

Competencies, Knowledge and Skills of a Bilingual Special Educator

Background

An increasing number of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are coming into the educational system (Grossman, 1995; Kai & Gardner, 1997). Yet, because few university programs prepare teachers to serve language minority students with special needs, culturally and linguistically, students with special needs do not receive an equal and appropriate education (Baca & Cervantes, 1998; Gersten, & Woodward, 1994; Ortiz & Garcia, 1990; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990). Their school programs are inadequate and their teachers are under prepared. They are at higher risk for misplacement in special education (CEC, 1994).

Thus, it is important for the field to improve the way in which teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional students are prepared.

Proficiency in Two Languages

Bilingual proficiency is an important component in the field of bilingual special education. Bilingual proficiency is defined as an individual's ability to perform and communicate in two languages in an informal social setting as well as being able to function in a more formal, cognitively demanding academic setting. (Abbot, Cummins, Hamayan, Kwait & Pearlman) Bilingual special education teachers must be aware of the role of language in developing academic context and skills in culturally and linguistically diverse students. They must demonstrate the ability to teach in two languages. (Baca & Cervantes, Harley, Allen, Cummis & Swain, Ovando & Collier, Trueba)

Bilingual special education teachers must enhance linguistically and culturally diverse students by acknowledging their individual language skills (Baca & Cervantes, 1998; Noel, 2000; Ovando & Collier, 1998).

Culture

Bilingual special education teachers need to be aware that when language is a core value for a cultural group, it will also play a crucial role in the development of students' cultural identity and self-concept.

The competency of culture in the bilingual special education teacher college/university program must provide the tools, knowledge, meanings, expectations necessary to prepare teachers to educate the linguistically and culturally diverse students with special needs

Assessment

Assessment is defined as the process of gathering data about an individual or group of students for the purpose of making instructional decisions to improve the educational program for the students. Assessment has a prominent place in the diagnosis and evaluation of culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities. IDEA mandates assessment and evaluation of students based not only on test results, but on a comprehensive multidisciplinary evaluation and team decision.

Assessment occupies a prominent place in the diagnosis and evaluation of linguistically and culturally diverse students. Knowledge of assessment procedures is an important competency in the preparation of bilingual special education teachers, especially the process of collecting data for the purpose of (a) specifying and verifying instructional problems or strengths, and (b) making decisions about students (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1998).

Instruction

Classroom teachers striving to strengthen culturally and linguistically diverse student's academic competence must develop and implement lessons that are sensitive to the cultural and educational background of the students, and promote student's multicultural understanding in the class.

One of the most contested issues in teaching the linguistically and culturally diverse student with special needs is related to the effective methods of instruction. The quality of academic instruction is often lacking in many classrooms (Kozol, 1991). Thus, culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities are at even greater risk of being placed in a classroom in which little attention is given to academic instruction

Professionalism

Bilingual special education teachers must develop the ability to reflect on their own actions, observations, and responses to experience, and apply these reflections and their academic knowledge to the design and implementation of new approaches to teaching.

Teacher professionalism must be viewed as a constant learning process to enhance students' learning and performance.

Source: Rodriguez, Diand, & Carrasquillo, Angela, (1997) *Bilingual Special Education Teacher Preparation: A Conceptual Framework*, NYSABE Journal 1997
http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/files/rcd/BE021384/Bilingual_Special_Education.pdf

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<http://www.lingref.com/isb/4/152ISB4.PDF>