

REPORT ON PRE-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING

Summary

Background

The Australian Association of Special Education inc. is committed to advocating for the provision of quality services for students with special education needs.

Issues

AASE is committed to the provision of appropriate educational services to students with special education needs and the realisation of inclusive practices in schools. These goals will not be achieved without appropriate pre-service and inservice education for teachers delivered by people who themselves have demonstrated expertise and competence in special education.

Teacher Competencies Resulting from the Mandatory Pre-Service Unit

Awareness of Issues in Special Education

Teachers will be aware of historical and philosophical developments in program development, delivery of instruction, and current policy and practices.

Assessment and Evaluation

In collaboration with a special educator, teachers will be able to develop, administer and evaluate curriculum-based measures to plan individual programs, monitor student progress and evaluate instruction.

Curriculum and Program Design

In collaboration with a special educator, teachers will be able to adapt curriculum objectives and design an individualised educational program that meets the identified needs of a student.

Instruction

Teachers will be able to plan and utilise effective instructional strategies to assist students achieve instructional objectives.

Classroom and Behaviour Management

Teachers will implement practices that result in maximum teaching time, high rates of task engagement, decrease disruptive behaviour and promote positive teacher/student interaction.

Environmental Adaptation

In collaboration with special educators and other personnel, teachers will be able to recommend and implement modifications to the classroom and school environment that assist students meet classroom and individual objectives and access the full range of school facilities.

Research Based Practice

Teachers should be able to critically evaluate and able to justify their selection of instructional strategies in the light of empirical evidence provided by research.

Practicum and Post-Graduation Development

Teachers must learn to apply more general principles to specific situations. Coaching and mentoring have been shown to be most effective in assisting classroom teachers to use research based techniques. Such practical experience should be gained by working with trained and competent special educators.

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION INC. POSITION PAPER

TOPIC: Pre-Service Teacher Training

Background

The Australian Association of Special Education inc. is committed to advocating for the provision of quality services for students with special education needs. Advocacy for the provision of quality educational services is premised on current research and exemplary practice in the field. The focus of this paper is on pre-service teacher education and the skills, knowledge and values teachers entering regular classrooms should have in order to cater for the diversity of student needs, including students with special education needs. Carnine (1992, p.16) wrote:

“If teachers are to be held accountable, then the educational establishment must be held accountable for providing relevant knowledge and the viable professional tools derived from that knowledge.”

This paper assumes that special educators are part of the team working in collaboration with classroom teachers, school based support teams and other professionals and agencies to develop programs, adapt curricula, locate resources and modify the means of curriculum delivery to students with special education needs.

Issues

AASE is committed to the provision of appropriate educational services to students with special education needs and the realisation of inclusive practices in schools. These goals will not be achieved without appropriate pre-service and inservice education for teachers.

AASE advocated for the inclusion of a compulsory unit in pre-service education that addressed the instruction of students with special education needs. AASE believes that such a unit should focus strongly on curriculum adaptation, assessment strategies and instructional practices that have been shown to be effective in promoting student learning. The course should take a non-categorical approach to disability and not spend valuable time on medical and aetiological issues.

Social education and regular education are not separate entities but rather represent different aspects of educational planning and program implementation. Many skills in assessment, curriculum design and teaching that have been traditionally associated with special education are based on the results of research on effective teaching.

This paper is organised around a series of competencies that we believe pre-service teacher should develop in beginning teachers. Each competency is developed with a series of relevant objectives which should be achieved in pre-service teacher education. Many of these objectives could be developed in teacher education courses other than in the mandatory unit in special education. Indeed, if pre-service teachers are to develop an integrated knowledge of a continuum of effective assessment, programming and teaching skills many of the objectives here should be addressed in content area units (such as English and Mathematics) as well as in a special education unit.

AASE believes that courses in special education should be taught by lecturers who can themselves demonstrate both theoretical expertise and practical competence in special education.

Issues in Special Education

Teachers will be aware of historical and philosophical developments in program development, delivery of instruction and current policy and practices.

- Teachers should be made aware of the core principles of special education. This should include an understanding of the development of strategies for individualised planning and monitoring of instruction (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995). It should include a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of both behavioural and constructivist approaches to teaching students with special education needs. For example, direct teaching incorporates explicit teacher directed strategies that ensure specific skills and concepts are taught and learned. Many students, not only those with special education needs, will benefit from this approach, as well as from other forms of input from teachers and peers (Udvari-Solnar & Thousand, 1995; Warren & Yoder, 1994).
- Teachers should be aware of historical developments in the provision of educational services for students with special needs. This would include an understanding of current best practice where services are provided according to a student's individual needs. The selection of curriculum content and instructional strategies should be based on an assessment of individual student need, not on disability categorisation. This discussion needs to be undertaken with a consideration of the policy decisions of individual states, advent of social justice and equity issues and the issues surrounding state and federal disability discrimination acts.
- Teachers should understand their roles and responsibilities in meeting the special education needs of students. It is not intended that they should be proficient special educators, but rather that they be aware how they can obtain assistance in catering for students with special education needs. This assistance would preferably be gained from trained special educators and other members of school based support teams who may also access resources outside the school.
- Teachers should be aware of the role families and care-givers can play in educational assessment and planning for students with special education needs.

Assessment and Evaluation

In collaboration with a special educator, teachers will be able to develop, administer and evaluate curriculum-based measures to plan individual programs, monitor student progress and evaluate instruction.

- Teachers should understand the rationale behind Curriculum Based Assessment (CBA) and Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) and the alignment of curriculum, instruction and assessment.
- Teachers should be able to use results of assessment to write behavioural objectives.
- Teachers should be able to alter curriculum content and/or teaching strategies based on the results of formative assessment.

There is a considerable research base that supports the use of CBA to place students in a curriculum and to define student outcomes that are realistic and challenging (Allinder, 1995; Bracey, 1992; Howell et al., 1993; King-sears & Cummins, 1996; Westwood, 1995; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1995). Teachers should evaluate the effects of their instruction through regular monitoring of student progress and academically engaged time (Howell et al., 1993; Rosenshine, 1995; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1995).

Curriculum and Program Design

In collaboration with a special educator, teachers will be able to adapt curriculum objectives and design an individualised educational program that meets the identified needs of a student.

- Teachers should be able to utilise syllabus statements to develop a sequence of outcomes.

- Teachers should be able to identify concepts, strategies and principles for inclusion in individual and classroom programs.
- Teachers should be able to critically analyse curriculum development in relation to research outcomes.
- Teachers should be able to collaborate with parents in establishing learning priorities.

AASE (AASE, 1995) noted in its position paper on educational provision for students with special education needs the importance of appropriate curriculum. An appropriate curriculum results in improved school performance and a decrease in inappropriate behaviour (Kimball & Cameron, 1996).

Curriculum content can be analysed into a fixed sequence of steps moving from basic to higher order skills (Rosenshine, 1995; Westwood, 1995).

Instruction

Teachers will be able to plan and utilise effective instructional strategies to assist students achieve instructional objectives.

- Teachers should understand the general principles of effective explicit instruction including planned review, presentation of new content and skills in small steps, monitoring of student progress in a lesson through guided and independent practice and the use of feedback and correctives.
- Teachers should be familiar with a range of teaching strategies demonstrated to be effective – mnemonic strategies, cognitive and metacognitive strategy instruction, peer tutoring, cooperative learning.
- Teachers should be aware of the importance of practice, repetition and drill in basic academic skills.
- Teachers should be aware of a range of cues, prompts, questioning procedures and physical guidance procedures.
- Teachers should be able to locate, design or adapt instructional materials to meet the needs of individual students. Some students with special education needs will not require adaptation of curriculum content, but rather adaptation of the means of delivering the content.

Critical characteristics of effective instruction have been described by educational researchers, and these characteristics can be embedded into a range of teaching methodologies (Good & Brophy, 1994; Westwood, 1995; Harris & Graham, 1996). Effective instruction maximises the time students spend learning and minimises inappropriate behaviour (Slavin, 1996; Carpenter & McKee-Higgins, 1996; Kimball & Cameron, 1996).

Classroom and Behaviour Management

Teachers will implement practices that result in maximum teaching time, high rates of task engagement, decrease disruptive behaviour and promote teacher/student interaction.

- Teachers will be able to manage time and resource effectively.
- Teachers will be able to explicitly teach social skills, classroom rules and procedures.
- Teachers will be able to use a range of instructional grouping strategies.

Direct influences in a school such as classroom management practices and classroom climate have almost as much impact on student learning as student aptitude (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993). A positive classroom climate has a positive effect on student achievement (Allinder, 1995; Wang & Reynolds, 1996; Westwood, 1995; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1995). Teaching of appropriate behaviour will be needed by some students with special education needs and will increase on-task behaviour and minimise disruptions (Fisher, Schumaker & Deshler, 1995; Wang & Reynolds, 1996). Peer-mediated teaching strategies such as cooperative learning and peer or cross age tutoring can be effective for students with special needs and are alternatives to whole class teaching and independent seat work (Udvari-Solner & Thousand, 1995).

Environmental Adaptation

In collaboration with special educators and other personnel, teachers will be able to recommend and implement modifications to the classroom and school environment that assist students meet classroom and individual objectives and access the full range of school facilities.

- Teachers should be able to modify the classroom to accommodate the needs of students when necessary. They should be aware of environmental elements such as lighting, noise levels, physical arrangements of furniture and equipment.
- Teachers should be able to utilise school resources to assist individual students.
- Teachers should be able to determine when and where the assistance of support staff such as teacher aides is appropriate, and when such support is over intrusive or unnecessary.
- Teachers should be aware of the direct roles parents can play in flexible instructional environments to support individuals and groups of learners.

Some students with special education needs do not require modification or adaptation of curriculum content, rather they need alternative ways of accessing the curriculum (such as sign interpreters).

Research Based Practice

Teachers should be able to critically evaluate and be able to justify their selection of instructional strategies in the light of empirical evidence provided by research.

- Teachers should be familiar with recent research on special education practice. There is an enlarging research base of intervention and instructional strategies for students with special education needs which have been empirically demonstrated to be effective in promoting student learning (Lloyd, Forness & Kavale, 1998). Some programs and practices recommended to educators have not been based on empirical research evidence (Carnine, 1992), so it is important for beginning teachers to be aware of the need for demonstration of the effectiveness of intervention strategies. Teachers should be aware of the lack of empirical support for some educational concepts and strategies such as learning styles and facilitated communication (Peters & Heron, 1993).

Effective practices may derive from a range of theoretical bases. Educators should focus on examining the evidence for effective practices, rather than on the ideological bases of practices (Dixon & Carnine, 1994).

Practicum and Post-Graduation Development

It is not enough for teachers to know about effective practices. They must use them in the classroom. Teachers must learn to apply more general principles to specific situations. Coaching and mentoring have

been shown to be most effective in assisting classroom teachers to use research-based techniques (Malouf & Schiller, 1995), and thus should be a component of practicum experience for pre-service teachers and a means of further development of practising teachers. Such practical experience should be gained by working with trained and competent special educators.

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