

Emotional Impairment and Psychology in the Classroom

Kathryn Lee Souders*
University of Michigan

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses students with emotional impairment and the educational psychology behind aiding these students in the classroom setting. Learners in the K-12 grade levels have a variety of emotional impairments that can affect classroom behavior and performance. Behaviors and actions are caused by many underlying psychological stressors and triggers. In examining these, specific strategies and teaching techniques to help emotionally impaired students become a working part of the learning environment are important for their achievement.

KEYWORDS: Behavior, Classroom, Education, Emotional Impairment, Learning, Psychology.

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to shed light on emotional impairments in the public education system, and to emphasize the need to address and include this portion of students using successful strategies. Many teachers and parents alike do not fully understand the needs of students who suffer from emotional impairments, generally leaving them excluded from classroom learning. By raising awareness, and identifying symptoms and key behavior patterns, both parents and educators can improve learning practices for these learners. Additionally, the learners themselves will be part of and engaged with participation to remove inhibitors and break through perceived limitations by recognizing emotional impairment teaching instructions. Teachers are empowered through knowledge and information on the criteria of emotional impairment. With skill and applied practices in place, tools to improve learning and connect with emotionally impaired members who can benefit from these methods to overcome learning hurdles.

2. EMOTIONAL IMPAIRMENTS

Emotional impairment, or emotional disturbance, is defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as persons exhibiting at least one of the following; "(A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors. (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers. (C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances. (D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression. (E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems" [1]. Each of these criterion can be commonly seen as comorbid with other symptoms. As many students are seen with symptoms of the listed or emotional impairment like, one must see a professional psychologist to be properly evaluated and officially diagnosed.

The most common emotional impairments seen in students K-12 are depressive, bi-polar, post-traumatic stress, obsessive-compulsive, anxiety, and phobia disorders.

* Corresponding author. Tel.:
E-mail address: ksouders@emich.edu

3. PSYCHOLOGY

The DSM-V is the official guide containing the criterion for diagnosing emotional impairment in the United States. It has been found that about 1% of students in the United States have emotional impairments, which are receiving special education. The preadolescents and adolescents estimated to have emotional and behavioral impairments are between 16% and 18% [2]. In this case pre-adolescents are considered to be between the ages of birth to twelve years old and adolescents are thirteen to seventeen years of age.

There are a few tools to read intellectual impairment and functioning. The Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS) is a relatively new measure that looks across eight domains; school, home, community, behavior toward others, emotions, self-harmful behavior, substance use, and thinking [3]. The CAFAS has statements that psychologists answer with a minimal/none scale to severe. An older second instrument used to diagnose emotional impairment is the MACC Behavioral Adjustment Scale. This scale rates the psychopathology present [4]. Lastly, teacher rating scales and parent rating scales which are very common use for psychologists assessing students from childhood to adolescents. Both of these assessments allow the recording of observable behaviors of the student that are divided into different age appropriate forms [5].

Psychological stressors and triggers such as trauma, major life changes, and biological changes in chemical productions are largely seen in students as influences for their emotional impairments. The same psychological stressors are seen in adults, and this is why many of the emotional disorders seen in children/adolescents are still present as they mature into adult life [6]. Also, to be included and considered with psychological stressors and triggers is witness to life altering experiences, significant loss, profound hardship, and survival experiences (most commonly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder).

4. INSTRUCTION

Many students with emotional impairments have comorbid diagnosis linked with behavioral issues. Understanding both the behavior and what is causing the behavior is key in being able to accurately teach these students. Numerous students are excluded in school due to their emotional impairments. As found in the *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, "school exclusion remained one of the most common disciplinary responses, it is not considered an effective strategy for improving problem behavior" [7]. Many of the disciplinary actions used in education are rigid and automatic. John R. Kelly also states, "Historically, youth with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) have experienced higher rates of absenteeism, lower grade point averages, and higher course failure than their non-disabled peers; as a result students with EBD are at significant risk of school failure, dropping out of school, and experiencing poor life outcomes" [8]. Again, this is why educator understanding is important in cases with emotional impairment. By understanding the individual and the specific impairment teachers can educate, to the best of their ability, the students with impairments.

There are some instructional programs such as the Prevention of Emotional-Social Disorders for Children with special needs (PESS). This program is in place to aid in the understanding of education for these students inside the home and the classroom alike [9]. It is very important for teachers and parents to be united and under the same understanding when addressing student needs.

Emotional impairments break into two categories, internal and external. Internalized students tend to have an over-controlled and inhibited style. Characteristics of this are often seen as withdrawn and lonely. On the other hand students with externalized emotional impairments

are often seen with uncontrolled and acting out styles. Each category can exemplify additional traits and characteristics.

These two categories both have students that have poor academic performance due to the lack of attendance as mentioned above. Students with emotional impairments are less likely to be set in regular general education classrooms and they are less likely to perform as well as other students. Since they are less likely to attain the achievement and academic performance of other students, teachers need to be especially aware of their learning needs. Most students have been found to perform at least one grade level lower than their current grade placement, and closely perform at the same level as students with learning disabilities [10].

It has been found that students with emotional impairment that combinations of methods works best to meet their learning needs. Computer-assisted instruction combined with teaching-mediated instruction showed a significant increase in learning, take away, in students with emotional impairments [11]. Combined teaching strategies worked again in a study by Cerar, in which students benefited from multiple small instruction steps that broke down the process into individual steps (on paper) to complete the assignments, after verbal instruction was given [12]. Both studies used teaching strategies, but were not limited to, outlined in figure one. Educating students to be able to help themselves succeed as well as perform well in an academic setting is the underlying goal as educators. Ultimately, having the student know accomplishment and successful results improves the total learning episode.

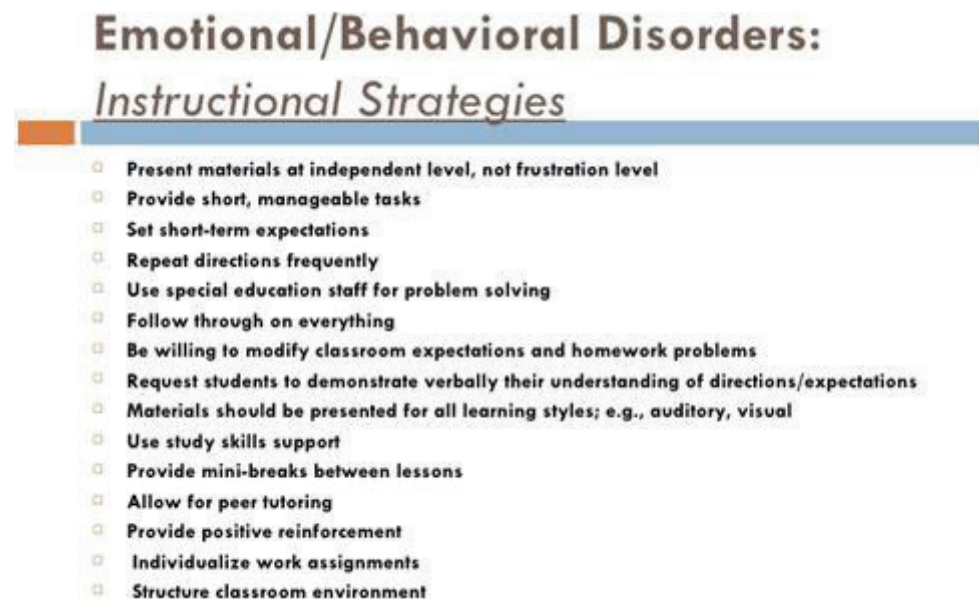


Fig. 1.
Teaching Strategies for Students with Emotional Impairments [13]

5. CONCLUSION

The best way to educate students with emotional disorders is to understand their disorders to the fullest and teach with combined styles. In using combined styles of teaching, it is very important to relate the information to the students. If it is not relevant to their lives, the motivation and underlying need for knowledge will be squandered. Parent and instructor

involvement in identifying successful learning applications can build improved education results. Individuals will require a variety of methods to be established. Upon identifying the successful educational styles, a customized foundation can present itself and be used to build further successful teaching applications for student progress and growth inside of and outside educational settings.

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