

**Children with Developmental Coordination Disorder within school environment: “victims” of a special type of racism!**

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Fortunately, or not during recent years school environment is intertwined with everyday physical activity. Therefore, a kid's physical ability determines on a great level his/her individual participation to school or leisure activities, resulting in the creation of a “stigma” and ultimately the exclusion from a large part of educational process of “the clumsy” and without the necessary motor coordination children. Clumsiness has been recognized for many years as one of the most often disorders in childhood. In 1994 the World Health Organization and the American Psychiatric Association recognized clumsiness as a unique disorder under the term “Developmental Coordination Disorder”. The specific term refers to children who without any known pathological, cognitive or neuroanatomic cause, fail to conquer the fundamental motor skills. This article includes a short report on socio-emotional aspects, which most of the times are proved to be equally or even more serious than motor problems, entrapping the kid in a vicious circle of a special type of racism.

It is widely accepted that many and sometimes serious emotional and social problems are linked to low and medium motor abilities in childhood. A serious cause is definitely the lack -for many years- of information of both teachers and parents regarding the severeness and consequences of such a situation. Because of that many children with low or even medium level motor abilities are often characterized-stigmatized by teachers as bored, naughty or even mentally retarded. Even as a one-time event the above mentioned situation is able to seriously disturb the psychological and social world of a kid with low motor abilities. Unfortunately, and since movement can be at the same time complicated and easily observed, motor ability presents a wide range of psycho-social dimensions. The positive correlation between motor ability and desired social characteristics such as social acceptance and social position and recognition, has been repeatedly noted. Therefore, more skillful children are more easily adjusted individually and socially, the moment when motor difficulties prevent participation in group motor activities and lead to a non-typical motor development. This is the way to create an impermeable “vicious cycle” that characterizes the development of children with such motor difficulties. The poor motor ability leads to low recognition and prestige among peers and to exclusion from group games. Additionally -and since clumsy children are finding it difficult to hide their difficulties- clumsy children are often the easy target for taunt, spoof and bullying. This situation leads to the avoidance of motor and group activities since these are directly linked to feelings of failure. As a result, the existing motor problems become even more obvious and serious. Even the more basic skills necessary for motor development, many times are not developed. The “vicious cycle” prevents the child with motor difficulties from making friends, leading him/her to social isolation and severe emotions of inability and inferiority.

Many of the emotional and social problems come from the attitude of parents on their child's inability to perform daily activities such as dinner and homework. Many times parents create an unpleasant environment driven by their ambitions and expectations. The social status of the family or other factors such as that maybe one of the parents was good in sports, may be responsible for the above mentioned situation. All of the above surely creates the first feelings of disappointment to the child.

Emotional problems seem to excessively grow during school years. Very often these children cause hostile emotions when by accident push one of their classmates in their effort to move from one place to the other. Lower self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, disappointment and misery are the main characteristics of the child's psychological world. The fact that motor ability affects self-esteem was also proven by studies that revealed that children with motor difficulties presented lower self-esteem and recognition than children with no problems. As a result of the above, problems in behavior also appear. It has been mentioned that in children with motor difficulties the non-realistic tendency to set higher goals than those they can achieve is something very usual. Another similar behavior is the tendency not to take responsibility for their success or failure and to consider as responsible other factors. It has also been mentioned that children with motor difficulties often attribute the results of their actions to effects of independent to them factors, independently if this is true or not. The above behaviors and the weakness of children with motor difficulties to perform with an acceptable ability, makes failure their daily routine.

It is obvious that children with low or medium motor ability face a social environment of racism and stigma formulated by peers, teachers and parents. An important question is whether motor weakness is a situation which children can overcome without assistance through time. Relevant research not only confirmed that without any help the problem remains and that from children that are lucky enough to overcome the problem the real lucky ones are those that overcome the problem without having to cover their academic and social weaknesses. On the contrary, for children who take time in overcoming their motor problems, prognosis is not that optimistic.

### **Some practical guidance**

Motor difficulties make "clumsy" children to be stigmatized and isolated, with serious effects on their emotional and social growth as well as on their academic progress. For some of these children, early detection and therefore early intervention may be their only hope for reversing the consequences of motor problems. The issue of the necessity for early detection of motor difficulties has been mentioned by many scholars. Early detection does not just lead to early implementation of an intervention program, but it also prevents many of the motor and emotional problems occurred with the child's age.

The way through which parents and children are approached in order to be informed on the situation, is another crucial issue. An honest discussion with the parents and if possible with the child, may help them understand the nature of the problem and what they can do to improve it. It should be clarified that the intervention process is long and requires patience. Consequently, persistence is an important factor.

Specifications and criteria that should govern each intervention program have been described by various scientists. It has been repeatedly noted that for someone to focus their attention on a child and do something for its problem, is more important than what and how this is done. To ensure a “rich” environment filled with motivation for a child is of more value than an unnatural atmosphere, which limits the child’s imagination and leads it to feel discontent against teachers and school. Also the type of an intervention program should correspond to the different needs of each child. What is asked therefore, is whether a specific program assists or not a specific child and not if the method of corrective teaching in general is efficient or not.

Physical Education is of course one of the most important factors for an intervention program for children with motor difficulties. The method of part exercise or task analysis seems to be the most suitable teaching methods for children with motor difficulties. Despite all the above and the method one will select to teach there are always some practical advice a physical education teacher should consider:

- All children should have the feeling of success from even the first attempts. For this reason, first attempts or tasks should be easier.
- Activities with many levels of success instead of the strict criterion “pass-fail”.
- Games with no exclusion for anyone.
- The increase of difficulty of a task should be done in small steps to avoid failure.
- Practice should begin with easy tasks and continue with the harder ones.
- Practice should aim specific parts of the problem.
- Tasks should take place in different situations with different time limit and other parameters in order to motivate the child to learn and do the task under various conditions.
- No stress activities and big breaks after a hard task are very important.
- Finally, it is good to offer the child the liberty to select which activities he/she prefers and believes he/she needs.

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