1

Interacting With Students

The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil.

—Emerson

☑ *STRATEGY 1: Use a "hypothesis and frequent reflection" strategy when working with students who have special education needs.*

What the Research Says

In an analysis of 19 expert special educators, Stough, Palmer, and Douglas (2003) determined that the success of these teachers and their students with special needs could be attributed to their unique approach and application of pedagogical knowledge. The central finding of this study was that each teacher was concerned about individual student performance.

These teachers had a minimum of five years' experience and were evaluated using a multifaceted approach (interviewing, videotaping, observation, stimulated recall, and field notes). The study was conducted in five schools ranging from urban to rural and elementary through high

school levels. In addition, the special education needs of the students varied along the continuum of services (RSP, MM, ED, etc.).

Considering first the academic behavior and then the classroom behavior, each teacher used a hypothesis/reflection strategy to teach his or her students. By using prior knowledge of the individual student, each teacher developed a hypothesis about the student and then an instructional plan to meet those individual needs. During the instruction, the teacher would assess the individual student's progress and reflect on the efficacy of the practice in that moment, making any needed adjustments. The teachers believed strongly that all students could learn and were collectively working to increase student independence and emotional well-being.

Application

Expert teachers know that it is essential to consider the individual student. Novice teachers may be able to cite this concept but will benefit from a supported hypothesis/reflection approach. By using stimulated recall and collegial reflection, all teachers can adjust their practice to increase student learning.

Individual teachers would benefit from taking the time to review available data (IEP, 504, cumulative file, etc.) to develop a basic profile of a student and his or her individual strengths and weaknesses. Using background pedagogical knowledge of instructional practice, the teacher can then form a hypothesis about how that student will benefit most from specific instruction. As the instruction unfolds, the teacher will note the student's response and can adjust the practice as needed.

Often, by considering the needs of one student, a teacher can positively impact an entire class. For example, if a teacher notices that an individual student needs to have written directions read aloud due to a processing delay, the teacher may discover that the entire class performs better when she reviews the instructions orally with the whole class prior to beginning an assignment.

Frequent reflection is the key to evaluating the hypothesis and determining the efficacy of instructional practice. With time and experience, teachers' knowledge of student characteristics increases along with the number of instructional strategies they are able to employ.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

It is important that teachers base their hypotheses about individual students on facts or observable behaviors. It can be tempting to assume that because a student has the same disability as another

student their instructional needs are the same. The key to excellence in teaching students with special needs is to consider the student individually. It can also be tempting to do what has always been done rather than design a practice that specifically meets an individual's need. By constructively using assessment and subsequent reflection to inform their practice, teachers can accelerate their students' success.
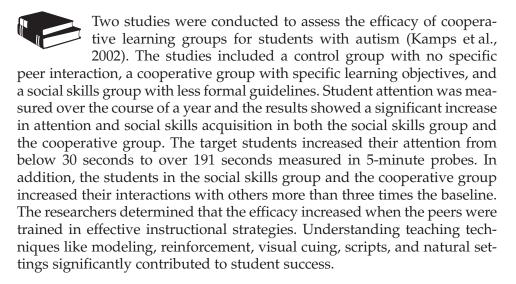
Source

Stough, L. M., Palmer, D., & Douglas, J. (2003). Special thinking in special settings: A qualitative study of expert special educators. *Journal of Special Education, 36*(4), 206–223.

STRATEGY 2: Pre-teach general education students with instructional strategies prior to forming cooperative groups.

What the Research Says

Two studies were conducted to assess the efficacy of cooperative learning groups for students with autism (Kamps et al., 2002). The studies included a control group with no specific peer interaction, a cooperative group with specific learning objectives, and a social skills group with less formal guidelines. Student attention was measured over the course of a year and the results showed a significant increase in attention and social skills acquisition in both the social skills group and the cooperative group. The target students increased their attention from below 30 seconds to over 191 seconds measured in 5-minute probes. In addition, the students in the social skills group and the cooperative group increased their interactions with others more than three times the baseline. The researchers determined that the efficacy increased when the peers were trained in effective instructional strategies. Understanding teaching techniques like modeling, reinforcement, visual cuing, scripts, and natural settings significantly contributed to student success.

Application

Although most teachers are aware that pre-teaching procedures prior to introducing a new activity to their students increases success, few teachers take the next step. By specifically teaching basic techniques

like modeling and reinforcement, all students can benefit from a supported cooperative group experience. For the student with a disability, the need for a positive group is even stronger and often harder to come by.

Teachers should identify the specific instructional needs of their students with disabilities and what instructional approaches appear to be the most effective. They should then teach those skills to the whole class. For example, consider the student with a processing delay who benefits from visual cuing. A teacher could teach the entire class about the benefits of using visual aids when giving presentations or working to persuade an audience. Examples of visual cuing in the media could be discussed, and students could create their own examples. In-class examples of visual cuing could be highlighted, like homework listed on a daily agenda, check-off sheets for projects, clean-up activities, and so on. When students participate in cooperative groups, they can now incorporate these skills to facilitate their own communication and particularly the involvement of the student with a disability.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

It is important that teachers do not rely so heavily on a few capable students to constantly facilitate the efforts of a student with a disability. Likewise, when planning for the student with a disability, it is common to stick with what has worked in the past. Teachers need to branch out and try a variety of approaches to help expand their students' capabilities.

Source

Kamps, D., Potucek, J., Dugan, E., Kravitz, T., Gonzalez-Lopez, A., Garcia, J., et al. (2002). Peer training to facilitate social interaction for elementary students with autism and their peers. *Exceptional Children*, *68*(2), 173–188.

STRATEGY 3: Use creativity to design ways to academically support and challenge students with severe disabilities who are included in general education classrooms.

What the Research Says

Although many students with learning disabilities are successfully included in general education classes for both academic and social growth, frequently IEP teams limit their expectations

of students with severe disabilities. Most students with severe disabilities are placed primarily for social goals, and any academic expectation is limited to the life-skill training that occurs in the special education classroom (Downing & Echinger, 2003). Creative teachers can identify myriad ways to assist students with severe disabilities to work on their academic goals. Use of pictorial charts and number cards can provide a bridge for students. Downing and Echinger offer the example of a student in a biology class who sorts and counts seeds while nondisabled peers identify the genus. When the class is working on writing a story, the student with a severe disability might select pictures that would illustrate the story. Students learning how to follow directions and interact socially might be called on to distribute papers or collect homework routinely. They offer additional suggestions for teachers who use random groupings of students for specific activities. Students with severe disabilities could use pictures of the class and a die to place students' names into envelopes, forming groups (with the assistance of a paraeducator) while the teacher is delivering the lecture.

Application

The first step in creating appropriate academic activities for a student with severe disabilities is to consider the student's IEP goals. With those goals in mind, the next step is to open a dialogue regarding the specific curriculum as well as the classroom procedures of the specific class. Some teachers find it helpful to create a chart that blocks out the basics of these two areas so they can be viewed simultaneously to begin the planning process. Either by viewing the chart, or simply by reviewing the IEP and lesson plan book, teachers should consider the crossover points that could be avenues for appropriate learning activities for the student. They should begin with the classroom procedures and evaluate things like homework turn-in, group activities, lectures versus labs, and so on. Teachers should look for opportunities for the student to practice his or her academic goals (writing name, recognizing routines, etc.), then move to the curriculum itself. Teachers must consider the essential standards that are being addressed by the specific unit and the level of modification that is appropriate for the specific student. If the student has the services of a paraeducator during the general education class, teachers should ensure that he or she is aware of both the curricular and individual student's goals for the lesson.
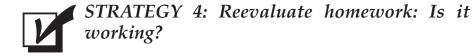
Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

Teachers should avoid contrived matches of curriculum and academic goals. The more real and relevant the activity is, the more likely it is to benefit the student's growth overall. Making a collage

of food groups might be appropriate for a nutrition or biology class but not for history. It is essential that the standards for the lesson are addressed and that alternate activities don't become "busywork." Teachers should also be aware of any safety or medical issues that could negatively influence specific activities.

Source

Downing, J. E., & Eichinger, J. (2003). Creating learning opportunities for students with severe disabilities in inclusive classrooms. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 36*(1), 26–32.

STRATEGY 4: Reevaluate homework: Is it working?

What the Research Says

In their book, Etta Kralovec and John Buell present a unique view of the homework concept and question the value of the practice itself (Buell & Kralovec, 2000). Few studies have been conducted on the subject, and while the book offers perspectives from both sides of the debate, it is clear that the homework concept needs to be examined more closely. For example, Buell and Kralovec cite homework as a great discriminator as children, once leaving school for the day, encounter a range of parental supports, challenging home environments, afterschool jobs and sports, and a mix of resources available to some and not to others. Clearly, opportunities are not equal. Tired parents are held captive by the demands of their children's school, unable to develop their own priorities for family life. And for a student with a disability, parents may lack the needed skills to help with homework.

The questions their research and discourse explores are, "With single parent households becoming more common or with both parents working, is it reasonable to accept the homework concept, as it is now practiced, as useful and valid considering the tradeoffs families need to make?" "How does homework contribute to family dynamics in negative or positive ways?" "Does it unnecessarily stifle other important opportunities or create an uneven or unequal playing field for some students?"

Buell and Kralovec also provide examples of communities that have tried to formalize homework policy as the communities tried to balance the demands of homework with extracurricular activities and the need for family time. They also point out the aspects of inequity inherent in the

fact that many students lack the resources at home to compete on an equal footing with those peers who have computers, Internet access, highly educated parents, unlimited funds, and other resources for homework requirements.

They also point out that homework persists despite the lack of any solid evidence that it achieves its much-touted gains. Homework is one of our most entrenched institutional practices, yet one of the least investigated. It is also the one least likely to be completed by students with disabilities unless assisted by parents, tutors, or friends.

Application

Teachers should be aware of the inequalities that may exist among students in their classes regarding their ability to complete homework assignments. Certain students may be excluded from the opportunities for support and other resources. Consider the following questions:

What is homework?

How much homework is too much?

What are or should be the purposes of homework?

Can different assignments be given to different students in the same class?

Do students have specific accommodations or modifications regarding homework written in their IEP or 504 plans?

Do all students have equal opportunities to successfully complete the homework?

Who is responsible for homework, the students or the parents?

Do all students have the same capacity to self-regulate?

How are other school activities or family-based responsibilities factored in?

What is the best and most equitable way to deal with overachievers?

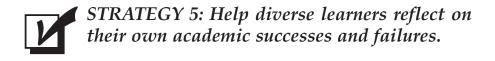Is the homework load balanced between teachers?

When designing homework assignments, particularly those that are multistep or project based, consider consulting a special educator for suggestions on making the assignment manageable for students with disabilities. Frequently teachers have no concept of "too much" or "too little" when it comes to homework.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

Traditionally, homework has been seen as a solution to rather than the cause of educational problems. It takes a little bit of acclimation time to begin to look at the homework concept with a new lens. However, the value of homework in providing opportunities for students to deepen their knowledge should not be ignored. Be wary of assuming a specific assignment is "easy" for students. For example, picking up a book from the library and bringing it to class may be a 5-minute operation for most students. However, for a student with disabilities who may be unfamiliar with the organization of a library (including accessing the computerized catalog, locating the appropriate selections in the stacks, and then skimming several books to select the best one), this may be beyond the scope of his or her ability without specific assistance. Consider setting a fixed time limit for certain homework projects, as appropriate.

Source

Buell, J., & Kralovec, E. (2000). *The end of homework: How homework disrupts families, overburdens children, and limits learning.* Boston: Beacon.

STRATEGY 5: Help diverse learners reflect on their own academic successes and failures.

What the Research Says

Students often get into ruts in school, falsely thinking that because they didn't do well in a class in the past, they won't now or in the future. However, extensive research shows that students can learn to control their own academic destinies. One body of research focuses on students' attributions for success and failure (Alderman, 1990). This research shows there are four common reasons people give for their successes and failures: ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. Attributions can be divided into two dimensions: stable-unstable and internal-external. Stable-unstable refers to how consistent the attributions are over time. That is, the extent to which a person uses the same types of reasons to explain his or her success or failure over and over again (stable) or whether the person gives one kind of reason on one occasion and another type of reason another time (unstable). For example, a student says solving mass problems in physics is always too difficult for her (stable) but that in chemistry some balancing equation problems are easy for

her and some are too difficult (unstable). Stable arguments are often harder to address. They tend to be avoidance arguments; that is, the student consistently uses the same argument to avoid work he or she feels threatened by. Older students tend to form defensive "stable" arguments to avoid potential "failure" situations.

Internal-external refers to a situation in which a person assigns responsibility for his or her successes and failures—inside or outside the self. For example, a student says she didn't do well on her test about the Holocaust because she didn't study enough (internal). She says she didn't do well on her first science test because her family interfered with her study time (external). She says she got a good grade on her second science test because she was lucky (external).

Students' explanations of their successes and failures have important consequences for future performance on academic tasks. Research shows there are four common ways students explain their successes and failures: effort ("I could do it if I really tried"), ability ("I'm just not a good writer"), luck ("I guessed right"), and task difficulty ("The test was too hard") (Alderman, 1990). Attributions are related to the following:

- Expectations about one's likelihood of success
- Judgments about one's ability
- Emotional reactions of pride, hopelessness, and helplessness
- Willingness to work hard and self-regulate one's efforts

Application

Help diverse learners rid themselves of their misconceptions about learning. Students who see a relationship between their effort and their success are more likely to use learning strategies such as organizing, planning, goal setting, self-checking, and self-instruction. Alderman's "links to success" model is designed to help at-risk students develop attributions that will motivate them to succeed. Her four links to success are as follows:

1. Proximal goals, which are short term rather than long term, specific rather than general, and hard (but reachable) rather than easy; for example, "This week I'll manage my time so that I have three extra hours to study." For the student with disabilities, the time frame for proximal goals may need to be shortened. Depending on the student's individual needs, consider goals measured in 15-minute, half hour, period, or daily increments. Teach students to anticipate and overcome obstacles, monitor progress while goals are being pursued, and evaluate whether they achieved their goals at the end of the specified time. "I'll know whether I accomplished this goal by writing down how much time I study and

comparing that to how much I studied last week." A possible obstacle to achieving this goal is making a statement such as, "I will overcome these obstacles by . . ." If they don't achieve their goals, teach students to determine why and what they could do differently next time.

2. Learning strategies, which students are taught so they can apply effective strategies such as summarizing and clarifying, emphasize meaningful learning and can be used across subjects and situations. Ineffective approaches, such as repetition, which tends to emphasize rote memorization, can be difficult for students with learning disabilities—particularly those with short-term memory issues.

3. Success experiences have students evaluate their success in achieving their proximal goals and focus on learning ("How much progress did I make?") rather than performance ("What grade did I get?") as the goal.

4. Attributions for success encourage students to explain their successes in terms of their personal efforts or abilities. The teacher's role here is to give students feedback on why they succeeded or failed and help students give the appropriate explanation. Was an answer incorrect, incomplete, or was there a careless mistake? Make sure students understand why an answer is incorrect. Ask questions such as, "What did you do when you tried to answer that question or solve that problem?"

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

Feelings of helplessness are created over a period of time through the belief that failure is due to lack of ability, so it is important for students to learn that their ability can improve if they use proper strategies and make appropriate efforts. This is particularly important when dealing with students who have a heightened sensitivity to their own learning issues. Students want to resist being put in positions of failure and are often more motivated by fear of failure than by the "new" strategies for success. Occasionally, and usually with older students, some efforts simply won't work. Don't give up on all students because a few have given up on themselves. Be careful not to alienate those few because they aren't buying in.

Source

Alderman, M. K. (1990, September). Motivation for at-risk students. *Educational Leadership,* 27–30.

STRATEGY 6: Become knowledgeable about youth culture to successfully engage all students.

What the Research Says

It is no secret that some of the most difficult challenges facing teachers are classroom management, physical and emotional isolation, and difficulty adapting to the needs and abilities of their students.

Brock and Grady (1997) concluded, "Teaching is one of the few careers in which the least experienced members face the greatest challenges and responsibilities" (p. 11). Many teachers come prepared with book knowledge and theory, but the reality of controlling a classroom of 35 students is a whole other story. This reality usually hits after the first few weeks of school, when the honeymoon period is over for the students and they have figured out what they can and can't get away with in a particular class. This is particularly true for students with disabilities.

In many teacher preparation, induction, and mentoring programs across the nation, these issues are being addressed with concrete solutions and qualified mentors. Connecting with exemplary veteran teachers who have experience and rapport with adolescents can also be a big help. Teachers at the secondary level reported their teacher colleagues having a positive influence in helping them understand the challenges of adolescents. Elementary teachers felt their principals were extremely helpful in providing support and encouragement.

Application

No longer can we tolerate a "sink or swim" attitude. In California, the BTSA (Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment) program focuses in on beginning teachers learning as much as possible about the students in their classrooms. Knowing which languages are spoken at home, previous student test scores, the community in which these students live, and cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds all help teachers understand and adapt to the needs of the students they teach. Excellent classroom managers do this instinctively as they prepare their curriculum for their students, often on a class-by-class basis.

Understanding where students are and what is important to them is a vital first step in designing instruction. Check literature, music, clothing trends, and so on. Spend time looking over popular magazines, check on students' favorite films and television shows, and most importantly, take time to talk to and listen to them. Some teachers distribute interest inventories at the start of the school year to help learn about their students. These can also be used as a reflection tool at the end of the year for students as they note how much they have changed. Relating the curriculum to the students in order to make it meaningful, relevant, and fun reduces classroom management issues as well as contributes to student success.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

With the social climate today and students coming to class with myriad challenges and concerns, it is more important than ever for teachers to be aware of the problems and challenges of adolescent culture. What may seem trivial to an adult can be monumental to an adolescent. Many students would rather be considered "bad" than "stupid" in front of their peers. Yet many times a teacher will put a student in the position of acting out because the student doesn't know the answer to a question. Be careful not to judge students based on what other teachers say. All students deserve a teacher who has not made up his or her mind about what the student is capable of in the classroom. Be careful of becoming too much of a "buddy" or "friend"— retain adult status and model adult ideas and behavior. The more a teacher can invest in understanding his or her students, where they are coming from, and what is important to them, the more successful the teacher can be in implementing classroom management procedures.
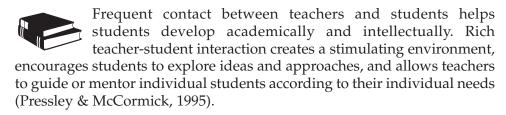
Sources

Brock, B. L., & Grady, M. L. (1997). *From first-year to first-rate: Principals guiding beginning teachers.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study.* Chicago: University of Chicago.

STRATEGY 7: Remember that students with special needs benefit most from one-on-one contact.

What the Research Says

Frequent contact between teachers and students helps students develop academically and intellectually. Rich teacher-student interaction creates a stimulating environment, encourages students to explore ideas and approaches, and allows teachers to guide or mentor individual students according to their individual needs (Pressley & McCormick, 1995).

Application

Working with individual students in a traditional classroom setting for long periods of time is not practical. While students are working individually on an exercise, the teacher should visit with individual

students and offer them some meaningful suggestions. Such suggestions might include hints for moving a student who appears frustrated or bogged down on a point toward a solution.

These private comments to students might also be in the form of advice regarding the format of the student's work. That is, some students are their own worst enemy when they are doing a geometry problem and working with a diagram which is either so small that they cannot do anything worthwhile with it or so inaccurately drawn that it, too, proves to be relatively useless. Such small support offerings will move students along and give them that very important feeling of teacher interest.

In some cases, when a student experiences more severe problems, the teacher might be wise to work with the student after class time during the school day. In this situation, it would be advisable to have the student describe the work as it is being done, trying to justify his or her procedure and explain concepts. During such one-on-one tutoring sessions, the teacher can get a good insight into the student's problems. Are they conceptual? Has the student missed understanding an algorithm? Does the student have perceptual difficulties or spatial difficulties? And so on.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

Working with individual students and merely making perfunctory comments when more might be expected could be useless if the severity of the problem might warrant more attention. Teachers should make every effort to give proper attention to students when attempting to implement this teaching strategy. Teachers should keep the student's level in mind so that, where appropriate, they can add some spice to the individual sessions by providing a carefully selected range and choice of challenges to the student in order to further individualize the learning process. Make sure advanced students don't get bored. Challenge them by giving them more difficult problems to solve, having them tutor other students, or having them evaluate alternative approaches to solving a problem.

Be aware that some students can become very needy. They often lack confidence or the ability to work comfortably in an independent manner. This can compel them to begin to dominate the teacher's time. When this occurs, teachers should give them the same general attention they give to others. When their demands begin to dominate the class, invite them to meet after school or at a time when they can have undivided attention. To conserve time, consider combining a few students with similar problems and address their needs together. Or, have students who understand the material serve as tutors, mentors, or group leaders.

Source

Pressley, M., & McCormick, C. (1995). *Advanced Educational Psychology.* New York: HarperCollins.

STRATEGY 8: Explore any hidden stereotypes and perceptions about included students with learning disabilities.

What the Research Says

Cook (2001) examined whether teachers' attitudes toward their included students with disabilities differed based on and in relation to the disability's severity. Using prompts corresponding with the attitudes of attachment, concern, indifference, and rejection, 70 inclusive classroom teachers nominated three students. Chi-square analyses produced predictors, based on a theory of instructional tolerance and a model of differential expectations, that students with severe or visible disabilities were significantly overrepresented among teachers' nominations in the indifference category. Also, students with mild or hidden disabilities were significantly overrepresented among teachers' nominations in the rejection category. Results were interpreted to indicate that teachers tend to form different attitudes and expectations for their included students with disabilities depending on the severity or obviousness of students' disabilities. It is suggested that included students, both with obvious and hidden disabilities, are at risk for receiving inappropriate educational interactions—but for different reasons. Distinct recommendations for improving teachers' attitudes toward included students with hidden and obvious disabilities were offered.

Application

Teacher-student communication should be primarily focused on instructional interaction. Often, with some groups and individuals, the instructional interactions focus on behavioral or disciplinary interactions and away from the more appropriate and purposeful types of educational interactions. Teachers become attached to some students and student groups and place others in categories of concern, indifference, or total rejection (as described in the research). All teachers make judgments, interpret situations, and form attitudes regarding instructional tolerance of groups and individuals.

The bottom line is that inappropriate perceptions of disabilities influence the attitudes teachers hold toward their included students with learning disabilities. This results in changes in the frequency, duration, expectation, and quality of teacher-student interactions.

Bias and stereotyping can be very subtle and come from a place very deep in the subconscious. Once teachers think about it or are made aware of it they can develop personal action plans to change these patterns of behavior and implement more objective ways of creating meaningful and effective educational interactions.

Self-education is the key. Sharing ideas with trusted colleagues or talking it over with a favorite special education teacher allows teachers to see themselves and their included students in a more objective light. Once they are made aware of their possible bias or stereotyping, they are glad to replace those ideas with more useful and accurate lenses with which to view students. Bias and stereotyping are usually very personal, and only new knowledge frees them from these notions. Developing more accurate and useful ways of seeing students is a powerful strategy to increase teachers' abilities to meet the needs of all students.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

No real pitfalls here. Becoming more aware of the personal factors and mindsets that influence teachers' decision making about students is always a positive thing.

Source

Cook, B. G. (2001). A comparison of teachers' attitude toward their students with mild and severe disabilities. *Journal of Special Education, 34*(4), 203.

STRATEGY 9: Learn how to facilitate the social acceptance of students with special needs in general education classes.

What the Research Says

The inclusion of students with moderate and severe disabilities in a general education classroom was established under the humanitarian premise that their interactions would lead to

greater acceptance and understanding of students with special needs in society in general. Also, students with special needs would benefit from a wider range of social and academic opportunities. Unfortunately, in some settings the idealistic assumption behind inclusion is often undermined. Students with moderate and severe disabilities are often socially ostracized, especially in adolescence. Social acceptance is fundamental to the quality of life of all people, including those with disabilities; this study sought to determine what barriers exist to inclusion of adolescents with disabilities in their school peer groups.

Sparling (2002) conducted a qualitative study consisting of a survey of 534 senior high students (grades 9–12). It was undertaken to determine factors that affect the social acceptance of students with moderate and severe disabilities at senior high school. The nature of the student's disability, social and cultural influences, teacher attitude and modeling, as well as adolescent psychology and peer pressure are all cited as issues that affect inclusion. Researchers found that the social inclusion of students is hampered by several factors including:

1. Lack of knowledge about disabilities, which leads to fear and uncertainty about how to interact with students

2. Peer pressure, which discourages students from interacting with their classmates with disabilities

3. School and community culture, which values success and achievement

4. Nature of the student's disability, which hampers traditional communication and may also lead to inappropriate social interactions

5. Teacher attitude, which determines the tone of the class, and therefore the degree of acceptance of students

While researchers found that students with special needs are accepted in certain situations at senior high school, they found there is room for improvement through education and encouragement of nondisabled students and staff at the school.

In this study, 82% of the general education students indicated they would help a student with special needs if asked by a teacher or teacher assistant. Ten percent stated they would not. Also, 60% said they would interact more if the teacher or teaching assistant explained how better to relate to students with special needs. Sixty-eight percent of the students in this study felt that students with physical or intellectual disabilities would fit in better socially if students knew more about the disabilities. Again, knowledge appears to be the primary factor affecting social inclusion of students with disabilities (Sparling, 2002).

Application

Out of the five main points highlighted in the conclusion in the research, teachers have the most control over the lack of knowledge about disabilities, leading to fear and uncertainty, and teacher attitude, which determines the tone of the class and therefore the degree of acceptance of students.

Knowledge is the key to inclusion of students with disabilities. It decreases fear and diminishes the stereotypes associated with people with moderate and severe disabilities, thereby facilitating their social inclusion. Teachers as well as students can benefit from increased knowledge. In most secondary school settings, students with special needs are assigned to classes and there is very little support or education that comes along with the students. Teachers may get an IEP that helps, but for the most part they are on their own in trying to prepare for the wide range of support students require. There are a few special education teachers out there who understand that position, and they will take the time to include real suggestions for accommodations based on their firsthand knowledge and experience with the students. This is an exceptional teacher but not the norm. If this isn't common practice at their site, teachers should take their list of students and visit each case manager and ask for relevant information early in the semester or school year.

Sparling's (2002) study indicates that many teachers have a positive attitude toward inclusion but most expressed concerns regarding the lack of training to effectively teach students with disabilities and classes that included them. The study also identified the greatest threat students with disabilities bring to classrooms—the threat to classroom norms. Most teachers believe they are fair and nice to special education students but need to optimize their knowledge to better build action plans and anticipate problems and potential solutions before issues come up.

Also, add "getting to know the parents" to the list of factors to discuss with case managers. Often case managers can also give tips on how to optimize home-school interactions. Informed teachers and student peers are more accepting of students with disabilities with added knowledge. They are also more accepting of any anomalies exhibited by these students.

Teacher attitude affects and influences how general education students see students with disabilities. How do students see teacher interactions with these students? If they knew more about how to interact with students with disabilities would they be more accepting? Is the teacher a good role model? How can the teacher assist his or her students to play a role in fostering inclusion? A lack of knowledge about how to communicate, and about the nature of student disabilities, leads to fear and decreased acceptance, which affects social inclusion. It's clear that increasing the knowledge of all students can have a positive effect on acceptance.

Knowledge transfer can take many forms, but for an individual teacher in the confines of his or her own classroom, carefully modeling positive behaviors and informally educating general education students seem to be good strategies. By engaging in subtle conversations with selected students, peer leaders, and those most receptive, teachers can start to "break the ice" for those reluctant but receptive students. Most of this can be handled informally as needs arise.

If knowledge is the key to inclusion, then teachers are in the best position to use their creativity to develop effective strategies to make it work!

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

Time is always a factor. What are teachers going to take out of their daily teaching load in order to add additional strategies that foster inclusion? Research indicates inclusion is a fast-growing educational strategy and evidence continues to mount in support of the positive effects of inclusive education for all students. If this is the case, developing sensitivity and strategies that foster successful and effective inclusion are essential. As teachers become better at inclusion they become better overall teachers.

Sources

Katz, J., & Mirenda, P. (2002). Including students with developmental disabilities in general education classrooms: Social benefits. *International Journal of Special Education, 17*(2), 14–24.

Sparling, E. (2002). Social acceptance at senior high school. *International Journal of Special Education, 17*(1), 91–100.

STRATEGY 10: Develop specific pedagogies, behavioral management techniques, and interventions to assist in working with students with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

What the Research Says

McLaughlin and Reiber (2004) describe some of the more commonly used in-school treatments and evaluate their effectiveness for ADHD. These researchers found in their recent

comprehensive review that there are currently three treatments for ADHD that can be considered supported by research: (1) psychostimulant medications, (2) behavioral intervention, and (3) a combination of these two. A significant amount of research has been conducted that supports the combination of these two interventions in the treatment of ADHD.

The researchers' work went on to explore a variety of classroom interventions to assist teachers in working successfully with children with ADHD. They included: classroom structure, teaching modifications, peer interventions, token economies, and self-management. The interventions reviewed and described were scaled from the basic modifications needed in the classroom to those in which more time and resources were involved. All the strategies reviewed were based on qualitative research.

Investigators found and stated that discussion of alternative treatments is practical for three reasons.

1. ADHD does not have its own disability designation for special education intervention. This means that with the exception of an Other Health Impaired designation, ADHD is predominately addressed in the general education classroom (Heward, 2003).

2. While recommendations of medication treatment for an ADHD student may be discussed in a meeting involving instructors, the decision surrounding this approach is not one for the instructor to make and should be left to the student's physician and parents.

3. Classroom interventions and attempts at behavioral intervention are solely in the hands and guidance of the classroom instructor. From a general education perspective, many times this falls on the general education instructor to ensure a healthy learning environment for the entire class. At times, the least prepared professionals are working with ADHD students.

Application

Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder is characterized by significant problems with attention, impulsiveness, and overactivity. According to the background information in McLaughlin and Reiber's (2004) article, it is one of the most common reasons for referral of children to mental health clinics and affects an estimated 3% to 5% of the elementary school-age population. On average, these estimates place at least one child with ADHD in every classroom in America. For this reason, the use of effective interventions for reducing the classroom impairment characteristics of students with ADHD is important to all school personnel. Three intervention strategies were suggested by the research.

1. Classroom Structure

The general characteristics of ADHD are inattention, high distractibility and impulsivity, and hyperactivity. These traits make concentrating on schoolwork, instruction, and learning very difficult. To be successful academically, students with ADHD must be able to focus their attention on the instructor and the lesson. Therefore, students with ADHD benefit greatly from an orderly environment carefully constructed with them in mind. For this reason, classroom structure is one of the most important areas of instructor influence in the classroom. The use of classroom structure to alleviate the effects of ADHD in the classroom has received much attention and research support. Classroom structure can be divided into two distinct categories, physical structure and mental organizational structure. Some suggestions and information to consider are:

- Closed classrooms with walls and windows are more conducive than open classrooms where students can see other teachers with other groups of students.
- Trends toward learning communities and groups of students at tables produce more distractions than desks.
- Traditional desks in straight rows work best.
- Reduce clutter in the room. Disorganized rooms, unfinished projects, and wall-to-wall displays are a problem.
- Place students with ADHD in the front or middle of desk rows away from external distractions such as pencil sharpeners, windows, sinks, and doors.
- Try to provide a quiet space where students can go to avoid stimuli.
- Post simple clear classroom rules in front of the room with eye-catching borders and colors. Also consider posting the desired behaviors and consequences. Cause and effect are ideas that are often lost on ADHD students and logical consequences reinforce the rules.
- Consequences should be delivered consistently and not out of anger or personal frustration.
- Post daily academic schedules and topics in clear sight.

2. Curricular and Teaching Modifications

In the ongoing battle of gaining and maintaining the attention of ADHD students, there are several easy-to-implement modifications an instructor may use:

- Keep curriculum interesting and relevant. Vary the presentation format and relate on-task support materials.

- Use color (pens and chalk), large fonts (handouts), bold lettering, and so on to draw attention to most important aspects of tasks.
- Consider providing guiding outlines or notes to help minimize multi-tasking.
- Make academic tasks brief and give quick feedback.
- Break down tasks to help with organizational difficulties.
- Use proximity and make a habit of positive comments.
- Provide outlets to expend pent-up energy. Bathroom trips or other diversions can help.
- Consider the use of prepackaged curriculum that has been successful for others or that has a research base that supports its effectiveness with ADHD.

3. Peer Intervention

When teachers are attempting to modify the behavior of a student with ADHD, recruiting the aid of classmates as a peer-mediated intervention offers many advantages—including being more efficient in delivering immediate and consistent feedback and promoting generalization across settings—and may result in the improved behavior and academic performance of the peer mediating the intervention.

There are two types of peer interventions. Peers can be used as part of a contingency group. By using peers as contingency groups, peers are given responsibility for general classroom behavior. This can be as a whole class or as groups. Peers can also be used as student leaders or instruments for monitoring and rewarding desirable social and academic behavior. Because of the need for ADHD students to be accepted and the accessibility to immediate feedback, attention improves and impulsivity decreases. Peer tutoring is an instructional strategy in which two students work together on an academic activity with one student providing assistance, instruction, and feedback to the other. During intervention, the students were paired with peer tutors who provided guidance and immediate feedback. Results of this study revealed increased on-task behavior, decreased fidgeting, and increased academic performances on tests (Heward, 2003).

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

Don't forget to read the current IEP and the student's records for hints and tips. Use it as a starting point. Next seek out the student's case manager for suggestions that might have a successful track record with the individual student. Remember to monitor peer contingency groups for fairness, equity, and a positive tone. Ensure that all group members are participating and disband the group if these factors aren't present.

Sources

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STRATEGY 11: Practice viewing learning disabilities through the cultural/ethnic eyes of the parents/families of the students.

What the Research Says

Not all diverse families and cultures view learning disabilities and related educational services the same way. This body of research was supported by a past literature search on cultural issues affecting families with disabilities. With reflection, comments, and recommendations based on a wide range of investigation and thinking on cultural issues surrounding these families, researchers were able to produce a useful paradigm for the understanding of culture in the learning disability service context. Once understanding and a new cultural perspective are facilitated, more effective strategies for interaction with these families can be structured and implemented successfully.

Consideration and research regarding cultural factors and issues affecting families of children with disabilities can be considered recent and relatively new. According to Harry (2002), it should be viewed in the context of the way parental roles have been conceptualized and changed by professionals over the past three decades. Basically, three recent time frames have been defined according to their specific approach.

1. Prior to the 1970s, the emphasis was on psychoanalytic approaches to parents, particularly mothers, an approach that for the most part presented the mother as a victim or patient in severe psychological crisis who needed to go through certain stages of reaction before a point of "acceptance" could be reached. This philosophy focused almost totally on White, middle-class families who could access the kinds of services offered by the psychoanalytic model. While some of the central tenets of that line of thought, such as the notion of

the parent's mourning for an ideal child, seem to be a part of most parents' experience, the literature had two dominant limitations:

    a. the promotion of a pathological view of families of children with disabilities and

    b. a total omission of the impact of differential cultural beliefs and practices on family reactions.

2. The 1970s saw the beginning of the "parent as teacher" approach, which sought to promote and implement positive parental involvement through behavioral training programs. The successes of that approach were reported to be variable, with clear evidence of greater success with middle-class and White families, whose life circumstances, childrearing practices, and personal interaction styles were more consonant with the approaches presented by that model.

3. The advent of P.L. 99–457 in 1986 introduced the current phase, a line of literature that reflects an ideal of the parent as partner or collaborator with professionals. As this ideal evolved into a vision of family-centered practice, issues of diverse family beliefs and practices became a crucial focus (Harry, 2002).

Harry (2002) goes on to describe current trends and influences on cross-cultural issues and cross-cultural professional preparation. The research identified a number of culturally important factors for professionals to consider in preparation for meeting the needs of cross-cultural students who are disabled and their families.

The following section will highlight the principles emerging from the literature on service provision to families who, by virtue of socioeconomic or cultural features, differ significantly from the mainstream. While this information came from Harry (2002), the information was gleaned from a review of the literature that reveals the following six areas of difficulty regarding the provision of culturally appropriate services to families:

1. Cultural differences in definitions and interpretations of disabilities

2. Cultural differences in family coping styles and responses to disability-related stress

3. Cultural differences in parental interaction styles, as well as expectations of participation and advocacy

4. Differential cultural group access to information and services

5. Negative professional attitudes to, and perceptions of, families' roles in the special education process

6. Dissonance in the cultural fit of programs

The challenge of providing culturally appropriate services can be captured by Atkin (1991) reflecting about Black minorities and health and disability services: "Service provision for disabled people usually embodies the views of the provider rather than the user" (p. 45).

Atkin (1991) called for research and service provision policies that are informed by "an account of disability in terms of black people's perceptions without these perceptions being seen as pathological" (p. 46). This principle should be seen as central to the process of decision making about services for minority populations. However, becoming aware and reflecting the "views of the user" is no small goal if teachers essentially do not like, share, or even respect those views.

Application

It is essential to view the son or daughter with a disability through the eyes of a mother or father from highly diverse cultures. In certain settings, there can be subtle but powerful ethnocentrism that makes it difficult for mainstream practitioners or researchers to recognize and give credence to nonmainstream family patterns or practices.

Typically, teachers and other school personnel exhibit mindset differences based on ethnicity or culture. Also, school personnel's strong identification with the culture of educational professionalism can also present a communication barrier, regardless of ethnic identity. Professionals can find it difficult to break the traditional mold of professional monopoly of information and decision making.

Personnel preparation programs for professionals in special education and related fields should include coursework in the study of cross-cultural literature related to families and disabilities. General education teachers should also consider acquiring this type of sensitivity. As more and more special education students are mainstreamed or involved in inclusive programs, these courses should be presented with a strong practical emphasis that requires students to develop and practice an awareness of the cultural principles and concepts on which special education in the United States is based. Consider the following ideas as essential elements of training and preparation in acquiring cross-cultural mastery:

(a) Personal self-examination, reflection and awareness of the cross-cultural paradigm and values clarification/contrasts and comparisons;

(b) Culture-specific knowledge, which includes effective communication techniques;

(c) The ability to apply this knowledge at both appropriate interpersonal and institutional levels;

(d) A posture and style of nonspecific cultural practice and approaches that can lead to successful professional-parent relationships without being totally familiar with the culture or without having specific knowledge;

(e) Use of opportunities to learn from parents and other family members. Consider using family members in roles that support classroom instruction or school related activities. Develop observation and interviewing skills seen through a culturally sensitive lens.

While the focus of this application centers on working with parents of students with disabilities, these suggestions are commonsense suggestions for any educational setting for both special education and general education teachers.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

The limitations of a culturally specific approach, however, include the danger of bias and stereotyping and the inability of the elements presented to define the infinite range of differences among cultural groups. Be wary of making decisions that don't reflect the individual student.

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