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 objectives before proceeding with the lesson.

After reading Lesson 4, the paraeducator will:

1. Define the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).
2. Describe at least two advantages of delivering instruction in integrated settings.
3. Describe at least two methods of providing services to students with disabilities in integrated environments.
4. Describe at least two grouping methods for accommodating students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

What Is the "Least Restrictive Environment"?

As we mentioned in Lesson 3, special education law requires that students be placed in the LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT (LRE). According to IDEA, this refers to an environment in which students with disabilities are integrated with their classmates who do not have disabilities and participate in their community school. LRE requires that special education services be carried out in a regular school environment used by students who do not have disabilities, to the extent possible.

The "Continuum of Services" According to LRE:

General Education Class ▸ Special Education Teacher helps the General Education Teacher as a Consultant ▸ Special Education Teacher helps the General Education Teacher directly as an "Itinerant" (Temporary) Teacher ▸ General and Special Education Teachers Collaborate (teach together) ▸ Resource Room (student receives instruction in a small, segregated class for part of the day) ▸ Hospital or Homebound Instruction ▸ Self-Contained Classroom (student receives instruction in a small, segregated class all day) ▸ Special Day School (student receives instruction in a separate school facility) ▸ Residential School (student receives instruction in a 24-hour treatment or detention setting).

What is "Inclusion"?

In the 1990s, some educational reformists called for general education to take responsibility for students with disabilities and to educate them exclusively in the regular classroom (Stainback & Stainback, 1989). They argued that there should be one, unified system to educate all students, not two separate systems: one for typical students and one for students who were different. The reformists were dissatisfied with LRE, saying that, in practice, it was often ignored. Thus, the "INCLUSION MOVEMENT" advocated that all students should be educated in the general education classroom. This way, students with disabilities would avoid being stigmatized. Plus, they would grow to be accepted as a routine part of the classroom and, ultimately, of society. Many state departments of education and school districts have developed policies and procedures based on inclusion. Ask your instructor for more information.

The Value of Integrated Environments

Special educators find that many students with disabilities have successful learning experiences in classrooms where they were integrated with their nondisabled peers. Special instructional procedures were used successfully in general education classrooms, sometimes by special education teachers or paraeducators who assisted general educators. McLean and Odom (1988) reviewed several research studies and concluded that students with disabilities performed at least as well in integrated as in segregated environments and that social, emotional, and communication skills learned in general education settings helped prepare them for adult life in the community. More important, many students with disabilities had a higher quality learning experience in integrated classrooms. Students with and without disabilities formed friendships, competed in sports, worked together on school projects, attended birthday parties, and brought families together. Pickett, Faison, and Formanek (1993) summarized characteristics of a high quality, integrated educational environment:

- Children and youth with disabilities learn from other children.
- Children and youth with disabilities learn from the environment.
- People *without* disabilities learn from their peers *with* disabilities.
- For people with disabilities to be integral parts of family life, they must have the opportunity to participate in the same school, work, and play settings as other family members.
- Each person with a disability contributes positively to family, friends, school colleagues, and other community members.
- Each person with a disability can participate as a valued member of the community.
- With full integration, children and youth with disabilities can learn options available to them, such as those in employment, friendship, recreation, leisure, and living space.
- Children and youth with disabilities have the right to succeed and the right to fail.

Are integrated environments really worth it? Yes, they are worth it from the standpoint of preserving legal rights, costs of services, and human dignity. Integrated environments are worth it because they serve as evidence that our society has conquered another myth: a fear that has unnecessarily kept people apart. Integrated environments are worth it because they are arenas where we learn much about each other. But we must learn more about designing integrated environments. Students will continue to challenge us to learn more about successful integration.

Methods for Providing Services in Integrated Environments

Is serving the student with disabilities in an "INTEGRATED ENVIRONMENT", like the general education classroom, really the best answer? The important factor in providing special education services is not what the physical classroom *looks like* (integrated versus segregated), but what *happens* in those classrooms. Simply placing a student with disabilities in a general classroom does not serve that student well. In fact, if needed services are not provided, it runs *contrary* to the intent of integrated education. The objective is to provide appropriate special education services in the least restrictive environment.

Smith (1998) describes several different methods for providing services to students with disabilities in integrated environments. Four of these methods are adapted and described below. Not all of these methods are available in every school district.

1. **A teacher works with students with disabilities in the general education classroom.** A special education teacher may teach one or more students with disabilities in the general education classroom. A trained paraeducator may be assigned to general education classrooms to assist individuals or groups of students with disabilities.
2. **Team teaching.** Special education teachers may work cooperatively with general education teachers to provide instruction to students with and without disabilities.
3. **Consultation.** Special education teachers may observe students with disabilities in a general education classroom, give helpful advice, and remain available for problem-solving. This is sometimes called "collaborative consultation." The teacher becomes a collaborator, or partner, in trying to solve problems involving students with disabilities.
4. **Intervention assistance teams.** An intervention assistance team is a group of teachers and other staff who help general education teachers provide services and solve problems for students who have disabilities. The team may consist of a teacher, physical/occupational therapist, speech/language therapist, psychologist, and other specialists.

The Challenges of Adapting Instruction to Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Classrooms

The supreme test facing general and special educators is how to adapt the classroom instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities while maintaining instruction for typical students. This section addresses this question, first by describing how to assess skills of the student with disabilities using "CURRICULUM-BASED ASSESSMENT" (CBA). Second, we will address issues related to grouping students.

Curriculum-based assessment (CBA). The first step in accommodating students with disabilities in the general education classroom is to pinpoint their skill levels. Traditional, "NORM-REFERENCED TESTS" (such as achievement or intelligence tests) have provided little guidance for the teacher attempting to work with students who have disabilities. Scores on achievement or intelligence tests may provide some general indication as to the academic or intellectual differences between students, but they provide no information on specific performance levels in reading, math, language, spelling, and other areas.

In the 1980s, CBA emerged as an alternative method of assessment. CBA involves the practice of obtaining direct and frequent measures of student performance on a series of sequentially arranged objectives derived directly from a classroom curriculum (Blankenship, 1985). A teacher uses a screening inventory to assess a student's performance in a content area, such as basic arithmetic operations. For example, the teacher may use an inventory composed of a few arithmetic items based on a series of sequentially arranged objectives within a curriculum, as shown below:

5 one-digit addition problems without carrying
3 one-digit addition problems requiring addition of "0"
3 one-digit addition problems requiring addition of "1"
5 one-digit addition problems with carrying
5 one-digit subtraction problems
3 one-digit subtraction problems requiring subtraction of "0"
5 one-digit subtraction problems with regrouping
5 two-digit addition problems with carrying
5 two-digit subtraction problems with regrouping

The teacher or a trained paraeducator may administer the screening inventory to all students at the beginning of the school year. On the basis of the inventory results, the teacher may place students at specific points in the curriculum (e. g., those needing to learn addition with carrying, those advancing to two-digit addition, those advancing to two-digit addition with carrying, etc.). Twice a month, the teacher may reassess the students using a similar inventory. She identifies the number of arithmetic items performed correctly, the rate of items performed correctly, and the numbers and types of errors under each arithmetic objective. Then, to identify progress, she compares each student's performance to previous performance. Unit 5 provides more information about CBA.

Groupings. Once a student's academic skills have been pinpointed using CBA, the teacher must consider the way that instruction will be delivered. Four grouping alternatives are described.

Historically, grouping of students has been aimed at producing "sameness," or homogeneity. "HOMOGENEOUS GROUPS" provide distinct academic advantages: teachers can tailor their instruction to specific skill levels and avoid accommodating students far above or below a given skill level. Unfortunately, homogeneous groups may create segregation and lack of acceptance of students who have disabilities.

Smith (1998) advocates creating "FLEXIBLE GROUPS," which she describes as a group of typical students along with students with disabilities who function academically at different levels. Instruction can still be arranged for typical students at the homogeneous level. Then, the typical students work with students who have disabilities in cooperative learning capacities or as peer tutors.

In "COOPERATIVE LEARNING" activities, typical students and students who have disabilities work together to complete assigned tasks. Each group member assumes specific roles and responsibilities and carries out tasks. In cooperative learning, there is no distinction between students who have disabilities and those who do not; each student plays a role. Slavin (1987) reports research that showed cooperative groups developed stronger relationships and achieved higher academic levels than homogeneous groups.

"PEER TUTORING" can be arranged in flexible groups. Typical students assist students with disabilities in the practice of academic skills or in training of social skills. While peer tutoring has been found to be successful in improving academic and social skills without extensive teacher involvement, the teacher must remain closely involved in training and monitoring tutors.

Lesson 4 Video Activities

Exercise 1: Let's meet the Gray family.

FOR DISCUSSION: What did you learn from Michael's parents? What are some conditions necessary to make integrated education work?

Lesson 4 Progress Check

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

Here are some items to check your progress.

1. What is the Least Restrictive Environment?

2. Two cautions were mentioned about LRE. Describe one.

3. Identify two characteristics of a high quality, integrated school setting.

4. A movement which calls for general education to take responsibility for students with disabilities and to educate them exclusively in the regular classroom is called
   a. LRE.
   b. Team teaching.
   c. Inclusion.
   d. Consultation.

5. Identify two methods of providing services to students with disabilities in integrated environments.

6. The practice of obtaining direct and frequent measures of student performance on a series of sequentially arranged objectives derived directly from a classroom curriculum is called _____.

7. A grouping method in which typical students apply learned skills by working with students who have disabilities, and each member assumes specific roles and responsibilities is called
   a. cooperative learning.
   b. peer tutoring.
   c. adaptations.
   d. the member system.

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   a. cooperative learning.
   b. peer tutoring.
   c. adaptations.
   d. the remember system.