

Chapter 72

Case Study Analysis of a Team/Collaborative Model With Specific Learning Disabled Students

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs), which is the most common type of designated disability among school-aged students in the United States. SLD is a disability that can have devastating effects on a student's learning ability, as in the most severe cases the SLD student may remember little, if anything, about what he or she has learned; may have difficulties focusing on even one thing; may not be able to read above an elementary level; and may live in isolation due to poor social and motivational skills. This chapter discusses the service delivery models for students who have SLD and provides two case studies of models that can be successful if implemented properly. Finally, the chapter presents intervention strategies to assist the general education teacher when working with students with SLD.

INTRODUCTION

Of those with “specific learning disabilities,” 80 percent are there simply because they haven’t learned how to read. Thus, many children receiving special education—up to 40 percent—are there because they weren’t taught to read. The reading difficulties may not be their only area of difficulty, but it is the area that resulted in special education placement. Sadly, few children placed in special education close the achievement gap to a point where they can read and learn like their peers. – President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002

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According to the United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2012), there were 2,431,000 students with a diagnosis of specific learning disability (SLD) in United States schools during the 2009-2010 school year. This type of disability has increased significantly during the past 40 years. During the 1976-1977 school year, students with special needs who had a specific learning disability diagnosis were at 1.8% of the total school population, and this percentage increased drastically to 4.9% during the 2009-2010 school year.

This type of disability tends to target more males than females, but the prevalence differs from between two to one to four to one. Females who have been diagnosed with this type of disability tend to have more severe academic difficulties than their male counterparts do (Friend, 2011). Of the 13 IDEA categories, specific learning disability is the largest group due to the wide range of symptoms it covers. According to Friend (2012):

A specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. (p. 127)

A malfunctioning in the brain causes these students to be disorganized, write letters backwards, read very well but not comprehend what they read, exhibit poor penmanship, have lack of fluency when reading, have lack of phonic skills, and, in some cases, exhibit some inappropriate social skills (e.g., invading another person's personal space when talking). Despite these difficulties, most students with a specific learning disability have average intelligence and, if given accommodations in both school and the workplace, can become productive citizens within our democratic society (Horowitz, n.d.). Many SLD students are educated in either the inclusive or resource room settings. The service minutes identified within their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) range between inside the regular class 80% or more of the day to inside the regular class between 40% to 79% of the day.

The team/collaborative model, which is defined by Snell and Janney (2000) as "two or more people working toward a common goal" (p. 33), is the most common model used with this population. For lack of a better description, it is basically an inclusion model. Collaboration of this type has been on the mind of educators and others practicing in the field of education since the 1970s, according to Jones-Hamilton and Vail (2014):

The use of a team/collaborative model could benefit this population of students more because they would have the support of the special education teacher within the resource room and inside the actual regular class setting when needed. Their main function in the inclusion setting is to assist in reducing barriers to participating in school activities; facilitate social interactions between students; build peer support; encourage the contribution of ideas by family members; embed related service into the school day; and design plans to ease transition between grades and schools and into jobs or college. (p. 33)

Ultimately, this model ensures that the educational plan for students with special needs are planned and implemented. Given the mandates and requirements that special education programs are faced with so that adequate yearly progress is made, this model should be well received by any education leader

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