1, 2 and 3 are crucial years in developing the academic skills of a child. It is also during these years that certain differences become more pronounced, prompting the need for an assessment, in order to put together a plan to help the child learn better. Here are a few common scenarios that occur and strategies that the classroom teacher can use to work around a child's difficulties to help her learn better.



2



**PRIMARY-SCHOOL
(AGE 6-9 YEARS)**

1. DIFFICULTY IN READING, WRITING AND MATH INSPITE OF GOOD UNDERSTANDING

Classroom Scenario

Radhika is an intelligent 7- year- old who enjoys and is very good at painting. She understands concepts taught to her orally, but struggles to read grade appropriate text. Her reading skills are inconsistent. Some days

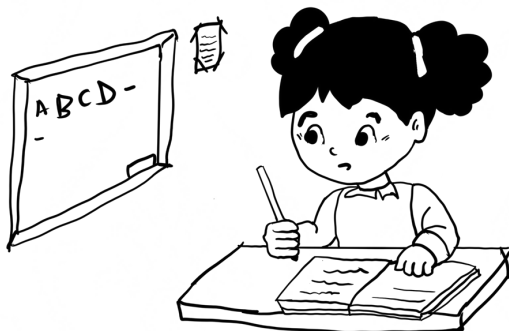
she can read while on some days she struggles to read the same sentence. Her understanding of numbers is also not consistent for her grade. She struggles to perform basic math operations.

She finds it very difficult to copy from the board . Her classwork is often incomplete. She makes errors even when she is asked to copy from a book handed over to her, as she struggles to read the content and spelling is a challenge. She inverts the alphabets while writing and most of them end up looking like a mirror image of the actual alphabet. She cannot follow multiple step instructions like - open page 35 and read the 4th line.

Teacher's Dilemma

Is Radhika comfortable catching a ball, buttoning her shirt and tying shoelaces? Does she get confused between the left and right foot while wearing her shoe? Observe her.

Assess Radhika's current level of understanding of concepts taught to her.



Challenges with grade appropriate reading, writing , spelling and Math despite normal understanding

What Can You Do?

1) Create alternative learning materials for Radhika.

2) Introduce concepts to her at a concrete level. Use a lot of pictures and less text in her reading materials.

3) Create a list of keywords for each chapter- words that she needs to be able to decode and understand in order to understand the lesson.

4) Encourage her to spell these keywords using alphabet tiles and other hands on materials. 5) Deliver the lesson to her in audio format- an audio recording of the text. Use technology extensively in learning and assessment.

Eg- Give her the option to type her answers in a document instead of writing them. Most word processing software like MS Word, have autocorrect and predictive features that help with spelling. Many of them also have screen read feature that reads out the questions to them. 6) Work on basic math understanding using hands on materials. Use math apps to build on comprehension. Simplify the statements in statement sums to fewer words. Use multiple choice questions in assessments.

Documenting Progress

While working on reading, spelling and math difficulties involve a wholly different set of strategies. This is often the domain of specialists, the classroom teacher can modify the materials and mode of delivery and assessment to ensure that grade level concepts are learnt.

2. POOR ATTENTION SPANS

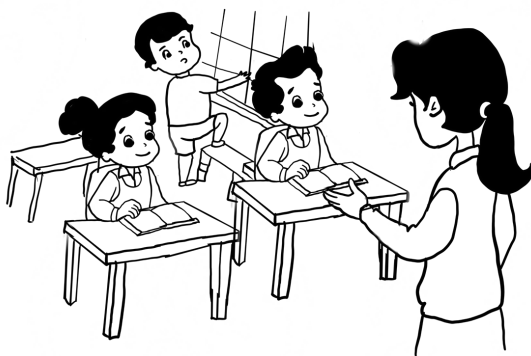
Classroom Scenario

Avik is a smart and energetic eight-year-old. He comprehends what has been taught to him well, but only if he manages to pay attention until the teacher finishes teaching. Sitting in the assigned place in the class is a huge challenge for him. If forced to sit, he fidgets to hold himself together. He strikes a conversation with the student sitting next to him at most inappropriate times, often ending in an argument as the other student finds it very distracting and difficult to finish his work. He also interrupts the teachers in the class and is in a hurry to start an activity before listening to instructions completely, often resulting in mistakes in the activity. He does not have enough focus to copy what is written on the board. His work is incomplete and clumsy, almost as if he is in a hurry to finish it. He talks excessively and in a loud voice, distracting everyone else in the class.

TEACHER'S DILEMMA

Is there a specific pattern to work that he is unable to complete?

Take a look at Avik's work and list down the activities/ worksheets that need completion.



Hyperkinesis, poor attention span and challenges with Task Completion

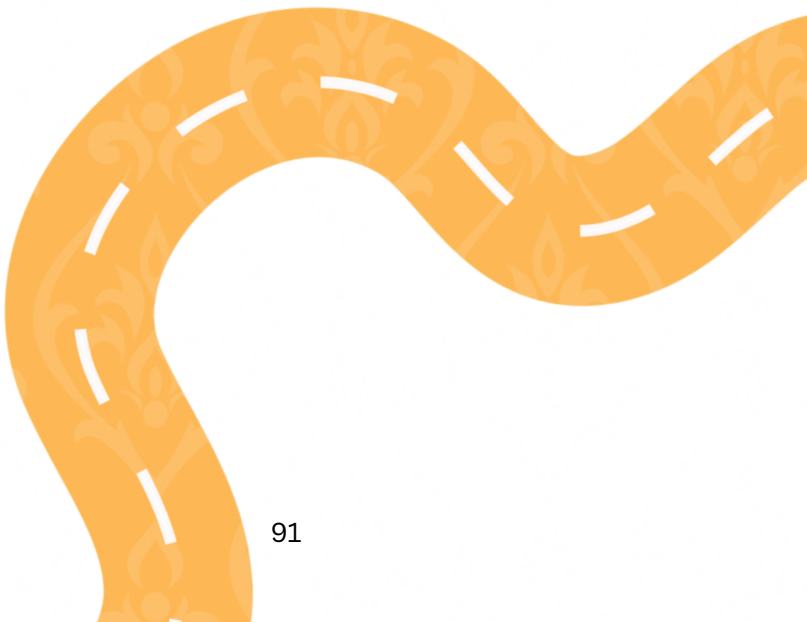
What Can I Do?

- 1) Have a conversation with Avik about the classroom rules and set clear expectations. Eg. You can get up from your place after you complete 4 sums on your worksheet.
- 2) You cannot interrupt the teacher while she is talking or talk to the person sitting next to you until both of you have completed your work.
- 3) Use pictures and visual schedules to re-iterate the above.
- 4) Incorporate breaks in his worktime. If a worksheet has 6 questions, Avik should complete 3, then he can take a break, walk around but after a minute, he has to come right back and complete the remaining 3.
- 5) Once the above has been established and is working well, slowly increase the amount of time he is expected to focus and work before taking a break.
- 6) Remind Avik to slow down in his writing, in his work, in his talking and talk at a lower tone.
- 7) Allow Avik to use fidget toys to calm down.
- 8) Praise small successes to motivate him. Assign him to a quieter part of the classroom.
- 9) Use a timer and prompts to ensure Avik copies what is written on the board.

Documenting Progress

Use multiple choice questions and short quizzes for assessments. Assign leadership roles to Avik in the class, for example the class monitor. This will help him channelize some of his energies and build on a sense of ownership towards his learning.

Monitor Avik's progress and slowly increase expectations.



3. DIFFICULTY IN UNDERSTANDING

Classroom Scenario

Anya is a friendly and sweet 7-year-old who loves to sing. She is also the kindest and most helpful girl in the class. Academic learning is not among Anya's strengths, for her work is often incomplete. She struggles to read at an age appropriate level and finds it difficult to comprehend grade level text.

She also struggles with grade level math. While she has the skill to write, she often does not know what to write. She takes longer to follow instructions and sometimes, even forgets parts of the instruction in the process. Her classwork is clumsy and her bag and belongings are even clumsier and the lack of organization adds to her challenges in learning.

TEACHER'S DILEMMA

Observe Anya and her work
to assess Anya's present level



**LACK OF AGE APPROPRIATE
COGNITIVE SKILLS AND DELAY IN
UNDERSTANDING**

What Can You Do?

1) Introduce alternative learning materials that are more hands on and text and worksheets that use simpler language.

2) Break down your instructions. Use videos and learning apps to teach a concept. Simplify the worksheets.

3) Use visuals to reinforce instructions. Use alternative assessment methods- oral assessment and multiple choice questions.

Documenting Progress

Document progress and strategies that have worked and build on concept learning consistently.

4. PERFECTIONIST/ GIFTED CHILD

Classroom Scenario

Vidhi is an intelligent, sensitive 7-year-old who is a pro at academic learning. Her cognition is above grade level in most subjects. Vidhi is not particularly fond of writing, and she writes in print. She is a perfectionist who dislikes making mistakes so much that she bursts out crying loudly, and is often not easily calmed down. Vidhi is also very sensitive to feedback about areas of improvement. These feedback trigger a bout of loud crying, which takes its time to go away.

Vidhi is an introvert who takes a long time to make friends. She barely initiates conversations with peers and takes her time opening up to them. She is more comfortable talking with people older than her. She has some specific interests and can talk about them for very long periods of time. Vidhi is prone to falling while using the stairs or running or in Physical Education (PE) classes. She is sensitive to loud noises and often avoids PE, because losing a game in usually ends in intensive meltdowns and loud crying.

Teacher's Dilemma

What are the things that trigger meltdowns in her? Observe Vidhi and write down.

Have a conversation with Vidhi to help her understand that it is okay to make mistakes and mistakes are a part of learning.



Giftedness , Socio emotional differences, sensory differences and a spiky learning profile.

What Can You Do?

1) Give differential worksheets to Vidhi, that are slightly more complex for the same topics.

2) When she makes a mistake and begins to cry, let the phase of being overwhelmed pass, do not have a conversation with her until it has passed.

3) Once she has calmed down, help her understand that it is okay to make a mistake, they can be corrected, and it is just a way for us to learn. Give appropriate examples.

4) Use social stories to re-iterate this learning.

Incorporate sensory breaks in Vidhi's schedule, brief periods when she can take a walk, play on the swing or read a book and come right back. Praise Vidhi for work that she has done well. This will build on her confidence and reduce the need for validation. Encourage parents to introduce Vidhi to physical activities like swimming, cycling, badminton etc.

Document Progress

Encourage Vidhi to participate in PE, but for short duration with appropriate breaks. For example if she plays football for ten minutes, then she could take a break for three minutes before going back to play. Remind Vidhi to slow down and focus while using the stairs. Remind Vidhi to slow down while she is writing.

For students with spiky learning profiles, the key to achieving optimal learning outcomes is the consistent reminder that it is okay to make a mistake, while building on their strengths and confidence, which will, in turn, prepare them to accept situations that do not go their way better.

5. BULLYING AND AGGRESSION

Vivek is an energetic 8-year-old, whose energies often get misdirected at others in his class. Known as the class bully, he is the one with the short temper who is prone to getting aggressive when things don't go his way. There are quite a few instances each day when things don't go his way- not

being able to complete the classwork, being told to talk in a low voice, not understanding what is being taught, wanting to be a part of a group of peers who do not want to play with him and more. His behavior often ends up disrupting the class and he ends up hurting others physically in the process.



Teacher's Dilemma

What are Vivek's triggers?

Observe him and have a
conversation to understand
triggers.

What Can You Do?

- 1) Set clear rules and expectations in the class.
- 2) Stay calm.
- 3) Help all children understand that bullying and aggression is not acceptable.
- 4) Have a conversation to understand where the aggression is stemming from.
- 5) Seek help from parents if necessary.
- 6) Use role play and social stories to teach the concept of personal space.
- 7) Practice de-escalation strategies like distraction when the student is beginning to get aggressive.
- 8) Teach strategies for emotional regulation- like breathing or counting to ten, or moving away from the situation that triggers an aggressive response.
- 9) Involve school counsellor. Have an open conversation with the parents to ensure that similar strategies are being practiced at home and at school. Praise the child for progress made and use positive re-enforcement strategies.



Documenting Progress

Establishing ground rules and consistent intervention across environments is key to managing bullying and aggressive behaviors.

Practitioner's Musings : What worked for me....



When we hear the term 'inclusion', the first challenge that comes to our mind is about managing 'behaviours'. But what are these 'behaviours' trying to convey to us and is it all that challenging to manage?

*"Behaviour is a response to both external and internal triggers. **Behaviour is communication. A child tries to say something through behaviour.** Sometimes, it can even be a tool for self regulation. When we try to modify or improve behaviour without understanding the reason behind it, we mostly end up causing irreparable damage to a child's psyche. **To respect and protect a child's dignity is the foundation of all successful facilitation.** Just as all adults do not have the ability to be masters at all skills, so are all children. Children are not a homogenous mass, but individuals with a variety of interests and abilities. The different levels of achievement of a learner are not trophies of triumph for a teacher. They are simply the steps that lead to a further opening up of a child's world.*

***To understand the difference between 'can't' and 'won't' is critical to becoming a successful educator.** The facilitator is richly rewarded when he/she learns to observe the learner and not jump to conclusion based on diagnostic labels.*

To know your learner is a work in progress. Let's not insult the intriguing complexity of any child's personality by a dominating sense of 'I know'. Knowing a child is an ongoing series of discoveries one makes through everyday interactions.'



Champa Saha

An educator with over three decades of experience working with students with diverse needs. Champa was the Founder Principal of Samhita Academy, an inclusive K12 school in Bangalore and currently runs a home schooling program for diverse learners at her centre - Mayakunj

Dhwani ध्वनि

Voices of Practitioners Driving Inclusion in Classrooms



Dear Teacher,
Many students discover their passions outside the classroom. Teachers play a key role in recognizing hidden talents and providing opportunities for students to develop their unique skills. By organizing and overseeing extracurricular programs, teachers help students learn to collaborate, communicate, and support one another—skills essential for success in life.



3



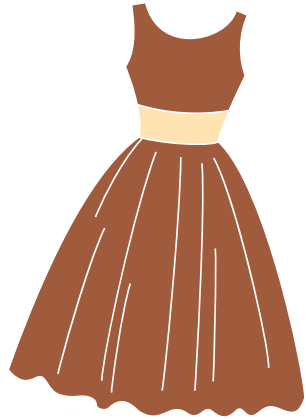
THE JOYS OF EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

INCLUSION IN EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

It is a near universal opinion that extracurricular activities that we were a part of our childhood, have become our core memories. These activities helped us bond, build on our confidence and help us develop useful skills. But **when it comes to neurodivergent children, given their sensory profiles and differential needs, often, the question is , how do we include children with differential needs** in the school annual day program, sports day or even the class excursion or field trip? And like everything else, this is no rocket science. All that it requires is a few tweaks and the ability to work together with parents as a team. Here are a few pointers that will help make extra curricular activities more meaningful and fun for those children in your class who are ‘different’.

REMEMBER TO ..

1) Plan certain programs or roles within programs that do not require the participant to wear specific types of costumes, like in the school Annual Day. Many neurodivergent children struggle with wearing specific costumes for a dance or drama.



2) Allow a child with noise sensitivity to go on stage with her headphones on.

3) Tweak the steps of a dance to include steps that can be performed by all children, including those who struggle to imitate specific movements.



4) Structure the practice time. Let the neurodivergent child be in a quiet space in school until it is her turn to practice.

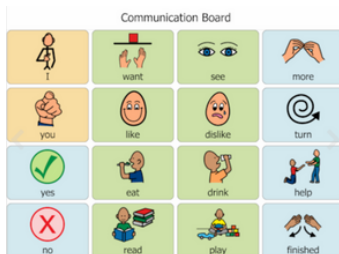


5) Should there be a need for a child to wear a particular costume, please inform the parents well in advance so that they can get the child to wear that costume for some time everyday until she gets used to the feeling of wearing it.

6) Do not insist on the neurodivergent child coming in early, like the other children, to the venue on the day of the performance. Try to reduce the time that the neurodivergent child is present backstage or in the green room. Seek parents' help.



7) Stick visual cues and communication boards in the venue.



8) Seek the parents' help to include a neurodivergent child when going on a field trip or excursion.



9) Be flexible to explore options like the child being dropped and picked up by the parent at the venue directly, instead of school, or if need be, a parent accompanying the child to the trip.



10) When planning for sports day, include activities and games that will be easy for all children and non competitive sports.



What worked for me....

Parents Musing towards practitioners contribution toward their child's achievements



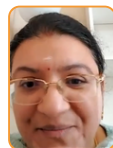
Kaarthik, a regular performer at various public forums

Kaarthik was studying in Candor International School for 5 years during his early schooling period. Candor helped Kaarthik in spotting his interest in music by having him in school choir group and giving him his first stage experience, that's where he learnt his first song - What a Wonderful World, which still is very close to him.

Candor also played a vital role in building his reading skills, seeing his interest in reading, the class Teacher encouraged him to prepare and present a chart regularly to his class friends, he enjoyed the attention he got from his classmates and helped building confidence.

The buddy system they had, also helped in including Kaarthik in many of their classroom group activities.

**Priya,
Kaarthik's mother**



Meet the teacher behind Kaarthik's success



Puja Sood

Trained as a developmental psychologist, with 20+ years of experience as a special educator, Pooja is a firm believer that 'every child can learn' when provided with the right environment and support. As the Head of Additional Learning Support, Candor International School, she actively promotes awareness of the rights of children with special needs, collaborates closely with students, parents, and teachers to foster an inclusive school environment. Puja is one of the practitioners contributing to this resource.

Dhwani ध्वनि

Voices of Practitioners Driving Inclusion in Classrooms



Dear Teacher,
Let's move on to understanding what comprises sensory classrooms. Each child processes sensory input differently. A skilled teacher recognizes signs of sensory overload or sensory-seeking behavior and adjusts teaching methods accordingly, ensuring comfort and focus. In a sensory classroom, teachers help students build communication skills, practice empathy, and navigate social interactions in a way that respects their sensory sensitivities.



4



CREATING A SENSORY SMART CLASSROOM

Many challenges that neurodivergent children face in the classroom arise from sensory differences; **differences in the way their senses perceive the world around them and themselves in relation to the world around them.** Here are some telltale 'behaviours and signs' that could be indicative of differences in sensory processing, especially in children over 5 years of age:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Unusual sensitivity to noise, lights, smells and other sensory stimuli | 5. Has difficulty tolerating different textures of food and clothing |
| 2. Being fidgety and easily distracted | 6. Challenges with fine motor skills and handwriting |
| 3. Prone to emotional meltdowns | 7. Fear of playground equipment like swings and slides |
| 4. Has poor balance, falls down often and is pretty clumsy | |



Often, it takes very simple accommodations to make the classroom sensory friendly, not just for the neurodivergent student, but for all students.

Content credit: Sol's Arc

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE-

Setting up the classroom

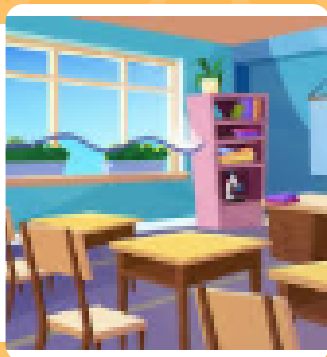
Use neutral wall colours and limit decorations to reduce clutter or visual distractions.



Use visual cues to clearly define spaces such as floor markings or curtains to delineate different areas of the classroom (e.g. quiet area, workstations, sensory corner).



Design spaces with features that enhance communication accessibility, such as good lighting, minimal background noise, to reduce auditory distractions and support speech understanding.



Provide break cards to help students take a break when they experience sensory challenges or fatigue.



Display visual schedules or daily routines using pictures or symbols to help students understand and anticipate classroom activities, reducing anxiety and increasing predictability.



Use labeled bins or shelves to store materials and supplies in a structured manner.

This helps students locate and access items independently.



Use signs with big, bold images and minimal text to help children understand where to go.





Incorporating play stations with water, sand, or textured surfaces that children can touch and explore to help them in sensory regulation.

Avoid seating these children near windows, doors, or other high-traffic areas to reduce external distractions.



Incorporate short, frequent movement breaks into the daily schedule to allow the child to expend excess energy and improve focus.

Provide clear explanations and guided practice to scaffold learning (I do, We do and You do), gradually increasing complexity to support independent problem-solving skills.

The Gradual Release Model



Figure 1 - The Gradual Release Model

INSTRUCTIONS & LANGUAGE LEARNING

Break down instructions and tasks into smaller, manageable steps. Provide clear, consistent prompts and cues can support learning.



Use visual aids such as pictures, symbols, flash cards to help make language more concrete and understandable.

Improve attention by using both your body and your voice when communicating.

Eg Extend your hand to point when you say “look” and nod your head when you say “yes”, use their name when giving instructions.



Offer structured practice opportunities with plenty of repetition. Start with simple problems and gradually increase the level of difficulty.



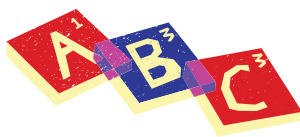
Allow for discussion in the classroom, among peers, and in a small group format.

Make language learning fun and engaging by incorporating games, storytelling, role-playing, and interactive activities.



Allow the child to express themselves through non-verbal means such as gestures, facial expressions, and body language. Emphasize that communication is not limited to verbal speech.

Use tactile tools like sand trays for writing practice or letter tiles for word building.

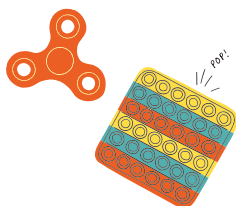
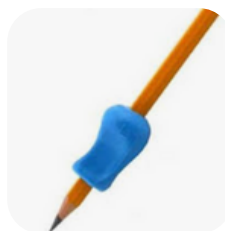


Offer clear, step-by-step instruction on each language component. For instance, when teaching blending sounds, explicitly demonstrate how to combine individual sounds to form a word.



Emphasize phonological awareness skills, including rhyming, segmenting, blending, and manipulating sounds within words.

Wrap a rubber band/clay around the barrel of a pen/pencil for easy gripping. Use grippers if available.



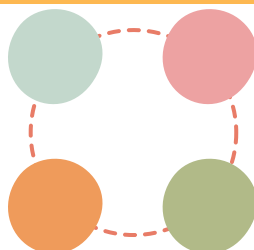
Use tools like fidget toys or stress balls that children can use to help manage restlessness and maintain focus.

Reading windows help children track better during reading.



TEACHING NUMERACY

Utilize visual aids such as manipulatives, diagrams, charts, and drawings to make math concepts more concrete and understandable.



Use examples, problems, and activities related to their interests to increase motivation and engagement in learning.



Make teaching math fun by playing games with flash cards or online apps.

Use multiple formats and methods to choose concepts and providing flexibility when teaching and assessing.





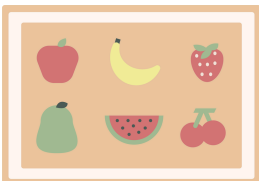
Use real-life situations that make problems functional and applicable to everyday life.

Using different colours to differentiate between operations or highlighting key information.



Demonstrate each step of a problem-solving process. For example, show how to add two numbers by aligning them vertically and adding one column at a time.

Including movement in learning, such as counting steps, hopping to numbers, or using large floor mats with numbers.



Create wall posters or individual charts for quick reference, making it easier for children to understand and recall information.

Practitioner's Musings

What worked for me....

“One example of inclusivity that I have seen work is, when working with a student who had been labeled with ADHD, I encouraged the teacher to offer flexible seating options and use shorter, more interactive lessons. This shift allowed the child to engage more effectively, demonstrating that small changes can improve a child's ability to focus. Another simple adjustment I've seen work is assigning these students a role, like being the classroom monitor for distributing books. This gives them an opportunity to move around and expend some of their extra energy productively, without disrupting the flow of the class. It's a great way to channel their focus and help them stay engaged while contributing to the classroom environment.

This approach helps both the teacher and the parent realize that the label is just a surface-level descriptor. What truly matters is how we use it to work more effectively and efficiently with the child, focusing on their strengths and unique needs.



Varsha Ramdas

Varsha is a passionate special educator with experience in both special schools like Ishanya India Foundation l and mainstream schools like Greenwood High . She strives to understand and support each child's unique needs, believing that shaping young minds is the best way to make a positive impact on society.

Dhwani ध्वनि

Voices of Practitioners Driving Inclusion in Classrooms



Dear Teacher,
Your language plays a crucial role in fostering an inclusive classroom. Using inclusive language ensures that all students feel valued, respected, and represented. When teachers model respectful and inclusive communication, students are more likely to mirror that behavior in their interactions with each other.



5



LANGUAGE MATTERS

A classroom is a microcosm of the world at large and is, in its very nature, diverse. What this entails for the classroom teacher is to have answers for the many questions that are directed at her by the young and curious learners. The attitude and perception of the classroom teacher towards children who are 'different' in some ways, often helps shape the perceptions of the learners in the class.

In the following pages are situations where the **language used by the teacher, be that in addressing a learner's challenges in the classroom, or giving feedback to the parents, plays a vital role.** It also has some pointers to use effective, objective language to ensure a truly inclusive classroom environment.

The classroom teacher is in a unique position of observing certain challenges that some learners may possess and identify ones that need support from sources outside of the classroom, which entails communication of the same to the parents and other primary caregivers.

LANGUAGE IN THE CLASS

BE MINDFUL TO...

1) Avoid ‘diagnosing’ a child- While the classroom teacher may observe certain behaviours or challenges that point to a certain neurotype, it is not in the space of a classroom teacher to use a diagnostic label to address the child. Mention of diagnostic labels like ‘autistic’ , ‘dyslexic’ etc should be avoided in the class

2) Use a person- first language- For children who come into the school system with a diagnosis, **do not emphasise on the disability**. The focus of the feedback should be on the specific behaviour or challenge and ways to correct it. Don’t refer to a diagnostic label for the same. Eg: Harish is a 7 year old who finds it difficult to stay in his seat and complete the task assigned to him. He is constantly on the move, often disturbing others in the class. The feedback to Harish should not include terms like ‘hyperactive’. It should be, ‘Harish, you should sit down and finish two sums, after which you can take a small break, but come right back to finish the next two sums.’

3) Be aware of your implicit bias- Take a moment to step back and observe your own bias. Is that bias interfering with the way you interact with and support a child who is ‘different’?

4) Create a safe space for discussion- Encourage questions about differences from other learners in the class and answer them as objectively as possible.

5) Respect the privacy of the child and do not use ‘labels’ to discuss or describe the child to other colleagues.

Mastering the art of giving feedback to parents

Being sensitive and empathetic while delivering hard messages is the key to giving feedback to parents about certain concerning behaviours or challenges that you have observed.

A FEW POINTERS

1) Observe and record- Observe the child's behaviour or challenges and keep a record of the same. It is very common for most young children to have a 'bad day' once in a while. It is only when there is a consistent pattern to a behaviour or a challenge, that steps need to be taken to work on them or work around them.

2) Try to figure out the possible triggers to the behaviour

3) Fix a time for interaction

4) Begin with the positives, the things that the child is able to do well

5) Be objective while giving feedback about the challenges. As always, the feedback should be about the challenge and not about the child. Quote instances where the said challenge has occurred.

A FEW POINTERS

6) **Avoid the use of jargons** or labels and do not 'diagnose' the child they deal with the similar challenge at home

7) **Listen to the parents actively.** Acknowledge their feelings and perspectives and try to get an understanding of how 8) **Collaborate with the parents** to come up with steps to work on the challenges.

9) **Document** the same and **follow up on progress.**

Remember, you make a difference

While it takes a village to raise a child, it probably takes an entire country to raise a child who is 'different' and working together as a team, with the parents and other primary caregivers and ensuring an open line of communication , goes a long way in making classroom learning meaningful for all learners.

Dhwani ध्वनि

Voices of Practitioners Driving Inclusion in Classrooms



Dear Teacher,
The use of multiple instructional materials, methods and assessments ensures optimal learning outcomes for all learners, including neurodivergent learners, thereby making learning meaningful for all.

In today's times, technology like Artificial Intelligence and various easy to use design software are very effective tools that teachers can make use of.



6

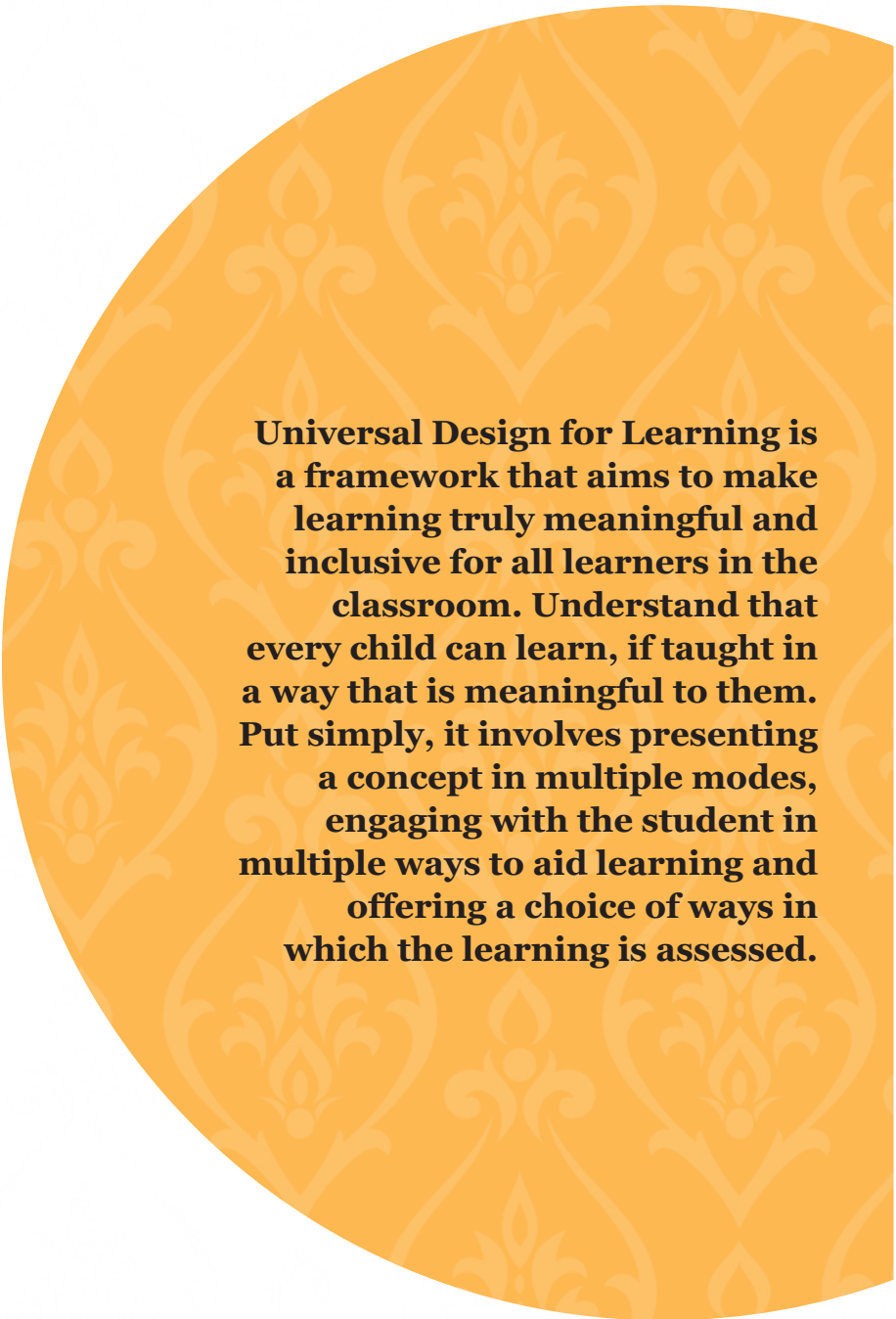


UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

The pathway to making classroom
learning meaningful for all


Universal Design for Learning functions on 3 basic tenets:

1. **Multiple means of representation-** A concept can be taught in multiple ways, not just from a textbook . Eg Parts of a plant can be taught by showing them in an actual plant, showing a picture with the parts labelled, using an interactive learning app that labels parts of a plant, listing its functions and more.
2. **Multiple means of expression-** A student's learning of a concept can be assessed in many ways, not just in writing. In the above example, a student can be given a plant and asked to verbally name its parts or label it on a worksheet or can do the same in an interactive app. Providing multiple means of expression helps in assessing a child's understanding more accurately.
3. **Multiple means of engagement-** Activities and interactive sessions around a concept help sustain learners focus and ensure optimal learning outcomes for all learners. In the above example, a learners can be asked to plant a seed, water it regularly and write down or talk about the changes they see and about how the seed germinates and from it a new plant grows.



Universal Design for Learning is a framework that aims to make learning truly meaningful and inclusive for all learners in the classroom. Understand that every child can learn, if taught in a way that is meaningful to them. Put simply, it involves presenting a concept in multiple modes, engaging with the student in multiple ways to aid learning and offering a choice of ways in which the learning is assessed.

Artificial Intelligence for Inclusive Classrooms



Role of AI in facilitating an inclusive classroom

One of the key ways to make classroom learning meaningful for diverse learners is by offering them learning **materials that are better suited for their learning profiles and cognitive level.** The **challenge for the classroom teacher is often that of time constraint.** Between putting together lesson plans, worksheets and learning materials for the class as a whole, classes and assessments, a big chunk of the work day is done. With a little planning and utilizing of generative AI, creation of differential learning materials becomes an easy task.

What Can AI Do For You?

Generative AI uses machine learning techniques to create new content – text, images, music, audio files and more, based on the prompts given. Once the skill of giving appropriate prompts is mastered, generating customized alternative learning materials becomes easy. Here are a few pointers to keep in mind :

- 1) Having a good understanding of the neurodivergent learner's preferred learning style and cognitive level helps in generating the right learning material in the right form (worksheets, audio lessons etc)
- 2) When given the right prompts, AI can help create a differential learning plan and suggest appropriate mode of delivery.
- 3) AI can help create worksheets at different levels for a said topic.
- 4) AI can help create mind maps, t- charts and other visually organized information that helps neurodivergent learners learn better.
- 5) AI can help create different assessments for diverse learners.
- 6) AI can help understand the sensory profile of a learner and guide the classroom teacher with optimal ways to deliver learning to the said learner.



Some useful Gen AI tools

- 1) Gemini
- 2) Synthesia
- 3) Chat GPT
- 4) Khan Academy
AI Tutor

Dhwani ध्वनि

Voices of Practitioners Driving Inclusion in Classrooms



Dear Teacher,
Making classrooms inclusive is a mandatory requirement in India. Our laws and policy make inclusion the cornerstone of every classroom. But the execution of these well meaning laws lie only in your hand. We hope you not only see the rationale for these legal guidelines but also the value in making your classroom work for every child.



Practitioner's Musings

What worked for me....

“ As an illustrator, my passion and experience revolve around creating visuals for higher impact. But when I started bringing my design skills to work on projects around neurodiversity and inclusion at Bookosmia, I gained a deeper understanding of the role visuals play in making learning and reading more meaningful for *all* learners. One of the most rewarding projects I've worked on is a sticker book designed specifically for neurodiverse children to help develop their fine motor skills. What started as a tool for neurodiverse learners has now evolved into an activity that can be enjoyed by all children, not just promoting skill development across diverse needs. My design work on books by neurodiverse authors and illustrators have made me realize that by thoughtfully integrating visuals—whether through a book, stickers, or other interactive materials—we can create opportunities for all students to engage, learn, and thrive. It's clear that when we make inclusivity a priority in our designs, we are not only supporting neurodiverse learners but also fostering an environment where every child feels valued and capable of success.

Pooja Saklani



Pooja is a prolific illustrator with over 25 children's books with Bookosmia to her credit, many of which are now in schools like Natkhat Scientists, Namaste Yatri while others have made it to Amazon Bestsellers, some by neurodiverse authors. She won the 'Best Thesis' award at Doon University for her pathbreaking neuroneutral sticker book by Bookosmia. Her designs have been presented to esteemed personalities like President of India Ms Droupadi Murmu and legendary writer Ruskin Bond. She lives in the serene hills of Uttarakhand.

Dhwani ध्वनि

Voices of Practitioners Driving Inclusion in Classrooms



Dear Teacher,

In India, all aspects of living for people with disabilities- education, work, healthcare, accessibility and more, is governed by the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. Section 17 of the RPwD Act mandates inclusive education for all persons with disabilities.

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) emphasises on inclusive and equitable education with the goal of providing access to schooling for all.



7



LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND INCLUSION

The RPwD Act requires the appropriate government to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy the right to equality, life with dignity and respect for their integrity equally with others. The National Education Policy further **emphasizes the need for inclusion in classrooms for children with disabilities.**

KEY TAKEAWAYS OF THE RPWD ACT

- 1) Inclusive Education for People with Disabilities is mandatory
- 2) People with disabilities should have equal access to opportunities for education, sports and recreation activities
- 3) Children with disabilities should not be discriminated against and should be able to fully participate in the education process
- 4) Schools, colleges and universities should provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities in order to develop academically and socially
- 5) Children with disabilities should be taught in the most appropriate language using the most appropriate communication methods
- 6) Reserved seats in government schools, colleges, higher educational institutions and establishments for people with qualifying impairments is mandatory
- 7) Focus should be to promote awareness and sensitise the stakeholders in various educational institutions about disability

Rights of People With Disabilities

Put simply, the law mandates that children with disabilities enjoy equal opportunities to learn, work and lead a fulfilling life.



NEP and Inclusive Learning

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) emphasises on inclusive and equitable education with the goal of providing access to schooling for all. Here are some goals and strategies outlined in NEP 2020:

1) Inclusive education for students with disabilities at both primary and secondary stages: This program ensures **that students with disabilities complete 8 of elementary schooling and 4 years of secondary schooling**

2) **Sensitization programs-** The policy mandates sensitisation programs for all stakeholders to remove

biases and stereotypes and develop respect for diversity

3) Continuous Teacher Training- The policy emphasises the need for continuous teacher training and professional development to help teachers implement inclusive teaching methods.

4) **Special Educational Zones-** The policy proposes setting up of special educational zones in regions with large populations of students with special educational needs (SEN)

5) Curriculum Adaptation- The policy recommends adapting the curriculum to the needs of the students and the use of flexible teaching-learning strategies.



Real Progress

While making classrooms inclusive is a mandatory requirement, we hope teachers also see the value of doing so and feel equipped to do so.

CONCLUSION

As you conclude this insightful manual created by Bookosmia on strategies for inclusion, remember that you hold the key to unlocking each student's potential, regardless of their differences. Your dedication to understanding and accommodating these differences is pivotal in creating an environment where every child can thrive.

Each small adjustment you make in your classroom—whether it's adapting teaching methods, providing additional support, or simply showing empathy—has a profound impact on a student's learning journey. You are not just teaching subjects; you are nurturing young minds and fostering a community of acceptance and support.

Thank you for your passion, patience, and perseverance in championing every child's right to learn and succeed. Together, we can create classrooms where every student feels valued, understood, and empowered to reach their full potential.



Sonali Saini

As Founder of Sol's Arc, a nonprofit committed to providing inclusive education solutions that address inequities faced by vulnerable populations. Sol's ARC works with state governments to improve foundational learning outcomes for all children, with a special focus on children with disabilities. Sonali has a master's degree in special education and expertise in inclusive pedagogy development.

Dhwani ध्वनि

Voices of Practitioners Driving Inclusion in Classrooms



Dear Teacher,
We hope you found this resource of some value to make your own classrooms joyful for and accepting of every student, however diverse their learning needs. Many practitioners came together to lend in their inputs after years of driving inclusion in their classrooms. Today you are one of them. We wait to hear from you!

Write to us at
sara@bookosmia.com



NOTES

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