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An Investigation of Peer Interaction in the Pre-School Inclusive Classrooms

“Structured Abstract”

Individuals with special needs who are a part of the society have educational rights like the other individuals. The achievement increases when these individuals start to receive education at early ages. An efficient mainstreaming education in pre-school period will contribute these individuals to move independently. The contributions of the parents, the teachers and the children who were normally developing in this process become quite important in increasing the achievement.

Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the peer interaction in the classrooms in which inclusive education is provided.

Method

In this study, qualitative methods were used to investigate the peer interaction in the classrooms in which mainstreaming education is applied.

Participants

First, the children who were receiving mainstreaming education in state elementary schools of the Ministry of National Education and independent pre-schools in the city centre of Adana during the fall semester of 2008/2009 academic year were identified. Then, these children's handicap types and the duration of attending mainstreaming education schools were investigated. Four children with Down syndrome who were

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attending a full-time mainstreaming school were taken into the sample of this study as the Down syndrome is the handicap type which is seen at mainstreaming schools most. The reason why four children with the same handicap type were taken into the sample is that they might show maximum similar developmental characteristics.

One of the children with Down syndrome (CDS1) was eight years old and in a classroom of 17 students; two of them (CDS2 and CDS3) were seven years old and the population of their classrooms were respectively 18 and 17 and one of them (CDS4) was six years old and in classroom of 24 students. CDS2 was a male and the other children were females. All of the children have been receiving training in private educational institutions and they are still attending a special education program in a private educational institution three half-day a week. While CDS1, CDS2 and CDS3 receive training in a pre-school class inside an elementary school, only CDS4 receives training in an independent pre-school. All these four children's teachers were female and they had support personnel in their classrooms.

Data Collection

At the beginning of the spring semester of 2008/2009 academic year, the administrators and the teachers of schools in which observations would be done were informed about the purpose of the study and the observation days were determined. The researcher participated in the activities for some time before the observation started so as for children to become familiar with her and not to regard her as a stranger. Unstructured observation method was made use of by the researcher in the classrooms in which the mainstreaming education was applied.

Forty-minute observations were done on five days in each of the four pre-school classes, in which there were children with Down syndrome, connected to an elementary school and notes about all the behaviors of the children were taken by the researcher. A video-recorder was not used not to affect the classroom atmosphere negatively and because it could not record all the behaviors of the children who were always moving in the classroom. In this research, as the peer interaction was aimed to be observed, free-time activity period during which the children were least directed by the teacher and the support personnel was preferred as the observation period.

Data Analysis

In this research, the data obtained from qualitative observations was transferred into the computer and was coded after being read line by line. Themes and categories were formed by evaluating the codes obtained. While coding the data, the perspectives of the specialists were considered and the related literature was reviewed.

Results and Discussion

Short interviews were done with the teachers to get their opinions about the mainstreaming education before the observations started. Three of the teachers whose

classes were observed stated that they did not have any big problems to overcome about the children with special needs and they were not against the mainstreaming education. One teacher (teacher of CDS1) expressed that she was against the mainstreaming education, the child with special needs restricted the activities done with normally developing children and the other parents were against the mainstreaming education. The classroom of CDS1 was the classroom in which some negative behavior such as aggressive communication and not sharing the game material were observed most.

Throughout the mainstreaming education, the categories of starting a conversation, responding to a verbal communication, directing, informing, social invitation and incoherent speaking of the child with special needs were determined among the positive verbal communication categories. The categories of not sharing the game material, criticizing, seeing the child inadequate, giving orders and asking for help from the adults were determined among the negative verbal communication categories.

Positive nonverbal communication includes behaviors of looking, smiling, approving, helping, going closer to the child, physical contact, sharing game materials, playing with an object alone, playing with an object together with the other children, playing together at a symbolic level, playing a manipulative game together, yelling, listening and imitating. Negative nonverbal communication includes behaviors of forcing to take the game material, warning not to give the material got by force back, committing physical violence, getting angry, ignoring, not sharing the game material, disrupting the established games, demanding the child to go away, going away from the child and getting alone.

While the behavior of looking was the most observed nonverbal communication among the children with special needs, playing with an object was the most observed behavior among normally developing children.

The behavior of getting angry was the most observed behavior among the children with special needs. The behavior of ignoring was the most observed behavior among normally developing children. The children with special needs displayed the behaviors of getting angry after the behaviors of getting excluded from the game, being seen as inadequate, being criticized and not sharing the game material. Normally developing children were unresponsive after the behaviors of getting angry, forcing to take a material.

The behavior of starting a verbal communication was the most frequently observed positive verbal communication behavior among the children with special needs. The frequency of the other behaviors were respectively responding to a verbal communication, directing, inviting to the game, incoherent speaking of the child with special needs and making a request. The observed negative verbal communication

behaviors among the children with special needs were respectively giving orders, asking for help from the adults and not sharing the game material.

The frequencies of the positive verbal communication behaviors observed among normally developing children were respectively directing, starting a verbal communication, inviting to the game, responding to a verbal communication, informing and making a request. The frequencies of the negative verbal communication behaviors observed were respectively not sharing the material, seeing the child with special needs as inadequate, asking for help from the adults, criticizing and talking dirty.

The frequencies of the positive nonverbal communication behaviors observed among the children with special needs were respectively looking, going closer to the child, playing with an object together, playing with an object alone, smiling, physical contact, imitating, sharing the game material equally, playing a manipulative game, yelling, playing a game at symbolic level, approving, listening and helping. The frequencies of the negative nonverbal communication behaviors observed were respectively getting angry, aggressive communication, forcing to take the material, not sharing the material, ignoring, getting alone, wanting the child to go away, disrupting the established game and going away from the child.

The positive verbal communication behaviors observed among normally developing children -from the most frequently observed to the least frequently observed- were playing with an object together, going closer to the child, playing together at a symbolic level, playing a manipulative game together, looking, playing with an object alone, smiling, sharing the game material equally, physical contact, helping, yelling, listening, imitating and approving. The negative nonverbal communication behaviors observed from the most frequently to the least frequently were ignoring, aggressive communication, not sharing the game material, forcing to take the material, getting angry, wanting the child to go away, going away from the child and disrupting the established game.

While the behaviors of informing and criticizing were only observed among normally developing children, the behavior of giving orders was observed among the children with special needs. It was seen that normally developing children usually let the children with special needs join their groups and play games together.

The negative behaviors while the children with special needs and normally developing children were playing together were usually observed after the behavior of seeing the child with special needs as inadequate, not sharing the material, the child's with special needs getting angry.

Consequently, it was observed that four children with Down syndrome could benefit from the mainstreaming education positively, they could get into social communication easily and they could play games together. It was seen that normally

developing children adopted the children with special needs, they could solve problems between each other without the teacher's guidance and they tried to help the children with special needs when needed. However, it is considered that the teacher's negative opinions about mainstreaming education were reflected on normally developing children's behaviors and this affects the normally developing children to display negative behaviors towards the children with special needs.