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KEY WORD: SOCIAL INTERACTION / VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHILDREN / MAINSTREAMED CLASSROOM

SUPHANVADEE VAIYARUP : A STUDY OF SOCIAL INTERACTION OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED PRESCHOOLERS IN THE MAINSTREAMED CLASSROOM. THESIS ADVISOR : SARINTHORN VIDHAYASIRINUN, Ph.D. 228 pp. ISBN 974-637-820-1

The purposes of this study was to study the social interaction in self-help, social participation and social acceptance between visually impaired preschoolers and their normal peers in the mainstreamed classes, and between visually impaired preschoolers and their teachers, and to study problems and influencing problems of the interaction. The subjects were 3 visually impaired preschoolers in mainstreamed classes.

The research findings were as follows :

1. The social interaction of the visually impaired children and their teachers were highly positive. Every teacher accepted and helped the children consistently and treated the children the same as their normal peers. However, in the classroom with several teachers, each teacher was found to help the child as soon as she was slow or did something incorrectly although the child did not ask for help. The children in this room, therefore, tended to ask for help from the teachers only.

2. The social interaction of the visually impaired children and their normal peers was both positive and negative. The child with low vision, having good human relationship and being the only exceptional child in the classroom, was accepted by all of her classmates through the semester; while the 2 blind children who were mainstreamed in the same classroom were not accepted by some children because of their blindness behavior, conflicts regarding visual limitation, and lack of understanding on the normal children's part. However, after they had learned from each other, the opposing children began to accept their blind friends gradually, and fully accepted them by the end of the semester.

Although all the visually impaired children wanted to participate in every classroom activity, they could participate actively only in movement activities requiring less visual ability, but had low opportunities to participate in the academic activities which were basically visual, since no adaptation of the media, seat and techniques to compensate the visual limits had been done.

3. The problems and influencing factors were the normal children had not been prepared to understand the visually impaired child's nature, on the contrary, the visually impaired children were not trained social skills of working and playing with other children, both groups were not intentionally provided opportunities to learn from each other in friendly atmosphere, and the teachers lacked knowledge and skills on promoting both normal and exceptional children in a mainstreamed classroom. The main reason of such problems were the special education teacher was over loaded with her work that she could not provide appropriate knowledge to teachers and normal children, as well as supervising exceptional children effectively.

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