

3. Supporting Diverse Learners

Description:

Public school classrooms today are made up of diverse students with a wide variety of strengths and challenges. Among these students are those with disabilities and those who are English language learners. The purpose of this module is to familiarize participants with key terms and additional resources they can use to support diverse learners. It is important that we recognize an asset-based approach to supporting student needs. Our mindset must be one that believes that all students are capable of learning and that the teacher's role is to have high expectations, build positive relationships, and create learning environments where all can succeed.

Key Standards:

- Teachers familiarize themselves with the rights and needs of diverse learners.
- Teachers demonstrate high expectations, implement culturally responsive classroom instruction and classroom management to support the diverse needs of the learners in the classroom.

Learning Tasks:

- Respond to a journal prompt & guiding questions to reflect on your own personal assumptions & dispositions around supporting diverse learners.
- Learn key concepts/terms associated with special education and multilingual learners.
- Read through and watch curated videos, text and activities to support your understanding of how to support diverse learners.
- Continue to build a personal toolkit (“backpack strategies”) of resources that will support your learning in the field.

Module 3: Key Concepts

Term	Definition
Special Education (ages 3-22)	<p>Special education refers to a range of services that can be provided in different ways and in different settings for children and youth with learning disabilities. There is no “one size fits all” approach to special education. Special education plans (IEP plans or 504 plans) are tailored to the unique academic and/or functional needs of a qualifying student, and provided at no cost to the student’s parents. To be eligible to receive special education services, students must first meet two criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They must have one or more disabilities. 2. The disability or disabilities in question must adversely affect their educational performance (IRIS Center). <p>School districts have a process in place to determine which students are eligible for special education. This process involves a comprehensive evaluation that examines cognitive skills and development. Parents can request an evaluation. If the district agrees to evaluate your child, the testing is conducted at no cost.</p>
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	<p>To qualify for an IEP, a student must have a disability within the 14 categories under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). An IEP is a legally binding written plan, developed collaboratively by school personnel and a student’s parents, which outlines the student’s current level of development, his/her/their annual educational goals, special education services, accommodations, modifications, and related services, as well as a method for monitoring and reporting the student’s progress toward achieving his/her/their goals. An IEP is a statement of the efforts that school personnel will undertake to give the student the best possible chance to succeed in the classroom. An IEP plan may include different educational services in a special or regular educational setting, depending on the student’s need. IEP programs are delivered and monitored by additional school support staff (IRIS Center).</p>
504 Plan	<p>Some conditions, such as ADHD, are not learning disabilities but can interfere with learning and qualify students for a 504 plan (Understood.org). Named in reference to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, these plans allow for students to be educated in regular classrooms along with the services, accommodations, or educational aids they might need (KidsHealth). A 504 plan is monitored by classroom teachers and modifies a student’s regular education program in a regular classroom setting.</p>
Least Restrictive Environment	<p>The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) says that children who receive special education should learn in the least restrictive environment. This means that children should spend as much time as possible with peers who do not receive special education, and the starting point for discussion should be the supports a child needs to succeed in a general education classroom (Understood.org).</p>
Related Service	<p>Any of a number of services and supports designed to help students with disabilities to further benefit from special education; these may include services from professionals including occupational therapists (OT), physical therapists (PT), and speech-language pathologists (SLP) from a wide range of disciplines typically outside of education (IRIS Center).</p>
Accommodations	<p>Accommodations are adaptations or changes to educational environments and practices designed to help students overcome the challenges presented by their disabilities and to allow them to access the same instructional opportunities as students without disabilities. An accommodation does not change the expectations for learning or reduce the requirements of the task (IRIS Center). Examples of accommodations include preferential seating, extended time on tests and assignments, modified textbooks or audio-video materials, behavior management support, and verbal testing.</p>
Modifications	<p>Modifications include any of a number of services or supports that allow a student to access the general education curriculum but in a way that fundamentally alters the content or curricular expectations in question (IRIS Center). Examples of modifications include the use of alternative books or materials on the topic being studied, a word bank of choices for answers to test questions, a calculator and/or number line for math tests, reworded questions in simpler language, projects instead of written reports, and a pass/no pass option.</p>

Module 3: Key Concepts (Continued)

Term	Definition
Interventions	An instructional intervention is a program or set of steps to help kids improve at an academic skill. Interventions are designed to keep track of the child’s progress. Examples of interventions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Analysis: breaking down a task into specific steps and teaching them in a sequence until mastery is achieved; • Multi-sensory strategy: sometimes referred to teaching through V-A-K-T or the combined use of Visual, Auditory, Kinesthesia, and Tactile senses; • Direct Instruction - instructional approaches that are structured, sequenced, and led by teachers (Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center).
Inclusion Classrooms	General education classrooms where students with and without learning differences learn together. Inclusive classrooms are welcoming and support the diverse academic, social, emotional, and communication needs of all students (Reading Rockets).
Universal Design for Learning	Universal Design for Learning is a framework, developed by CAST , that guides the design of learning experiences to proactively meet the needs of all learners. When you use UDL, you assume that barriers to learning are due to the design of the environment, not the profile of the student (Understood.org).
Multilingual Learners	Multilingual learners are students who are learning the language of instruction at the same time they are learning rigorous academic content (New York State Education Department).
Language Acquisition	First-language acquisition is a universal process regardless of home language. Babies listen to the sounds around them, begin to imitate them, and eventually start producing words. Second-language acquisition assumes knowledge in a first language and encompasses the process an individual goes through as he/she/they learn the elements of a new language, such as vocabulary, phonological components, grammatical structures, and writing systems (Colorín Colorado).
Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)	A research-based method of instruction that addresses the academic needs of English Language Learners. This model combines multiple instructional components with teaching strategies to ensure the content and language needs of English Language Learners are met as they learn alongside their native English speaking peers.
WIDA Standards	The WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards represent the social, instructional, and academic language that students need to engage with peers, educators, and the curriculum in schools. There are 5 WIDA standards that provide educators with a connection between language development and academic content. Learn more at wida.wisc.edu/teach/standards/eld .
Language Objectives	Language Objectives are “how” the students will show what they are learning. They are focused on the four domains of Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing. The ELP (English Language Proficiency) standards and the WIDA standards are sources of language objectives (Achieve the Core).
Content Objectives	Content Objectives identify what students should know and be able to do at the end of the lesson. These objectives will frequently be used to form assessments. They are derived from the core standards. They focus on the “what” (Achieve the Core).