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Field Work Special Education Teacher Interview and Observation

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Through the William S. Hart School District, I visited a SC1 history summer school class at Valencia High School. Mr. Adelini had 23 students and there were 2 aides in the classroom. One aide was assigned to Mr. Adelini, and the other aide was in service to a student who was provided with 1:1 assistance due to a TBI. Mr. Adelini has been a special education teacher for eight years. He currently works at West Ranch High School, however, summer school was being taught at a different site this summer. The students will be going into 11th grade history classes later this month, providing they pass the class. Most students are 15 and 16 years old. As a special education teacher Mr. Adelini is seasoned when it comes to IEPs, 504 plans, creating curriculum with modifications, working with resources, and parents.

Mr. Adelini keeps a file for all students in a locked filing cabinet. The file for each student contains a copy of their modifications and/or accommodations, test scores, samples of work, pertinent notes from other teachers/administrators, a behavioral report, and any special requests from the student's parents. Mr. Adelini likes this method of organization because the information is easily accessible and can easily be shared with the appropriate personnel. The district uses a program called Infinite Campus. This online portal is used for grades, attendance, student info, and holds IEP information. Anyone with access to a school site's individual Infinite Campus can see important information such as parent contact info, medication needs, medical concerns, etc. Having an organized method for storing student information is critical when having a special needs classroom. These students often need more guidance, and the teachers are required to take a lot more notes on behavioral and academic progress.

Special Education teachers collect varied data in order to produce the most accurate reports. Special education teachers need to update IEPs annually, write comprehensive and inclusive notes on progress and report cards, inform other resources (speech therapist,

occupational therapist, individual aides, department head, etc.), and assess themselves. They collect specific data in regard to specific goals on one's IEP. Goals may need to be met quarterly, yearly, or every other year. The IEP will ask if this goal has been achieved with a 70% success rate in 4 attempts, or something similar. This is a very black or white assessment and needs accurate observation and assessment for maximum efficiency. Each special needs student is assigned a case manager at their school site. The case manager is responsible for keeping in touch with all teachers and parents and getting updates on the student's progress.

Mr. Adelini teaches high school, so usually a student special needs student already has an IEP in place and has been working towards a set of goals for several years. If a child has a disability, he is eligible to receive federal support from birth. After being assessed by a doctor or therapist, a parent can take their child to a Regional Center where further testing and assessing can take place to reach a diagnosis. Once the child is of school age, the district may have additional testing for placement of the child. Once an IEP is established and services are agreed upon, the student will be continually evaluated the duration he is in school. The student can receive support until the age of 21. After 21 years of age there are services as well that can be used depending on the severity of the disability. Mr. Adelini has only taught high school and has never had a student need to get evaluated to be administered into a special education class. He has had many students who were able to move to a general education classroom with extra support (which is always an awesome goal for the student).

When a general education teacher has a special needs student in her classroom she needs to be aware of all disabilities, special needs, modifications, accommodation, medications, evaluations, and how to provide feedback and contact the parents. Knowing the contents of the IEP is critical. The IEP is a legal document and denying a student previously granted

modifications is illegal. I have witnessed a general education teacher deny a student advanced copies of notes when it was stated in his IEP. The student has processing difficulties and gets overwhelmed when trying to write and listen at the same time. After the student complained to his case manager, the principal was involved immediately. A general education teacher often has limited experience working with special needs kids. Also, the range of special needs kids is astronomical. A special needs student may have ADHD or have a traumatic brain injury or have low functioning Autism. The only way to feel comfortable in keeping the students safe and helping him accomplish his goals is to get experienced. Also, general education class sizes are much larger, without aides, and can be overwhelming to keep focusing on one or two special needs students. The ultimate goal for special needs students is to be more inclusive with general education. The issue is that there's not always the best support system in place for inclusion.

Understanding medications and medical conditions beforehand can potentially save a student's life. I had a student last semester who had a seizure during lunch and when he fell down hit his head on the trash can and was bleeding. The campus supervisors did not know LaRon had a family history of seizures. When they approached LaRon he was laying still on the floor bleeding, and they assumed it was a fight. If LaRon was in the classroom at the time of his seizure, with teacher who knew about his condition, the situation would have been handled more professionally. At West Ranch High School there is a nurse on duty during school hours. She will administer any prescribed medication to the students. Teacher often have bandages and basic first aid equipment in their classroom, but all medication needs to go through the school nurse and office. If a student has a medical condition or is on medication, the teachers receive an email stating all the details. In the case of LaRon after his seizure, all teachers were provided with a memo of his currently list of medications, warning signs a seizure may be coming on, and how to

proceed if a seizure occurs in the classroom. At this district teacher (general and special education) should not administer any medication. If a student cannot physically transport themselves to the office, a campus supervisor will pick them up and escort them to the school nurse. All health concerns should always be treated with the utmost care and attention to detail.

While observing Mr. Adelini's classroom, I saw UDL in the works. Each morning the students complete a warm-up. This activity involves a short reading of a historic event. There are a couple comprehension questions to be answered, the students write a question they have about the readings, and then circle any unfamiliar words. The interesting thing about the assignment was that Mr. Adelini put out three different choices of warmups. The activity was scaffolded to suit the needs of the students. At first, I thought every student was going to pick the easiest one because that's human nature to take an easier road. I was surprised to see many students picking from the intermediate pile and a couple pick from the advanced pile. Students like to feel challenged and like to see what their limits are. Mr. Adelini and the aide keep track of which difficulty each student is picking. If the student is not being challenged by self-assessing, Mr. Adelini will step in to ensure success.

After the warm-up Mr. Adelini would go over the day's topic and then give the assignment. The student had about 90 minutes to complete the assignment. It could be done individually or in pairs. The students were given options for presenting their work. They could use Google Slides, write a more formal essay, or simple just speak about it. Later in the day the individuals or pairs would share their assignment with the class. They class was required to give constructive criticism or something they liked about the presentation for participation points. I like how the class seemed engaged and it was more casual than a typical classroom setting. Mr.

Adelini said he partially structured the class like this because it's harder to gain their attention and focus during a summer school class.

I asked Mr. Adelini about how he collaborates with other teachers concerning UDL. He mentioned that the teachers don't necessarily talk about UDL. They have their own set of goals provided by the district and his department head. As an effective special education teacher, Mr. Adelini always modifies when necessary. He is continually assessing himself and his students. He offers help when needed to other teachers.

One question I had for Mr. Adelini was how big a role parents have at the high school level and how do you engage the parents when they don't seem invested in their child's education anymore. Last year I long term subbed for a special ed classroom, and I was required to stay for Open House. In the three hours for Open House I had one parent come visit (and her son was an excellent student). Mr. Adelini said usually the parents of the children with certain disabilities are far more invested than others. He said for high school the parents are either aggressively involved or non-existent. For parents that should be involved, but do not take interest, Mr. Adelini suggested to be proactive. He said to keep in contact with the parents even if they don't respond. Send weekly emails and bi-weekly phone calls. If the issue is severe (student is in danger or failing or severe behavioral issues) Mr. Adelini will get administration involved as well. This may be help from a counselor or assistant principal. Overall, the most important piece of the puzzle is the student and we always need to act positively for the student's education and health.

Special Education is often overlooked. I have heard people referring the SPED teacher as babysitters or on the "special train". A teacher once told me "when you're a special ed teacher for too long, you start to become special ed". I have the utmost respect for SPED teachers

because they solve problems that general educators do not. General education teachers tend to teach a lesson and check for comprehension. SPED teachers do that, but also monitor behavior, check for emotional instability, track info for IEPs, attend IEP meetings, communicate with parents, and so much more. Observing in Mr. Adelini's classroom allowed me to see the special education population engage with UDL.

Resources

Slavin R. (2018). Educational Psychology: Theory & Practice. Boston MA: Pearson Publication

Spring, J. (2018). American Education. New York: Routledge Publishers