Teaching in the Inclusive Classroom

Sample Lesson

Study Teams and Group Activities

If you register as an individual and not apart of a group, ask a colleague or spouse to participate with you in discussion assignments. If that is not possible for you, use group activities for you r own personal reflection.

Application Assignment and Access to a Classroom

If you are an administrator, counselor, or do not currently have access to a classroom, instead of reporting on implementation of application assignments describe how you plan to use the course concepts in your environment.

Teaching in the Inclusive Classroom: An Introduction

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By watching Video Program #1 and completing this session's learning activities, you will:

• Understand the scope and sequence of this courses.

• Explore the key concepts that the course will address.

• Reflect on your current teaching practices.

• Establish a course goal to improve the level of emotional safety in your teaching situation.

READING ASSIGNMENT:

Please read the introduction and chapter 1 in the course text.

PREPARATION:

In order to focus your thinking as you begin this session, please the following article by Nancy Larson.

"The Time Has Come," the Walrus Said, "To Speak of Many Things".

by Nancy Weidner Larson

As a special educator, I find myself in an ever-increasing "Mad Hatter-March Hare" sort of existence. I wonder if you, too, are having trouble just trying to keep up? This is true on many special education fronts: in curriculum, in classroom settings, and in the shear complexity of our professional conversations. In particular, how did "rigorous and high" curriculum standards become the desired goal for all students? Whatever happened to "reasonable" standards, goals and expectations that used to be acceptable back here in the trenches, where most of us reside?

When I think of "rigorous," I immediately envision Arctic explorer Anne Bancroft trekking through snow and ice, dragging a dogsled by a shoulder harness, or Lance Armstrong making that final uphill push in the French Alps. Must all of us strive to achieve universal rigorous levels? It would appear that few of us are either motivated enough or talented enough to be able to achieve "high or rigorous" standards. For my part, I think it may be enough to achieve "reasonable" goals. Frustrated parents, students, and teachers may agree.

A Twiddle Dum, Twiddle Dee "rigor" issue in my current world is the widely accepted notion that special or general education interventions and curricula must be "scientifically research based," or variants thereof such as "scientifically based," "peer reviewed," "peer juried" and "data driven" (No Child Left Behind Act). Much of what we know from special education research, just like in other disciplines, is narrowly construed and focused on relative minutia; for example, time on task, reading fluency, or short-term memory. As a consequence, we find ourselves in a place similar to those embracing the new frontier in brain research: We are on the cusp of an explosion of information about research-based practice, but right now we don't have many "research-based" practices on which to hang our hats. Those few practices we know for sure are effective can be named on the fingers of one hand: direct instruction works; strategy instruction works; children who are safe, alert and fed do better than those who are not; children who are instructed in small, intensive settings have a better chance of improving their skills; and students who achieve at levels one and one-half standard deviations below their peers can make progress but do not catch up (yes, there are a few more fingers). Still, mostly we know how to apply research findings when it comes to teaching basic reading skills to young students. In more complex areas such as math application and reading comprehension, we do not yet have the body of "scientific" evidence needed to make "research based" practice more than a hope for the future.

I must have been taking a Cheshire cat nap when confusion arose about the value of special education settings. The thought goes something like this: Children with disabilities are better off in general education classrooms because special education classrooms are somehow inferior or produce minimal results (the opposite of "rigorous"). As may be obvious, students in more restrictive settings typically have more serious learning and behavioral issues and, therefore, may make less progress. Go figure! Students with learning disabilities often do better and are more comfortable in special education settings. Could there be other factors in the equation? Could distractibility be a factor for some? Could a reluctance to display learning problems in front of a whole class be a factor for others? What happened to the concept of tailoring the program to the "individual"?

Still, the apparent dream is that students with learning disabilities, despite being identified as not doing well (actually failing) in general education, must be placed in general education so they will do better. Why? Didn't these students just come from general education where they were performing poorly? Is this not a circular fallacy? Students with learning disabilities don't do well in this setting, so they must remain in that setting and they will do better? The corollary to this mandate is that the best model for all special education is an inclusive classroom, where special education teachers potentially function as extremely well educated ("highly qualified"?) and expensive paraprofessionals. Also, full implementation of this model requires one special education teacher for each general education teacher for every hour of the school day at all grade levels. Imagine the expense.

The world of general education as it interfaces with the world of special education is becoming so complex that most teachers are on overload. We have previously learned that occupying space in a general education classroom is not the same as participating in general education, that subsidized employment at McDonald's is not the same as competitive employment, and that it is important to remember that we all have our strengths and our weaknesses.

It is time to resolve the convoluted thinking that mandates the "same" high ("rigorous") grade-level standards for all. One of the things that we know for sure in special education is that one size does not fit all, and that the same standards for everyone, rigorous or not, will not result in the same outcomes. Teaching children with disabilities is a complicated task and requires more instantaneous responses more often than most adults can handle. Let's get over our strange

visions of "sameness" and embrace "reasonable" as our bar. Life doesn't have to be that harsh, or should I say, "rigorous"!

Used by permission. Nancy W. Larson, Minnesota Department of Education, Nancy.Larson@state.mn.us.

PREPARATION:

Please consider the following questions with respect to the above article. If you are taking this course as a member of a study team, discuss your answers with your colleagues. If you are taking this course as an individual, consider the implications your answers might have for your teaching situation.

1. What is your reaction to the article? Do you agree with the author? Why? Why not?

2. What implications does the article have for your own teaching situation? Explain your answer?

3. What does your personal experience tell you with respect to the effectiveness of inclusion?

4. Education seems to be perpetually cyclical. After reading the above article and based on your own experience, do you believe that inclusion will eventually give way to some other approach to teaching children with special needs? Why? Why not?

VIDEO PROGRAM:

View the video program for this session entitled, "Teaching in the Inclusive Classroom: An Introduction." The running time for the video is approximately 27 minutes.

VIDEO PROGRAM OVERVIEW:

This video introduces the major themes in the course and presents a preview of the remaining sessions and accompanying
videos

Session #1: Instructional Strategies for All Students: An Introduction
The scope and sequence of this course are described along with key concepts to be explored.

Session #2: Instructional Strategies for All Students: Choice Theory and Meeting Individual Needs (Upper Elementary)
Featured is a lesson on economy, ecology and geography taught in a multi-grade inclusive classroom in one of Dr. Glasser's quality schools.

Session #3: Instructional Strategies for All Students: Real World Learning in the Inclusive Classroom (Middle School)
Dr. Glasser's concept of "useful work" is applied in a middle school classroom to make concepts more accessible to both disabled and not disabled students.

Session #4: Instructional Strategies for All Students: Constructivism and the Two-Step Approach (High School)

Dr. Paul Vermette of Niagara University teaches a high school lesson to demonstrate how a two-step constructivist approach can be used in inclusive classrooms.

Session #5: Instructional Strategies for All Students: Teachers and Students Working Together (Middle School)
The role collaboration should play in an inclusive classroom is explored with a lesson on paragraphs in a middle school creative writing class.

Session #6: Instructional Strategies for All Students: Using Choices and Differentiated Instruction (Middle School)
In this session you will view and critically analyze a lesson in which the teacher provides students several choices in how to complete an assigned task.

Session #7: Instructional Strategies for All Students: Teaching Study Skills and Self-Management (Middle School)
Teaching self-management skills is demonstrated in a lesson taught in a middle school resource room.

Session #8: Instructional Strategies for All Students: Teaching Communication Skills and Self-Evaluation (High School)
The use of class meetings to engage both special and general education high school students is demonstrated in a communications class.

Session #9: Instructional Strategies for All Students: Peer Teaching and Group Learning Strategies (Lower Elementary)
With a lesson taught in a lower-elementary, multi-grade classroom, you will explore using students as tutors or facilitators in inclusive classrooms.

Session #10: Instructional Strategies for All Students: Using Choices to Teach Responsibility (Lower Elementary)
In this session you will analyze a lesson in which the teacher uses choices to teacher her kindergarten students self-management skills.

Session #11: Instructional Strategies for All Students: Team Teaching (Upper Elementary)
A lesson taught in a middle school illustrates how special and general education teachers can best work together in teaching a lesson.

Sessions #12, #13, and #14 Self-Select Study Topics
With these sessions, you will select three of the foregoing videos to view a second time and study in more depth.

Session #15: Instructional Strategies for All Students: Participant Planning for Future Use of Course Concepts
With this session, you will reflect upon your learning experiences throughout the course and plan for the future use of your new knowledge and skills.

VIDEO AND READING FOCUS QUESTIONS:

Please consider the following questions with respect to the information presented in the reading assignments and video program for this session. If you are taking this course as a member of a

study team, discuss your answers with your colleagues. If you are taking this course as an individual, consider the implications your answers might have for your teaching situation.

1. Review the factors associated with successful inclusion in chapter 1 of the text. Which of the factors do you feel is most important in your teaching to ensure that all students (general and special education) can succeed? Explain your answer.

2. Consider the following statement by Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson "From a very young age, children understand that some of us are good with kicking a ball, some with telling funny stories, manipulating numbers, and some with making people feel happy. They understand that some of us struggle with reading words from a page, others with keeping tempers in check, still others with arms or legs that are weak. Children seem to accept a world in which we are not alike. They do not quest for sameness, but they search for the sense of triumph that comes when they are respected, valued, nurtured, and even cajoled into accomplishing things they believe beyond their grasp." Dr. Tomlinson made that about students in general. How does that statement apply to inclusion?

3. Consider this statement: "If we wish to have all students succeed, we must relate better to them and explain to them why what we are asking them to learn is worth learning." Does this also apply in an inclusive classroom? Why? Why not?

4. Review the outline of course videos in the Video Program Overview above. Which of sessions 2-15 do you believe will be most applicable to your teaching situation? Why?

5. With respect to your answer to #4, what would be a reasonable, reachable goal for you to achieve by the end of this course? How could you determine whether that goal was achieved?

APPLICATION ASSIGNMENT:
Your application assignment for these sessions is to refine the goal you have set for yourself in response the Video and Reading Focus Questions.

First, write your goal here:

Survey:

The next part of this assignment will help you identify those aspects of your approach to teaching align with Dr. Glasser competency-based, success-oriented educational philosophy. Next, please read and respond to each of the following statements using the following scale.

0 = neither disagree or agree
1 = strongly disagree
4 = somewhat disagree

7 = somewhat agree
10 = strongly agree

Early in the school year, I take an inventory of my students learning preferences.

0   1   4   7   10

I provide my students abundant opportunities for practice and application of newly acquired skills and knowledge.

0   1   4   7   10

I frequently model effective ways of completing assigned tasks.

0   1   4   7   10

My teaching goals and methods address a variety of student learning styles.

0   1   4   7   10

Sharing my knowledge and expertise with students is very important to me.

0   1   4   7   10

I make frequent use of peer tutoring and peer assistance.

0   1   4   7   10

I often offer students choices in how to complete assignments.

0   1   4   7   10

Examples from my personal experiences often are used to illustrate points about the material.

0   1   4   7   10

I guide students' work on course projects by asking questions, exploring options, and suggesting alternative ways to do things.

0   1   4   7   10

Developing the ability of students to think and work independently is an important goal of mine.

0   1   4   7   10

I often show students how they can use various principles and concepts.

0   1   4   7   10

My learning activities encourage students to take initiative and responsibility for their learning.

0   1   4   7   10

My students take responsibility for teaching part of the class sessions.

0   1   4   7   10

I often solicit student input about how to improve my teaching and their learning.

0   1   4   7   10

Students set their own pace for completing independent and/or group projects.

0   1   4   7   10

Students describe me as a "coach" who helps them solve their own academic and behavior problems.

0   1   4   7   10

Now review your scores. The higher your scores, the more you are using teaching approaches that the text identifies as effective.

Survey Analysis:

What are the areas of teaching strengths suggested by the survey results? (Statements with higher scores.)

What improvements are suggested by your survey analysis? (Statements with lower scores.)

Refining Your Course Goal:

What existing strengths can you capitalize on to help you achieve your course goal?

How can this course address areas where improvement is needed?

How will you know you achieved your goal (observable indicators)?

Who can provide support that will help you reach your goal?

PROGRESS REPORTING

To conclude your learning activities for this session, please turn to the Progress Report form for Session #1. Progress Report forms for all sessions are placed together at the back of this Course of Study book for easy removal and evaluation.