

SENSITIVITIES TO THE NEEDS OF FOUNDATION PHASE BLIND LEARNERS IN  
INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS THROUGH A "HIDE AND SEEK" GAME

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper, examines sensitivities to the needs of foundation phase blind learners in inclusive schools through a "hide and seek" game. Educators and learners who are insightful to the needs of foundation phase blind learners would always endeavour to create potential strategies and techniques for successfully accommodating blind learners in inclusive schools. This article expresses views of the educators, author's colleagues at the South African National Council for the Blind and parents of blind learners.

Blind learners, since the introduction of "inclusive education" in South Africa, are admitted in inclusive schools. What triggered the writing of this article is the fact that the author (blind) realised that, due to the introduction of "inclusive education", educators and learners lack the apposite knowledge to accommodate blind learners in the classroom or during leisure activities. As a result, both learning and social opportunities are not entirely afforded to blind learners.

Nonetheless, it is an overwhelming assignment to foundation phase inclusive schools educators to effectively and appropriately accommodate blind learners.

This is because of their varying needs comprising varying learning styles and varying learning support material.

It is difficult to imagine how intricate and demanding that would be to a foundation phase educator to accommodate these learners in these circumstances?

## **RATIONALE**

The rationale for writing this article is to provide such an opportunity, as well as to encourage both educators and learners to create accommodative situations and events for blind learners in inclusive schools. This article also endeavours to give educators and learners alike a further vehicle through which accommodative insights could be gained about the experiences, feelings, problems and practical realities of blind learners in general. Last, the paper tries to suggest some tips regarding those problems.

## **METHOD**

The author used educators' views and experience, experiences of blind colleagues and parents of blind learners. An unstructured interview was used to get responses to various questions. During the interview, the author took Braille notes reflecting interviewees' personal views. Interviews assisted the author in understanding participants and the various contexts in which they were speaking.

## **METHOD OF ANALYSIS**

A range of participants was interviewed. Analysis of the Braille transcripts led to a detailed discussion of issues alluded to here under.

## **RESULTS**

Educators and learners in inclusive schools have particular difficulties pertaining to the accommodation of blind learners due to lack of confidence, motivation, skills and personal experiences in living with a child who is visually impaired. There are no guidelines put in place by the department of education to help educators accommodate blind learners; and such guidelines need to be formulated as a matter of urgency.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Educators and learners have the potential to accommodate blind learners. However, there should be some form of training or awareness raising as far as the needs of the blind are concerned. More tips or strategies for making inclusive schools more accommodating should be investigated. The same should apply to motivating and skilling both learners and educators.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The envisaged training or sensitisation (through a hide and seek game") is specifically geared towards making learners and educators aware of the needs and problems that blind learners encounter in the classroom when they want to learn, play or, do something. Training or sensitisation would try to equip learners and their educators with specific ways to help blind learners be in the company of other learners.

The blind learner should as well undergo such a training or sensitisation activity (through hide and seek game) for the following reasons:

1. The blind learner would be able to share his/her experiences, skills, knowledge and frustrations or, difficulties as far as blindness is concerned with his/her schoolmates and educators.
2. The blind learner's participation would create a better learning environment for other learners and educators to both understand and realise his/her vast needs.
3. The learner's presence and participation would foster both integration and inclusion in the regular education programme.
4. The blind learner would also be a valuable source of inspiration to friends and educators during training.
5. This training would enrich all learners including the blind learner as far as blindness is concerned.
6. The training would offer all learners and educators practical experiences.

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## **DISCUSSION**

### **THE HIDE AND SEEK GAME AS A SENSITISATION TO THE NEEDS OF THE FOUNDATION PHASE BLIND LEARNERS**

The "hide and seek game" to cite but one good example, could be a good sensitisation technique to the needs of blind learners because of its effectiveness, practicality and inclusivity. All learners should be involved in this game.

### **THE USE OF HIDE AND SEEK GAME AS A SENSITISATION MECHANISM TO THE NEEDS OF BLIND LEARNERS IN A CLASSROOM SITUATION**

In using this technique for accommodation purposes in a classroom situation, the educator needs to make all learners aware that they are going to play the "hide and seek game". Most foundation phase learners and their educators should be familiar with and enjoy this game. It would put all learners on an equal footing and encourage a fun experience when playing it, since other senses except vision would be utilised to track hidden classmates. Learners would laugh at all the strange places learners choose to hide themselves.

The foundation phase educator should ask learners all the difficulties they encountered when playing the game. In addition, the educator should as well ask all the learners different strategies they used in trying to find best hiding places.

Thereafter, the whole class could practice some different strategies that blind learners employ when they want to find something, go someplace or do something. The educator needs first to highlight for sighted learners the fact that they use their eyes when finding their way around the classroom. Useful questions for consideration at this point are: what if they cannot see, and how would they find their way?

One option could be that of employing the services of a sighted guide. That option too, has its constraints, as it can promote total dependency. This raises the question: what should the blind learner do in his/her attempt to learn how to get to certain places without always depending on the guide? A blind learner could use the guide at first, while concentrating on using other senses as s/he goes or memorises his/her way. The learner might count steps, be aware of the

number of turns, listen for different sounds, and as well, try to sense if there is an unseen object in the way, like a wall.

The learner should learn landmarks, like his/her educator's desk. The educator should teach learners how to act as sighted guides to guide their blindfolded classmates. Each learner should get a turn as both a guide and a blind learner.

### **STEPS FOR PRACTICING THIS ACTIVITY**

Blindfolded learners should be asked to memorise their route and then do it without the guide, so that, they could appreciate how difficult it might be to learn where things are in the classroom. The educator should in addition, facilitate a talk around ways learners could help and accommodate their blind classmates.

Hopefully, learners would come up with some good ideas on how to help blind learners learn to get to different places on their own, how to include and involve them in games and, the importance of using descriptive words as opposed to gestures and other visual signs. The educator should facilitate a discussion about the importance of keeping everything in the room in the same place so that blind learners would not lose their landmarks.

### **CONCLUSION**

This training would just be the beginning of consciousness-raising and teaching specific accommodation skills. In order for this training to be effective and lasting, more times would have to be dedicated and devoted to specific activities to reinforce and expand upon learners and educators awareness of blindness and ways that they could interact with such learners.

Hopefully, it would be second nature to them to include and involve blind learners in the classroom activities and games and expand everyone's sensitivities to the needs of those around them.