

Inclusion Paper

Essential Elements of Including Students with Disabilities

EDCI 5554 Spring 2013

Dagmar Wabel
April 27, 2013



1. Educate Yourself about Disabilities



In today's education students with disabilities are included in the general education classroom and ideally are also taught the general curriculum. This is ideal for the students to ensure they reach their full potential and are not ostracized because of their disability. For the general education teacher however, this has a few implications. The teacher does not only have the responsibility to teach those students effectively but there is a prerequisite to this, namely the general education teacher has to educate herself about disabilities. Although it cannot be expected that the teacher will have the knowledge and preparation of a special education teacher, it is still fair enough to expect the general education teacher not only to share responsibility in providing effective instruction to students with disabilities but also to have a basic knowledge about disabilities (Rosenberg et al, 2011). According to the lecture "Introduction to Special Education" (Wells, 2013) there are 13 disability areas under IDEA, that are divided into the two categories of high-incidence and low-incidence disabilities. Intellectual and learning disabilities, emotional disturbances and speech and language impairments are the high-incidence disabilities. Low-incidence disabilities can be hearing and vision loss, orthopedic impairments, autism, deafness-blindness, traumatic brain injury and developmental delays (slide 5). Of all students who are served under IDEA 80% have a high-incidence disability and account for a total of 8% of the school-age population (Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2010). The teacher has a responsibility to become knowledgeable about these disabilities and also needs to know how students with disabilities can be identified in order to make them eligible for the help they need. This means that the general education teacher needs to know what



the response to intervention approach – or RTI - is and also needs to be able to work with other professionals to develop, implement and monitor a special education student's IEP, the individualized education program. In order to be eligible for services "a child must demonstrate a need for educational services and be identified in one of the disability areas under IDEA" (slide 15). It is vital for the student's success that the teacher not only knows this but is also aware that whenever a student full-fills these two criteria he or she is by law entitled to special education and related services which must be provided at public expense (IDEA, 2004). 

2. Educate others about Disabilities

The educator's responsibility expands beyond educating oneself about disabilities. Another responsibility is to educate others, and create awareness about disabilities among the student population and amongst colleagues. The education of others about disabilities does not mean that a teacher literally must lecture them, but it means **educating others by providing positive examples and be a role model in order to eventually achieve social change.**  A teacher can for instance put emphasis on using what Katie Snow (2009) describes as "People First Language". Literally this means saying things like 'this person has a disability' and not 'this person is disabled' and it is important because it "puts the person before the disability". When the disability becomes the defining characteristic of a person, it reflects prejudice (1). By actively using people first language and by encouraging others to do so, a teacher can contribute to educate students and the public that disability is not a problem but that a student with a disability simply has different needs that can and should be met. In his article "Eliminating Ableism in Education"



Thomas Hehir (2002) says that negative cultural assumptions about disability do have a negative influence on the education of children with disabilities. A teacher who is knowledgeable about disabilities and strives to convey her knowledge to others can contribute to change so that eventually people with disabilities are not disregarded and devaluated anymore (3). A teacher who subscribes to this will acknowledge that a child with a disability does not need to be fixed but should rather be accommodated. She will be a positive role model for other students, teachers and possibly even parents and help them understand the diverse needs of children with disabilities. Some parents, especially of minorities are not aware of the rights their child has and a teacher can make the difference by educating them about the laws and regulations, serve as a resource and form an alliance with them (Rosenberg et al., 2011).

3. See What the Student can Do, Not What She Cannot Do

Thomas Hehir (2002) explains that ableist assumption is when society thinks that "it is preferable for disabled students to do things in the same manner as nondisabled kids." (3). For example a child with vision impairment would be expected to learn how to read print instead of learning Braille. Hehir continues that such an assumption becomes dysfunctional when services to children with disabilities solely focus on the characteristics of their disability. This means that services are focused on changing the disability which can then lead to a situation where children are denied opportunities and result in low levels of educational attainment (4). It is important for a general education teacher to avoid such ableist assumptions and instead focus on what a student can do. Joseph Shapiro (1993) examines the imagery of poster children and 'Tiny Tim'. In his article "No Pity" he



argues that people with disability reject the idea that they are “childlike, dependent and in need of charity or pity” (7). Such ideas are only slowly changing and a teacher does well to examine her own imagery of people with disabilities. This is necessary in order to create the assumption that students with disabilities can achieve standard educational goals. The teacher however must not confuse this with what Shapiro describes as “the inspirational disabled person”. A student with a disability should be expected to achieve her educational goals but should not be pressured to prove herself by having to be a “heroic superachiever” (8). The educational outcome of a student with a disability can be greatly affected by the attitudes and expectations teachers have. According to the first-hand account of one student with ADHD her teachers and parents overlooked all the areas she was good at and instead kept pointing out her faults. The student Gretchen O’Connor laments that if she had learned how to deal with her ADHD in a positive way and make use of its advantages she would have had a better outlook on her life and also had had more respect for herself (Rodis, 2001).

4. Become Cultural Competent

The American author and educator Lisa Delpit contrasts Gretchen O’Connor’s experience with that of her daughter, who she suspects has ADHD as well. Even though Delpit’s daughter had bad experiences in school, Delpit was able to find the right school for her thanks to her economic status and having a professional career as an educator herself. Nevertheless Lisa Delpit wonders what might have happened if that had not been the case. “Poor African American and other children of color with learning problems are even more likely to face psychological trauma”, she says (Rodis,160). In fact, one issue in special education is that certain



minorities are overrepresented (Rosenberg et al., 2011). A teacher who is not cultural competent may aggravate the situation of a minority student who has a learning disability. A student with a different cultural background may act differently than the expected norm and be perceived as 'abnormal'. This can result in a teacher to refer the child for special education services, even though it may not be necessary (59). Cultural competent teachers will be aware that the United States is an example of individualized culture; a culture that emphasizes individual achievement and competition. They will further be aware that some of their students may come from collectivist cultures, and their unwillingness to for instance to compete as an individual thus does not stem from lack of motivation but because such a student prefers to work in a group. The role of parents also differs in various cultures, and a culturally competent teacher will keep in mind that some non-European American parents may not take initiative to contact the teacher (60). To be truly cultural competent one must also keep in mind that within cultures subcultures exist, and that people with a different background are individuals and rarely fit the common stereotypes. Mojdeh Bayat correctly states that a professional needs to have respect and understanding of how a family's culture influences their views on disability (86). Each family has its own unique style and culture, has different religious beliefs and socioeconomic status that influence how they deal with a child with disabilities and a professional must be aware of all these contributing factors (87). A teacher who is culturally competent will be able to "build a bridge between the cultures" as to establish a meaningful exchange of information and mutual understanding (87). 



5. Involve the Parents

Regardless of ethnic, socioeconomic or cultural background, involving parents is important in order to assist students with disabilities. One argument for this is that under IDEA it is a parent's right to be involved in the education of their child who has a disability. Under this law parents must be involved in the decision making process and have a right to be informed. They must consent before their child is tested, evaluated or receives special education services. When the parents are not willing to accept the school's decisions regarding their child's needs and education parents have a right to mediation and the right to a hearing. All this must be done in a way that it is understandable for the parents. The school is also obliged to let parents participate in meetings and in the development of the child's individualized education program. Further, the records considering their child's case must be accessible to the child's parents and may not be withheld (Wells, 2013).

Instead of only doing what the law requires a teacher to do, it is much better to

understand why a good partnership with parents is important.  A good partnership is one, where both parties are seen as equal and treat each other with respect. This is the gateway to establish a positive relationship where trust is mutual. A good teacher will use positive communication skills and adhere to the two principles of working with parents: the teacher will value the parents input and acknowledge that parents are experts about their children. The second principle is that the teacher will concentrate on the strengths a student has (slide 14-16). When professionals and parents establish positive partnerships they can enhance their capacities, gain in competence and together achieve the highest possible educational outcome for the child (Bayat, 2012).



6. Consult other Professionals

Good communication skills and being able to establish positive partnerships is not only important when a general education teacher works with parents but also important because one has to work with other professionals. Although this should not be seen as a 'must' either, but the general education teacher should make use of opportunities to collaborate with other professionals and seek their feedback and advice frequently. To support students with disabilities schools employ and use many different specialists, like social workers, speech & language pathologists and different kind of therapists. The better a general education teacher collaborates with each of these specialists, the more fruitful the professional partnership will be. How this can be achieved is described in Friend's (2008) article "Creating partnerships through collaboration". To establish a true collaboration and consult others effectively, it is necessary to respect all opinions and that each person feels welcome and respected enough to contribute ideas (102). All professionals should work towards a common goal and equally share responsibilities and be hold equally accountable (104). Friend also stresses the need for good communication skills and an aptitude for interpersonal problem solving (109). Another important factor when consulting other professionals is to view the group of collaborators as a team. Each individual should view herself as a part of the team, not merely a guest in a meeting, and all the members should hold the view that each of them is responsible for the success of the team (113). Effective teams can state a clear goal, members believe that the benefits outweigh the costs and are professional enough to monitor their own input and can prevent the escalation of emerging conflicts (115).



7. Use a Standard Based Individualized Education Program

One instance where it is necessary to consult with parents and other professionals is when an individualized education program (IEP) is developed. In order to ensure that the services students receive are effective, the student has to be granted access to the general education curriculum in the general education classroom. In other words this means that the IEP must be based on the state's standards of learning and they are "tied to accountability measures that are used in a given state" (Rosenberg et al., 2011). The design of a student's IEP should always start with an assessment of the skills and knowledge the student has mastered within the context of the standards. Using this approach, professionals will focus on what the student can do instead of focusing on deficits the student has (94). Again one could argue that a teacher has to do this because it is the law but just like it was the case with involving parents, it is much better to understand what the benefits of this approach are. Students with disabilities will be expected to perform at the same level than their peers and achieve a better educational outcome, which results in fewer students with disability dropping out of school. For general education teachers it is easier to see the correlation between the content they ought to teach and the needs of their students. This also contributes to the collaboration with the special education teacher, because both are now teaching the same curriculum and hence can formulate clear and concise educational goals for the student (94). The state standards only state what content students ought to learn but now how teacher ought to teach them. This fact enables the general education teacher to engage in effective collaboration with the special education



teacher to find the most appropriate manner of how to teach the student (Cortiella, 2008).

8. Apply a Universal Design for Learning

One approach to ensure that students are taught effectively is to use Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This approach stems from architecture, when designers embraced the idea that buildings should be accessible to everyone. Instead of using one way of instruction for all students, UDL is a research-based framework that encompasses varied ways of how instruction is delivered, material is presented and offers students more than one way to demonstrate their knowledge (IRIS Module: Universal Design for Learning). UDL is a holistic approach to differentiate instruction and it is not a series of exercises or tasks the teacher can execute during lessons. **Before delivering instruction,** the teacher must plan the lessons and actively think of how differentiated instruction can be incorporated in the classroom. This means moving away from direct instruction to active learning. Using UDL means to deliver the content in more than one way, and encourage students to engage and analyze it. The lesson is designed in such a way that students can “explore the content based on personal interests, preferences and abilities” (IRIS Module: Universal Design for Learning). Teachers naturally tend to design their lessons such that they reflect their own learning style and to develop a Universal Design for Learning, the teacher must become aware of this and actively seek out other methods of instruction that appeal to all learners. An example of this is for instance, presenting content in written form, but also find a video or audio that explains the content and creating graphics as mnemonic devices. With experience it becomes easier to use varied ways of instruction and besides students



with disabilities who are eligible for services, students who are not diagnosed with a learning disability but still struggle to master content will also benefit from this approach.

9. Keep your class-room well managed and use effective instructional methods

The use of Universal Design for Learning is part of creating a well-managed classroom and the use of effective instructional methods. However, there is more to this. In a well-managed classroom the teacher uses effective communication. This includes treating all students with respect, acknowledge and be sensitive to the different cultural backgrounds, and have appropriate expectations for all students regardless of their background and abilities. To foster a positive environment the teacher also must strive to develop authentic relationships (Rosenberg et al, 2011).

In her book "Educating Esmee" Esmee Raji Codell gives an example of how to do this: she greets her students by the door each morning and collects their 'troubles' in a 'trouble basket'. Her students can pantomime the unburdening of their home worries "so they can concentrate on school" (3)

 In a positive classroom the teacher knows how to deal with disruptive and noncompliant behaviors. When a teacher can determine a student's triggers, the phases of agitation, acceleration and peak can not only be avoided but the student's effective time used for learning is increased; making instruction more effective.

10. Differentiate Instruction

To address the needs of all students and students with disabilities in particular the general education teacher should also strive to use differentiated instruction. Using differentiated instruction also helps to establish a well-managed classroom because students will be taught according to their needs and interests. A variety of



materials and different presentation styles that cater to students who have different levels of abilities keeps them engaged. It will also ensure that students work within their proximal zone of development and hence limit frustrations while it makes learning more effective (IRIS Module: Differentiated Instruction). Differentiating instruction does not mean eliminating parts of the curriculum. Differentiated instruction is, when a teacher for instance reads to one group of students while she acknowledges that some students can read on their own and will let them do so. The opposite would be to force all students to listen and accept that some students will not benefit from this activity because they already can read or forcing all students to read themselves and accepting that some will struggle greatly because they still need some auditory assistance. Another common technique to differentiate instruction is called scaffolding. When new content is taught, the teacher explicitly builds on student's prior knowledge and experience by offering support and as the student masters the content, support is gradually removed (IRIS Module: Differentiated Instruction).

11. Address Disruptive and Noncompliant Behaviours in an Appropriate Manner

In a positive classroom the teacher knows how to deal with disruptive and noncompliant behaviors. Emotional and behavioral disabilities belong to the high-incidence disabilities. About 7.6% of all students with disabilities belong to this category and approximately 80% of them are male (Rosenberg et al, 2011).

The key to preventing noncompliant behaviors from escalating is to be able to rise to the occasion by understanding the "Acting-Out cycle" (IRIS Module: Addressing Disruptive and Noncompliant Behaviors). This cycle includes the seven phases of calm, triggers, agitation, acceleration, peak, de-escalation and recovery. It is most



important for the teacher to be able to detect the triggers and intervene at an early stage. A school-based trigger can be redressed by the teacher. Such triggers can range from arguments with peers to confusions about an assignment. Non-school based triggers are more difficult to address and a teacher should try to find solutions by talking to the student, making clear what the expectations are and try to find solutions together with the student (IRIS Module: Addressing Disruptive and Noncompliant Behaviors). From time to time this is not sufficient and another method of managing disruptive behavior is to implement a behavior management plan. In this plan the teacher states explicitly what the purpose is, and formulates how the student is expected to behave in the classroom. Logically it must also contain the consequences. However the plan should not be used to formulate and establish a legal base for punitive measures. Positive behavior should have positive consequences so that students have incentives to change their behavior. These positive consequences must be formulated as well. To help the student achieve this change in behavior the plan also contains a description of procedures. Describing the procedure is also part of formulating expectations and making them clear to the student (IRIS Module: Classroom Management (Part 1)).

12. Make Use of Assistive Technology

In the past decades great improvements and inventions have been made in technology and the general education teacher should not shy away from using those. Students with disabilities can greatly benefit from technology in the classroom because appropriate use of it can enhance communication or help them access materials. There is a whole range of assistive technology available. Some of the most widely used items are specialized writing tools, non-slip materials that



stabilizes student material on a desk, digital recorders to tape lessons and replay them, portable keyboards, audio books, word prediction software and communication devices (IRIS Module: Assistive Technology). Even though nowadays a plethora of assistive technology is available, the general education teacher should not be tempted to just use something but has to make sure that it is implemented appropriately, used consistently across the curriculum and that it is indeed useful to the student. Assistive technology is not limited to the use of devices but also includes assistive technology services. This service encompasses anything that is related to the use of assistive technology devices, which can be the need for repair or providing training to the family of the student on how to use the device (IRIS Module: Assistive Technology).



Works Cited

Bayat, M. (2012). Teaching Exceptional Children. Retrieved from Virginia Tech Scholar Website.

Cortiella, C. (2008). Understanding the Standards-based Individualized Education Plan. Retrieved from <http://www.LD.org>.

Friend, M. (2008). *Special Education: Contemporary Perspectives for School Professionals*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Hehir, T. (2002). Eliminating ableism in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(1), 1-32.

The IRIS Center. (2013). Module: Differentiated Instruction: Maximizing the learning of all Students. Retrieved from <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/di/chalcycle.htm>

The IRIS Center. (2013). Module: Universal Design for Learning: Creating a Learning Environment that challenges and engages all students. Retrieved from <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/udl/chalcycle.htm>

The IRIS Center. (2013). Module: Assistive Technology: An Overview. Retrieved from <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/at/chalcycle.htm>

The IRIS Center. (2013). Module: Addressing Disruptive and Noncompliant Behaviors (Part 1): Understanding the Acting-Out Cycle. Retrieved from <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/bi1/chalcycle.htm>

The IRIS Center. (2013). Module: Classroom Management (Part 1): Learning the Components of a Comprehensive Behavior Management Plan. Retrieved from <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/beh1/chalcycle.htm>

Mastropieri, M.A., Scruggs, T.E. (2010). *The Inclusive Classroom: Strategies for Effective Differentiated Instruction*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.



Shapiro, J. P. (1993). *No Pity: People with disabilities forging a new civil rights movement*. New York: Times Books.

Snow, Kathie.(2009). People First Language. *Disability is Natural*. Web 29 January 2013.

Raji Codell, E. (2001). *Educating Esme*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books.

Rodis, P., Garrod, A. & Boscardin, M.L. (2001). *Learning Disabilities & Life Stories*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Rosenberg, M.S., Westling, D.L., & McLeskey, J. (2011). *Special Education for Today's Teachers*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Wells, D. (2013). Introduction to special education (Power Point presentation). Retrieved from Virginia Tech Scholar Website.

Wells, D. (2013). Understanding and working with parents of children with disabilities (Power Point presentation). Retrieved from Virginia Tech Scholar Website.

