

**Supervising and Coaching Special Education Teachers**

**Ron Keller**

**College of Education, Grand Canyon University**

**EAD-530: Improving Teacher Performance and Self-efficacy**

**Instructor: John Utne**

**Due date: December 21, 2022**

***What questions might you ask about their lessons? What questions might you ask that would provide you with information about the students' IEPs, accommodations, specific disabilities, etc?***

To accomplish a fair and balanced evaluation it is especially important to review the IEPs and accommodation plans for every student in a special education classroom prior to the observation. Special education teacher Sarah Anderson has 5 students in her 5<sup>th</sup> period class I will be observing. One of them has dyslexia and is aided with constant repetition of vowel sounds to remind her where letters need to be placed in a word. I want to know how Ms. Anderson is structuring the lesson to include both the spelling and sounding out of the words, and whether those words originate from text specific to her special education class or are they an extension of learning from the classrooms where the student is mainstreamed. Another student struggles with fractions. Depending on the difficulty, I would expect Ms. Anderson to do a lot of modeling, perhaps using visual aids to illustrate the concept.

***What questions might you ask to identify the teacher's plan to differentiate instruction?***

Three of Ms. Anderson's 5<sup>th</sup> period students struggle with reading. Her previously mentioned "reflective project" involves using a reading program developed by Orton-Gillingham. The program explicitly teaches the connections between letters and sounds, breaking reading and spelling down into smaller skills then building those skills over time. Often students use physical expressions for letters, words, and sounds. I have done preliminary research on the program and would like to witness how Ms. Anderson puts into practice and how it has impacted the students in her classroom (Sailus, 2022). I believe Anderson supports the program and has seen growth from her students using the Orton-Gillingham method.

I want to know how she has tracked the students' growth and see any data she is using to compare the Orton-Gillingham method with reading and spelling programs she has used in the past.

***What questions might you ask to identify areas where the teacher believes students struggle, and how the teacher will address those areas?***

One of the best strategies to engage students struggling in a particular subject is to make learning that involves that subject fun. Learning should be fun in general, but a successful gen ed or special ed teacher knows how to turn an area of struggle into a challenge. When I ask about those strategies, I believe Ms. Anderson will have a ready supply of games that address those problem areas. Another way I would expect her to help her struggling students is to engage those students' parents in their child's education. I expect Ms. Anderson to have a close relationship with all the parents she teaches. I am especially curious how she has encouraged parents to adapt lessons that prove challenging to her students in school to the home environment. In other words, what are her parents doing at home to extend the learning of the more difficult lessons she has introduced in the classroom.

***What questions might you ask to determine the teacher's understanding of students' prior knowledge and how, if at all, it has guided the instructional planning for this lesson?***

Several students in Ms. Anderson's class have had IEPs since 5<sup>th</sup> grade. They are 7<sup>th</sup> graders now. I would expect her to have contacted the students' elementary school teachers and charted their goals and achievements since 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I would like to know in what specific areas students are still experiencing difficulties and how she has adjusted her teaching methods and strategies to accommodate their weaknesses. Having period assessment checkpoints is a

near-mandatory practice for special education students since standard annual test scores are a less than reliable way to track these students' progress (Benedict, et.al. 2013).

***What questions might you ask to determine the teacher's classroom management plan and any behavior intervention plans for individual students?***

First, and most importantly, I would ask Ms. Anderson to characterize her relationship with students. It is critical that every teacher, but especially a special education teacher, develop a close bond with their students. Research shows increased goodwill, and students less likely to misbehave when they have positive and authentic relationships with their teachers (Mitchell, et. al., 2017). Other standards of effective teaching still apply. I would expect Mrs. Anderson to have arranged her class in an orderly way to enhance safe teacher and student movement, to have her expectations clearly communicated, and have routine classroom procedures that students nearly know by heart at this point in the semester.

References:

Benedict, A., Kimerling, J., Leko, C., Thomas, R. (May/June 2013). Trends in teacher evaluation: what every special education teacher should know. Council for Exceptional Children. 45(5) 60-68.

Mitchell, B., Hirn, R., Lewis, T. (2017). Enhancing effective classroom management in schools: structures for changing teacher behavior. SAGE. 40(2) 140-153.

Sailus, C. (2022). The Orton-Gillingham approach of reading instruction. Study.com. Retrieved on December 21, 2022 from <https://tinyurl.com/2bkftmm8>.