

Low vision: teachers' knowledge, concept and behavior

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Introduction

Low vision may be defined as “a severe vision loss, which can't be corrected either clinically or surgically non with conventional spectacles¹. Veitzman explains that, according to the WHO “the low vision subject has a visual functioning impairment even after treatment or refractional correction and has visual acuity bellow 6/18 (0,3) and down to light perception. But they uses or is potentially able to utilize vision for planning or developing a task”².

Causes of subnormal vision are congenital or acquired. Many visual functions may be present in the individual having subnormal vision and might be improved by the use of both optical and/or non-optical devices³.

Experience shows that subnormal vision individuals have differences in their ability to use the vision. Visual ability is determined by the eye pathology but also by the performance in the use of vision⁴.

The inclusion issue represents an innovation in the educational system, a principle that should be present to cover differences even among sighted students. Inclusion, more than providing education for low vision children in regular school, represents the move against segregation by the recognition of individualities⁵.

For the inclusion to be effective it is important that teacher's understand the importance to "look" at the student regarding to their diversity and from this being able to identify their special needs⁶.

The student bearing subnormal vision may show difficulties in near and/or far vision. Therefore it is important a clinical-educational assessment with results being delivered to the teachers in a very clear form in order to enhance the work with the students⁴.

Hill questioned whether teachers are adequately prepared to interpret special needs, able to adapt the school environment to meet their low vision students' demands and know about aids and other material available⁵.

Because the teachers need to receive ample and cute information and orientation about their work with the low vision student, a research was conducted to check to evaluate the knowledge, concept and behavior of teachers from public school regarding educational inclusion of the low vision student.

Methods

The study was a descriptive, analytical and transversal type, developed using a self-applied questionnaire directed to the teachers of the fundamental, in the area of Campinas (~1.000.000 people) SP, Brazil, having low vision students in regular class, during the academic year (February - December) of 2000. In that period these were 84 teachers under those conditions at 23 schools.

The survey covered 68 teachers (81% of the whole group) because of several impediments that avoided contacting the remaining.

The following parameters about the teachers were investigated: age, time of teaching, specialized training on visual impairments, time working with low vision students, information received about low vision student, the kind of information received and which are important.

The self-applied questionnaire was developed upon an exploratory survey conducted at neighboring towns, in order to establish the present instrument for data collection⁶ (Piovesan & Temporini, 1995).

Data were processed through the tool Epi Info version 6⁽⁷⁾. Descriptive (The SAS System for Windows, 1996) and analytical descriptions were processed using Chi-Square Test with significance level of 0.05⁽⁸⁾.

Results

Regarding teacher's self evaluation of pedagogical knowledge to work with the low vision student, results showed that 83.3% of them knew little or even nothing.

Most of them, 92.6% had no specific information on visual deficiency and only 44.1% declared having information about how to work with that kind of students but all demonstrated the need of such information's, mainly about amplified material.

About pedagogical aptitude on adaptation of materials and environment in the classroom it was observed significance with the variables: level taught, availability of information to work with the low vision student, special teacher at the school and administration support.

It was verified that 95.6% of the teachers declared as very important the contribution of the specialized teacher but only 55.9% had this person at their schools.

Most of them declared that inclusion is difficult and main causes are, for 92.7% of them, they own lack of adequate training and too large class for 83.6%.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, in order to guarantee effective educational inclusion it will be necessary to establish training programs about low vision students for teachers of the regular class, to provide the necessary support teaching materials and to address the ophthalmological reports of the students to the school.

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