

My Winning Card: The Flag

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I had four students with autism, each with their own unique challenges. For each, I had to find a specific communication method. Omid would focus when I held his face and looked directly into his eyes. Sahil was interested in food, so I incorporated food into his lessons. Amir Ali, who had higher intelligence, was drawn to the subject with a little attention and affection. But Armin...

A month and a half had passed since the beginning of the school year, and I still hadn't found a way to connect with Armin. Every effort I made hit a dead end. Food, stars, cars... nothing caught his attention. I felt helpless. Consulting with the educational supervisor, the vice principal, and experienced teachers was of no use, as this was the first year the school had a special class for students with autism. I was left alone with Armin, who was in his own world.

Every day during recess, I went to the yard and observed him. One day, after a lot of aimless running and jumping, he suddenly stopped. I followed his gaze; he was staring at the flags at the school entrance, watching them with a beautiful smile. In that moment, I felt that perhaps this was the spark I was looking for.

I immediately went to the school office, picked up a small flag that was on the principal's desk, and took it to the classroom. A moment I will never forget: as soon as Armin saw the flag, he excitedly came towards me, took it from my hand, and shook it with great enthusiasm. He smiled, walked around the classroom, and played with the flag. For the first time, he looked into my eyes. In that moment, I realized that a bridge had been built between his world and mine.

I gently sat him on the chair and began teaching him the colors of the flag. I spoke, and he repeated. It was a small miracle. Gradually, I was able to teach him concepts such as up and down, less and more, left and right, using the flag.

The flag became my winning card. Through it, I found a path to Armin's world and brought him into the world of learning. The moment Armin first told me with his eyes, "I am here," made me forget all the hardships.

Innovative Approaches to Teaching Students with Autism: An Analysis of a Successful Experience

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Introduction

Teaching students on the autism spectrum is one of the fundamental challenges in the educational system, requiring deep understanding, patience, creativity, and the use of innovative teaching methods. These students often exhibit unique characteristics in social interactions, sensory processing, and learning, making traditional teaching methods less effective. This article examines the successful teaching experience of a teacher in establishing communication with students with autism, particularly one student who was difficult to engage. This experience demonstrates how identifying a student's personal interests and adapting teaching methods accordingly can significantly enhance the learning process.

Discussion

In this case, four students with autism had different educational needs. Each responded to different stimuli—some through eye contact, some through food, and others through affectionate interaction. However, one student (Armin) did not respond to any of the conventional methods, presenting a significant challenge in the teaching process.

To find a way to establish communication, the teacher used careful observation. It was noticed that Armin had a particular fascination with the school flags. By leveraging this interest, the teacher was able to establish an effective connection with Armin for the first time. This moment became a turning point in his education, and through the use of the flag, concepts such as colors, directions, and spatial awareness were taught. This experience highlighted that in teaching students with autism, identifying their focus points and transforming these into learning tools can create a remarkable shift in the educational process.

From the perspective of learning theories and developmental psychology, this experience can be analyzed through the following approaches:

1. **Interest-Based Learning Theory:** According to this theory, when learning aligns with an individual's intrinsic interests, the educational process becomes more effective. Armin's interest in the flag enhanced his concentration and learning.
2. **Behaviorism Theory:** Positive reinforcement, such as using the flag as an incentive for learning, can reinforce desirable behaviors. Armin's positive response to the flag demonstrated the effectiveness of this method.
3. **Sensory Processing Theory:** Many children with autism have specific sensory sensitivities. Armin's attraction to the flag was likely due to its movement, color, or sensory properties, which helped increase his focus.
4. **Social Interaction Theory:** Creating a motivation for communication through tools that interest the child can improve their social skills. Armin's first eye contact with the teacher signified the success of this approach.

Conclusion

This teaching experience illustrates that recognizing the individual characteristics of students with autism and employing flexible, interest-based teaching methods can significantly enhance

learning and communication. Teachers must carefully and flexibly identify the most suitable means of connecting with each student. Utilizing visual tools, educational games, and sensory techniques can have a profound impact on improving the learning experience for these students.

Practical Recommendations for Teachers

1. Carefully observe student behavior: Pay close attention to non-verbal cues and student interests.
2. Use personal interests in teaching: Incorporate objects, images, or activities that the student enjoys to engage them in learning.
3. Gradually reinforce eye contact: Encourage social interaction by using tools the child finds appealing.
4. Be flexible in teaching methods: If one approach is ineffective, experiment with alternative strategies and seek guidance from specialists and parents.
5. Create an interactive learning environment: Multi-sensory approaches (visual, auditory, tactile) can be highly beneficial for children with autism.
6. Enhance social skills through indirect teaching: Group activities, storytelling, and role-playing techniques can support the development of social skills in these students.

This teaching experience demonstrated that entering the world of a child with autism requires patience, creativity, and a deep understanding of their unique characteristics. Teachers who remain adaptable and genuinely invested in their students' progress can discover new pathways for learning and communication.