

Discussion of How Pupils' Learning is Affected by their Physical, Intellectual, Emotional and Social Development

Lack of development in each of these areas can limit a person's ability to learn in certain ways. In most cases it is the higher processes that suffer most. The opportunities for investigation and self or group-motivated study rarely present themselves. Suitable differentiation can help alleviate these problems to some extent, but in the worst cases retreat must be made to rote learning.^{6,7}

Through this essay reference will be made to four individuals at Darland High School, Rosset. Most are on the school's SEN register. All are given false names.

Physical ability can cause many problems in the classroom, but it is often the easiest to get round. Providing access and other environmental obstacles are removed most pupils can take part fully in lessons. Attention must be paid not only to physical access but also timetabling to avoid awkward journeys. Problems may occur in practical scenarios, but these are never the only way to acquire an understanding of a subject.¹ Some disabilities may slow down the rate of working. However, given sufficient support (which may include removal from mainstream lessons which move too fast) there shouldn't be too great an obstacle to learning.²

Sarah (Yr8) spends most of her time in a wheelchair, only leaving it behind for lessons. She is always very keen to be involved. This does cause some problems in PE, where she charges around oblivious to the risk to herself. Although there is no risk involving her in classroom activities, she has some problems which limit her learning. She writes very slowly and misses out words. This leads to several major obstacles to her learning. Firstly, she takes a very long time to write notes or answer questions. Often this leads to her missing important instructions or not finishing work. In some cases she tells a support worker what to write for her. This speeds things up a bit, but still means that she can miss instructions or information. Whichever method of writing is used, her notes are lacking something every lesson. Help sheets are discouraged because she needs as much practice writing as she can get. At home she often takes so long to do other tasks that she doesn't have time for homework, which would take her a long time anyway. As a result of these issues she does very badly on

tests, despite knowing many answers when asked. Despite having a support worker writing for her, she regularly fails to get a level 3.

Louise (Yr8) is blind in one eye and partially sighted in the other. Reading the board is fine, as she carries a small telescope which allows her to see provided she sits where the light is just right. The problem comes in experiments, where her peripheral vision is not good enough to avoid some accidents. Nevertheless she isn't at too much risk if she is careful. Probably related to her sight is that she gets very scared if someone comes within a couple of feet of her, and she often refuses to work with certain people. Despite these problems she is making good progress, attaining level 5 in tests.

Intellectual can be used to mean many things. Here it is taken to refer to the reasoning and analytical ability of the individual concerned⁸. Low intellectual development can cut off the higher learning skills. With limited reasoning and analytical powers it would prove hard to extract relevant information from a normal lesson. The problem would reveal itself most clearly in a problem-solving situation, perhaps even as simple as finding an answer in a book. Low intellectual development should be responded to by attempts to give solutions to situations. If this fails to help them learn actively, then recourse will be made to memorisation of given facts.^{3,9}

On the other hand, a highly developed intellect could become frustrated by overly simple tasks. If the majority of lessons are aimed at memorising information with no allowance for problem-solving then boredom could set in very quickly. This can lead to stagnation and in some cases to behavioural problems. Another problem facing those who are used to finding out for themselves is that they cannot simply remember what they are told. If they are not given the opportunity to investigate they may not learn as much as they could otherwise. When high intellectual development is tied in with specific learning difficulties the frustration is much greater.⁸

Richard (Yr9) is severely dyslexic but one of the brightest pupils in the year (judged by oral questioning). His reasoning and problem-solving abilities are highly tuned. Unfortunately he has great difficulties writing notes or test papers. His test scores lead to him being put in a bottom set this year. This has led to him not being stretched as much as he should be. Less of the material is covered by investigation than the top set, which helps most of the rest of the class, so he finds it hard to get a handle on it. Next

year he will probably be put in the top set to see if he can get the most out of the lessons as he can.

Emotional development mostly cuts down on learning opportunities by preventing the individual getting on with the tasks set. Inappropriate talking is one example. General reluctance to concentrate on study can severely reduce learning.⁸

Daniel (Yr7) has severe emotional and behavioural problems. These came to a head during my time teaching him and he is now on the way to being statemented. The cause of his problems have not been identified, but it is likely that they have been complicated by his parents splitting up. The symptoms were varied, some easily sorted out or bypassed. He will not sit down or be quiet in a classroom for more than a minute. He will throw people's pencil cases around right in front of the teacher, and frequently talks back when being told to do something. He refuses to bring his books or pens into school. The behaviour deteriorated from the first day in class. The climax came when he cut his face to get out of a lesson (he had been allowed out to the toilet already and had been told he couldn't go out again). The threat of not being able to go to the cinema for Christmas helped make sure he brought his books every day, but he doesn't seem to appreciate that it is inappropriate to shout out offensive comments while someone else is talking, despite any disciplinary actions. He openly hates being in school and doesn't listen or work in any lessons. As a result he rarely picks up more than 10% on a test.

Social development can be reflected in many ways. A person who is highly developed socially will be able to work with most people and produce good results in a group situation. Someone who is less developed may have difficulties in a one-to-one question and answer session. This could mean not wanting to answer the teacher or not being able to ask a colleague what question they are supposed to be doing. Refusing to work with a particular person could be for a good reason that anyone would recognise, but this is very rare. If it isn't for a good reason then it could be due to a low level of social development. This can cause disruption in a class and interfere with everyone's learning.^{4,8}

Richard resents his support worker so much she rarely gets a chance to help him. This resentment has sometimes become violent when she has tried to come and sit

next to him. This compounds the problem he is having in getting notes down. It also means that his written test scores are below level 3.

As mentioned above, Louise is very uncomfortable with anyone getting closer than a couple of feet. This causes problems with seating and practicals. It also makes a one-to-one explanation of something very difficult. Sarah and Louise usually refuse to work together. This can be disruptive for the whole class, but especially causes problems for their support worker. There has been a lot of work going into helping them and recently they have actually volunteered to work together to help me.

The range of effects within each developmental area is great. Some problems can be ironed out quite simply by suitable provision or differentiation^{2,5,7}. Others are hard to deal with in mainstream lessons. “There is a continuing role for special schools ... providing for each young person’s special needs.” – General Sec. NUT, March 2000.

In all cases, however, there is the possibility of learning. What is learnt may vary. In some cases it could be how to get dressed^{5,8}, in others it could be a national curriculum subject.

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