

ELL Observation for Student Teaching

Overview

In lieu of observing an IEP meeting, I instead observed a session in the English as a Second Language classroom. Daegu International School (DIS) is an independent school and does not have a special education department, and as a result does not do IEP's for students. This lends itself to some problems as most of it falls upon the teachers to accommodate the students. Students that may have learning disabilities, but because of Korean traditions the teachers are not aware.

Before talking about my observation, it is important to mention the history of Korean families and disabilities. Unfortunately, it is believed that if a child has a disability then it affects the whole family. Meaning that a young boy may have a disability, and as a result no one will marry his sister when they are older since they believe that disability could affect their potential children. Therefore these disabilities often go undiagnosed and remain a mystery to us as educators and can make it difficult to give these students the accommodations they require.

DIS has a strict "English only" policy when students are in the classroom, so in order for them to succeed they need a strong English proficiency. The students that are identified as ELL students attend an ELL class with an instructor at DIS who specializes in teaching English as a second language. His job is help students with their schoolwork as well as being the liaisons between students and teachers to make sure they get the appropriate accommodations.

Observation

I decided to attend an ESL class where one of my students was going to be in attendance. When I walked in Mr. Martin, our ESL instructor at DIS, was currently planning a course of action with a senior and helping him manage his time appropriately. Of course ESL students can have their work pile up quickly since they are so often given extra time on assignments, and learning the material can take them more time since they have to process it all in English. Once this senior left another student walked in and promptly sat down to practice writing in cursive, followed shortly by the student in my class who was there to work on her science exam with extra time as her accommodation. While they were working, I had a chance to talk with Mr. Martin about his curriculum.

Frequently during his class he will have students at multiple language levels and will have to differentiate the instruction for the many students. This means he is constantly floating between all of them practicing their skills and assessing them. He does tests twice yearly, one at the beginning and one at the end, to assess their understanding. Outside of the classroom, as previously mentioned, he is sending out lots of emails to teachers to try and get an idea of how well his students comprehend the material. This communication is vital, and I have utilized Mr. Martin frequently throughout the year to make sure the students I have that are ESL students are getting the appropriate accommodations. He also works hard to make sure they have the resources they need to complete my assignments, for example mathematics dictionaries for Japanese – English or making sure they have translator during class.

After the student was done the cursive activity, Mr. Martin then read with her in English about Christopher Columbus and assessed her comprehension by asking her questions

regarding the content. I found this fascinating, because it obviously was not about her knowing the name of Columbus's expedition, but was used simply as a tool of making sure she understood the content and the English vocabulary she was using.

Looking at ways to improve this system that DIS has in place, I think the biggest change could simply come in the form of more support. For Mr. Martin to be doing all subjects for these students, I think it would be beneficial to have a possible math ESL instructor. This would allow one teacher to focus and better differentiate instruction for each student. Not all students are at the same English level, but a lot of them are multiple grade levels behind in math as well. I believe this is due to the fact that the vocab for math is very specialized and specific, so for it can be a lot of vocab to learn before they can begin to understand the mathematics.