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Research Paper

Definition of An Argument: (Are Teachers Ready For Special Needs? Part 1)

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Special needs students need a lot of understanding from everyone. With this analysis I will define the debate of this hot issue and have my voice heard. The argument of whether or not teachers are prepared for special needs students is a big one. First of all, what does the term 'special needs' mean? Second, what are some of the special needs scenarios and why are these situations considered special needs. Third, what can be done for a special needs student?

According to Teresa Belluscio's Service Handbook: Office for Individuals with Disabilities, special needs, or in this case disabilities of young students, is defined as "a person who has an impairment that severely limits one or more of a person's life activities" (Belluscio 8). These people with special needs or disabilities can have any number of symptoms and needs. Symptoms of a disability includes a loss of a normal function like sight or hearing in whole or in part, to name just a couple. In the following definitions, Belluscio explains about the many different disabilities and disorders in detailed fashion.

- 1) Learning Disability---"A learning disability is described as a permanent neurological disorder in which information is received, organized, remembered, and then retrieved or expressed. People with learning disabilities have average to above average intelligence" (20).
- 2) Deafness/Hard of Hearing---"Deafness and hearing loss is measured in decibels and common sounds. A person with deafness may have a severe hearing loss ranging from 60-95dB. They may hear loud sounds like a lawn mower or a jet at 1000ft, but cannot hear speech. Deaf individuals adapt to speech visually through sign language or lip reading" (22).

- 3) Speech and Language Disorders---“Speech and language disorders may result from hearing loss, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, or other physical conditions. The disorder might result in stuttering, problems with articulation, voice disorder or aphasia” (26).
- 4) Psychological Disorders---“Psychological disorders cover a wide range of disorders such as anxiety, depressive, and personality disorders. In most cases, disorders are controlled by a combination of medications and psychotherapy” (28).
- 5) Orthopedic/Mobility Impairments---“A variety of orthopedic/mobility related disabilities result from congenital conditions, accidents, and progressive neuromuscular disorders. These disabilities include spinal cord injuries, cerebral palsy, spinal bifida, amputation, muscular dystrophy, cardiac conditions, cystic fibrosis, paralysis, and stroke. Functional limitations and abilities vary greatly and can best be determined by a case-by-case basis.”(30)
- 6) Blindness/Visual impairments---“Visual impairments include disorders in the sense of vision that affect the central vision acuity, the field of vision, color perception, or binocular visual function.”(32)
- 7) Attention Deficit Disorder---“ADD is officially called Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and is a neurologically based medical problem. It is characterized by a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity which has been found to cause maladaptive behavior in one or more major life activity” (34).

Accommodations must be made for needs arising from a disability. These accommodations could include several possibilities. For instance, a deaf person might need to have someone use sign language to communicate. A blind person may need to use Braille. Disorders involving mobility often require a student to need more time for work or to get to class. A depressed person might need regular counseling on top of his/her medicine, even during school hours. Attention Deficit Disorder might be taken care of with an exercise regimen during school hours along with using medication. This exercise could be done during Study Hall if this open period exists in the school in question. Learning disabilities might require a slower pace for that student, however the same curriculum should be followed if possible so this student does not become underdeveloped.

To define the argument of special needs, one needs to look at some of the situations that young students of this kind are experiencing. These would include: mainstreaming, peers and teachers not understanding the disability/disorder in question, inclusion, special education, and whether or not the school can comply with rules and regulations of state and federal law properly. Furthermore, is the “spirit of the law” being followed? Are young students with disabilities just getting the bare minimums and not what they truly need?

Identification of a child in need is very important and therefore needs to be documented. One website talks about how children are documented. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s [idonline.com](http://idonline.com), (“How a Student is Identified as Having a Disability and Needing Special Education Services”), there is a big process for this purpose. The process is started by a program called ‘Child Find’. According to the

above source, after identification, the student then goes through evaluation and then gets the services needed and then reevaluated to make sure services are still needed. The problem with this, as I see it, is that some children might have a disability and still fly under the radar of the state. This is why parents are trusted to tell the children's respective schools about the disability. However, this does not mean that a teacher should be yelled at by a mad parent. I have had experience with this as my dad did not take too kindly to misunderstanding teachers and everyone heard it. I went to school in the 1980's when there was not so much in the form of legal help. I received the bare minimum of provisions required by law. I did not receive the benefits of the 'spirit of the law'.

One of the major problems some schools and teachers face in serving special needs students is funding. Because of shortage of funds, children too often fall through the cracks of the system. However, there is hope. OSEP's [ideapractices.org](http://ideapractices.org) holds in it an archived law. In 1997, a law called I.D.E.A. was born. This stands for: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This law provides strict guidelines for schools and parents alike. Parents will become more involved, schools will not get as much money for special education if they do not have a stronger curriculum. Schools are supposed to have more dollars for their special education programs and there is going to be more accountability if schools do not comply.

Questions remain. Are schools following the law stated above properly? Is there enough funding to go around and are children getting the proper special education that is needed to help nurture and help these young students grow up with strong, healthy, and productive minds? Does the government need to do more?

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