

SUCCESS STORIES OF STRENGTHS BASED INSTRUCTIONAL (SBI) APPROACH FOR CHILDREN WITH EXCEPTIONAL NEEDS

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Abstract

SBI is a systematic approach of an instructional training model with a primary focus on identification of a child's strengths (Chakraborti-Ghosh 2013, 2019), the main theme of this paper. The paper will explain how Strengths-based instructional approach can be beneficial to open up communication, relationship, and the trust between parents and children with exceptional needs; teachers and students, among siblings, caregivers and more. This paper presents success stories of SBI in an informal interactive sessions with interviews, reflective discussion using a narrative case study of each participant.

Keywords: *SBI, narrative case study, informal interviews, parents, children with exceptional needs.*

1. Introduction

Children with Learning, Communication and Behavior Challenges are always a struggle for parents, teachers, and caregivers. Strength Based Instruction (SBI, Chakraborti-Ghosh 2013, 2019) approach has recently been used to open the communication with children with learning, communication, and behavioral challenges in Kolkata India with the presence of their parents. An interactive session using verbal interview was conducted. The result of these interviews have been accumulated in a narrative case study format. The presentation will provide the success story of this approach.

SBI is a systematic approach of an instructional training model with a primary focus on identification of a child's strengths (Chakraborti-Ghosh 2013, 2019), the main theme of this paper. SBI emphasizes the strengths of each children enhancing their self-confidence, and self-esteem. This instructional practice prepares teachers to develop their lesson plans recognizing the strengths of all children in an UDL environment to establish a community of learners based on their strengths, learning styles and abilities. SBI impacts on confidence building, lesson adaptability, and adjustment of any students at any grade level including children from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds. SBI model is an instructional Training Model which has been used to train pre-service and in-service teachers across the curriculum. SBI has Four Elements: Students, Content, Process, and Outcome. As Rose and Meyer, (2007) pointed out that environment, using the multiple intelligences and strengths with technology as a tool for instruction, learning, and performances is a key to success. SBI is a one-step forward to that direction.

2. Interactive session with children & parents

Rules for parents: Could start the communication. Children were the first to start talking about themselves. What they like and dislike. Parents will only respond to the question they have been asked.

Case One: 15 yrs. old girl. Grade 9. Daydreamer, Obsessive compulsive behavior (OCD) with handwashing. Desperately wants to socialize and be liked by her peers and by childhood friends/schoolmates at school. Wants to be popular. Likes socializing but intimidated.

Strengths: Caring, and Always smiling. Her smile is contagious and bring positive vibe to others. However, she is teased by her peers for that.

Area for improvements:

1. To develop an understanding of the excessive use of water that can cause skin issues
2. To write a journal with her daydreaming story and present to the parents when it is complete. She should have been given a set time to write on her daydream fantasy, not while inside the bathroom.

Communication: She understands that her mom gets irritated while she gets late for school, spending too much time in the bathroom.

Mother's Response:

1. Frustrated with OCD more than her interest in making friends at school.
2. Expectation vs performance
3. Lack of time vs personal frustration
4. Gender role vs family expectation

Case Two: 13 yrs. old boy. In Middle school. Likes the fantasy of having a boyfriend and/or girlfriend. Speaks his mind. Loves music but not confident. Works hard to concentrate on one area, needs attention to voice his opinion. Has Attention Deficit Disorders and some writing disorders.

Strengths: Confident, takes initiative, opinionated.

Area for improvement:

1. Needs to wait or raise hand before responding.
2. Needs to organize thoughts before speaking.
3. Needs to write points to discuss in tablet or computer.

Mother's Response: They like mountaineering, hiking, and trip to the mountain when gets time. Supportive of boy's ideas. Not over-critical. Do not understand how ADHD can be treated, but wants to learn!

Case three: 11 yrs. old boy with high functioning Autism. Mostly non-verbal. Has a non-disabled sibling brother. Loves his brother but constantly fights.

Strengths: Loves to sing and draw. Loves to play soccer with his brother and other children.

Area for improvement:

1. Cannot concentrate on one area.
2. Slow learner. Processes slowly.
3. Has a difficulty in concentrating, socializing, and making eye contact.

Parent's Response:

Mother has hired a private teacher for music and art lesson.

Emphasize more on his creative sides.

Father did not know his love for soccer.

Father compares his ability with his non-disabled brother.

The Expectation vs. Frustration

Ability vs. Performance

Case Four: Middle schooler, 11 yrs. old girl, in 8th grade, identified with high functioning Autistic spectrum disorder.

Strengths: Loves Math. In high school algebra class. Loves to play math software games in her tab. Loves to work with technology. Created a YouTube channel to teach math with the help of her teacher and mother.

Area for improvement:

1. Has a difficulty in concentrating, socializing, and making eye contact.
2. Does work well in large crowd.
3. Works best alone
4. Emotional outburst when angry

Parent's Role: Mother is extremely involved. Mother is a software engineer and father is a professor of computer science.

1. Mother is more persisting and engaged than father.
2. Father is very supportive of Mother's engagement with school.
3. Mother was informed about SBI approach and determined to make it a great success.
4. Determined to make daughter as functionally independent when she grows up.

Case Five: 27 years old adult. Identified with High functioning Asperger's syndrome.

Strengths: Loves to organize household items. Loves to cook but scared of Fire due to an old accident. Loves to greet guests. Good with computers. Speaks Hindi but the language is spoken at home is Bengali.

Area for improvements:

1. Has a difficult in concentrating, socializing, and making eye contact.
2. Loves to Eat but cannot control the appetite.
3. Hormones is strong with unknown female.
4. Currently working on good touch vs bad touch. But understands the proximity control when reminded by mother.
5. Likes to stay home because of some incident of traveling alone and got lost.

Mother's Role:

1. Wants to make her son as functionally independent as possible.
2. Works on three jobs to stay away from home.
3. Father works out of town and visits once a month.
4. Parents created a trust for future caregiver to take care of him after their death.

3. Summary & conclusion

The strength-based approach has its foundation in social work and builds upon the client's strengths, specifically seeing the client as resourceful and resilient when they are in adverse conditions (Strengths Based Models in Social Work, McCashen [2005]). A unique characteristic of this approach is that it is client led and is centered on outcomes using an individual's future set of strengths. Erika Stoerkel, explained in detail on "What is a strength-based approach?" in an article on Positive Psychology (2019). She explained how strength-based approach focuses on the positive attributes of a person or a group, rather than the negatives. There are multiple ways the strength-based approach can be applied, including in leadership, counseling, community and social work, and pediatrics. Powell (2015), a licensed psychologist from Colorado has been practicing for years on Strengths Based approach for intervention with At-Risk youth.

However, Strengths Based instructional approach has never initiated until Chakraborti-Ghosh started training her pre-service and in-service special educators to create a lesson on strengths-based approach. An evidence-based practice was established with the help of the parent and teacher of a high school girl who loved music and technology in 2013. Eventually, the success story was published in 2019.

Strengths Based Approach and Mental Health

The author has been focusing on Strengths based instruction as a pro-active approach rather than a reactive approach. If it starts as early as Pre-K, then family, teachers, therapist, and administrators all can be aware and be prepared of any upcoming accidents or behavior explosion. Mental Health has been critical issues and growing explosively with all gun-violence in the United States. All school shooting has been blamed to mental health but not enough emphasis on proactive approach to focus strengths-based approaches to address emotional and behavior explosions. Many health systems have traditionally adopted a view of mental disorders based on pathologies and the risk individuals have towards mental disorders. However, with this approach, mental disorders continue to cost billions a year for the healthcare system. Strengths-based approach moves the focus away from deficits of people with mental illnesses (consumers) and focuses on the strengths and resources of the consumers (Xi, 2013).

The Win-Win Situation

This Interactive session with children and parents has taken places in many settings through one on observation, interview, feedback, and responses from both the parents and children, youth, and adult.

All parents have agreed on SBI approach. It proved one more time how children and parents can create comfortable communication zone with the help of the teachers, counselors, and researcher like me to have a positive outcome for everyone. We as an adult are more focused on what to teach, but not put enough emphasis on student's learning styles. We also tend to focus on inabilities or disabilities rather than their area of strengths or abilities. Maybe some day with more sessions on SBI and training teachers to develop their lessons using Strengths Based Instructional Model will minimize the mental health cases such as shooting, stabbing and gun violence.

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