

unit
1**Education of Students with Disabilities: Goals & Implications****Unit Overview****Lesson 1: Principles for Educating Students with Disabilities**

Lesson 2: Understanding Students with Disabilities

Lesson 3: Background Information on Special Education

Lesson 4: Least Restrictive Environment for Students with Disabilities

Lesson 5: Individual Education Program

**NOTE TO THE READER: Review the following objective before proceeding with the lesson.**

After reading Lesson 1, the paraeducator will:

1. Describe five principles that guide the education of students with disabilities.
2. Describe how instruction tailored to individual students allows them to become as independent as possible.

Principle 1: All Students Can Learn

This principle has two important implications. First, all students, no matter what characteristics or behaviors they may bring to a classroom, are capable of learning. It means that all students with disabilities are capable of learning, even students with the most severe disabilities. There are differences in what students learn, how they learn, or the pace at which they learn, but they all have the capability. Let's meet three students:

Kim is 5 years old. When he first arrived in Mrs. Byrd's kindergarten class, Kim was able to add and subtract numbers with several digits. He had difficulty regrouping numbers, but he learned to do it as soon as Mrs. Byrd showed him. He could read numbers such as "2,461,339," much to the amazement of his classmates. At mid-year, Kim announced to Mrs. Byrd that he was "a little bored" with kindergarten and asked if he could move on to first grade!

Natalie is 8 years old. Natalie is in Mr. Martinez's third grade class. Like Kim, Natalie is also learning to add and subtract, but she experiences difficulty. She is behind her classmates and sometimes gets frustrated. But Mr. Martinez reminds her that last year,

in the second grade, she struggled with much easier problems, and she finally learned how to do them. She keeps trying, and muses, “I guess I’ll finally get it. But then I’ll probably have to learn times tables! Ick!”

Katrina is 15 years old. She attends high school classes, but due to her severe disability, receives extra support in most of them. She has autism, a disability which affects her speech, language, and responses to people and events. She uses sign language and a typewriter to communicate. Katrina is learning to identify coins and bills. She knows the value of a penny, dime, and quarter, but still confuses a nickel with a quarter. She enjoys trips to the community, and soon will begin making purchases and counting coin change.

Kim, Natalie, and Katrina are learning. They may learn the same skill at different ages or different skills at the same age. They learn at different rates and in different ways, but each has learned something in the past and each will be capable of learning more in the future.

The second implication of Principle 1 is that, if a student is not learning, the instruction needs to be changed. While all students can learn, they do not learn the same way or at the same pace. Instruction may need to be tailored to each student and changed until the best method is found.

Principle 2: Students with Disabilities Have Different Abilities

Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Kim, the kindergartner, has strengths in math, art, music, and reading, but weaknesses in physical and social skills. Natalie’s classmates may tease her about math, but they are impressed with her talent when she plays the piano. Katrina has a “severe disability,” but few of her peers will compete against her in the 100-yard dash. They are unaware of a “disability” when she is breaking the tape at the finish line.

Sometimes, labels like “disabled” make us think of students in a narrow way. While labels may help us communicate with each other, they sometimes prevent us from considering the whole person. We need to focus on students’ strengths, not on weaknesses; on their abilities, not on disabilities. Knowing a student’s disability tells us very little about their capabilities. Knowing a student’s goals, enthusiasm, and skills tell us about how their dreams will come true.

Principle 3: Education Should Help Students Become as Independent as Possible

The goal of providing education should be to assist students in becoming as independent as possible. Independence means being able to make decisions while having many options available. Again, people may become independent in different ways or to differing degrees. Kim may achieve independence as a computer analyst, while Katrina may work at the supermarket with limited supervision. Kim's and Katrina's careers may be very different, but their educational goals are the same: *To make them as independent as possible, given the abilities they bring to the classroom.*

Principle 4: Some Students Learn Best with Specialized Instruction

While all students can learn, they may learn best through different procedures. Instructors may need to tailor instruction to the student. For example, a student with mental retardation may learn how to sharpen a pencil when the instructor breaks the task into several parts (holding a pencil, placing one end into the hole, etc.). A student who is blind may understand what "roundness" means when given an object shaped like a ring. Other students may learn pencil sharpening with a brief demonstration, or learn about concepts like "roundness" in a quick lesson. Instruction is "specialized" when it meets each student's specific needs and characteristics.

Principle 5: Whenever Possible, Specialized Instruction Should Be Provided in Integrated Environments

Many times, specialized instruction for students with disabilities can be provided in general education classrooms. "Specialized" does not mean that instruction has to occur in a segregated location. For example, the student with mental retardation described above could be taught names of countries while the general education class studies industries and economies of Europe. The student with learning disabilities might be taught to read a list of vocabulary words while the remainder of the class reads short stories. *Many times segregation occurs because of the way educators think, not the way students act.*



Group Exercise: What Does Knowledge about the Disability Provide?

NOTE TO THE READER: Here's a potential discussion topic. Many of you may know a student, relative, neighbor, or other person with a disability. Describe someone by mentioning only the person's strengths, hobbies, and interests. Avoid naming the disability. Can others identify the disability? Why not? Does knowledge of the disability add to the information about the person?



Lesson 1 Video Activities

Exercise 1: Let's meet Quinn.

What do we learn about Quinn? Describe his attitude about his education. Discuss Quinn's situation in relation to the five principles in Lesson 1.

Quinn wants people to think of him as a student who is capable of many things. He likes most subjects, but not math. His attitude about his education is that he is one of many students actively engaged in achievement - he just happens to be blind. He is certainly capable of learning (Principle 1), has many abilities (Principle 2), and wants to be as independent as possible (Principle 3). He describes his Braille, which is an example of an assistive technology device providing Quinn with specialized instruction (Principle 4). Quinn would probably tell us that he wants to receive specialized instruction in an integrated educational setting (Principle 5).

Exercise 2: Let's meet Melinda.

What do we know about Melinda? Describe Melinda's attitude about independence. Discuss Melinda's situation in relation to the five principles.

Melinda has graduated from high school, goes out with friends, drives a truck, has gone bungee jumping, etc. Melinda stated that she could do anything given enough time, and that she was only limited by what people would not let her try! She has learned much (Principle 1), has focused on her strengths and diminished her weaknesses (Principle 2), and thrives on her independence (Principle 3). Melinda probably required specialized instruction, although we have no information (Principle 4). She clearly learns in integrated environments (Principle 5).

Exercise 3: Let's meet Eric.

What did we learn about Eric? Describe Eric's attitude toward his education. Discuss Eric's situation in relation to the five principles.

According to Ms. Grimes, Eric was disinterested in education until she emphasized how academic skills were used in the real world. His attitude changed when school and community life were "brought together." He was capable of learning, although what he learned and how he learned were adjusted to motivate him (Principle 1). He had different abilities, including capacity for academic learning once it was applied to community settings (Principle 2). He saw the value of independence when learning was applied to the community (Principle 3) using specialized instruction (Principles 4 and 5).



Lesson 1 Progress Check

NOTE TO THE READER: Respond to each item below. Later, check your responses with those in Appendix A.

At the end of each lesson, we will present some questions so that you can check your progress.

1. Name the five principles that guide the education of students with disabilities.
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2. All students, no matter what characteristics or behaviors they may bring to a class room, are capable of_____.
3. T F Focusing on students' disabilities allow educators to become more effective in teaching them.
4. T F "Specialized" instruction means that instruction has to occur in a segregated location.
5. With regard to education, independence means_____.