

Chapter 14: Readers with Special Needs

Every teacher should be especially aware of children with special needs, considering the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142). This law was amended by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which provides for the inclusion of many students with special needs into regular classrooms. Teachers work with other professionals in designing individualized education programs (IEPs) for children with disabilities. General guidelines for working with these children include providing opportunities for success, having positive attitudes toward them, providing appropriate instruction, using suitable materials, and communicating with others who work with them.

Several types of special learners are being integrated into regular classrooms. Children with learning disabilities usually show a significant discrepancy between achievement level and potential in one or more areas. Many have communication problems, and reading improvement is their greatest academic need. Attention-deficit disorder (ADD) and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), characterized by inattentive behaviors, require the teacher to plan carefully and organize instruction to maximize student learning. Students with mild mental retardation do not learn as readily as other children do. Some children have emotional/behavioral disorders or vision, hearing, or speech impairments.

Students who are having difficulty learning to read can benefit from a well-balanced literacy program including authentic reading and writing activities. Early intervention programs, such as Reading Recovery and Success for All, appear to be successful in helping young children overcome reading problems. Gifted children can progress more rapidly than their peers and often show advanced development in one or more of the intelligences identified by Howard Gardner. Teachers should provide challenging tasks for these students and help them reach their full potential in intellectual development, academic development, creative or productive thinking, leadership, and visual and performing arts.

America's schools have children from a wide variety of ethnic, cultural, and racial origins who bring diverse experiences to the classroom. Carefully selected multicultural literature helps these students develop an appreciation of their heritage. Many of them speak nonstandard dialects or a language other than English. English as a Second Language (ESL) programs attempt to provide students with equal educational opportunities. Effective instructional activities include drama, authentic experiences, purposeful writing, the language experience approach, and the use of literature.