

PERSPECTIVES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION: EDU 210
Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges
FALL 2009

INSTRUCTOR: Debbie Flaks
CLASS MEETING TIMES: Monday 7:30 – 10:00pm
OFFICE HOURS: To be individually scheduled
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Perspectives on Special Education is designed as a survey course. The goal is to introduce you, the student, to a range of topics, challenges, dilemmas and strategies in understanding and educating all learners, those considered typical learners and those considered 'special' learners. The field of 'Special Education' is vast; therefore, as the course progresses, you will be encouraged to narrow your research and area of interest by focusing on a few key issues and students. By the end of the course, you should understand more about:

- How students' learning profiles impact their learning in school from a functional perspective
- Why students are considered 'a-typical learners'
- How and why students' educational experience is impacted by special education law
- How all professionals who work with students can and should make the students' educational experience meaningful and provide opportunities for success

As I am a life-long teacher and have a strong belief that good teachers are life-long learners, the course will be intentionally taught in such a way to model, make explicit, and make available for inquiry some of the current pedagogical strategies and philosophies of education. Some of these include the implications of brain-based learning, differentiated instruction, inquiry-based education, Universal Design for Learning, and metacognition. While I recognize that not every student in EDU 210 is intending to become a teacher, I do believe that every person who intends to work with children should at least be familiar with current pedagogical issues and dilemmas. I will therefore try to be flexible in making the course relevant to all learners, and will be open to suggestions about ways for you to demonstrate outcomes that are authentic to your intended goals.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS FOR EDU 210

- All students benefit from informed advocates
- Every teacher is a 'special education' teacher
- All teachers need to model strong organization skills, consistency and flexibility
- All students benefit from considered instruction and assessment
- Being smart and being good at school are not synonymous
- We are successful in school when we draw on our personal strengths to acquire information, process and memorize information, and effectively output information
- Some students designated 'learning disabled' may simply be 'school disabled'
- Students with disabilities have many abilities

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR EDU 210

- What is my own learning profile?
- Who *are* my students?
- What does brain-based research teach us about the most effective strategies for teaching students with disabilities?
- How can I make my classroom a safe place for ALL students?
- What are the socially constructed barriers to making schools a place where ALL learners can thrive?
- How can I recognize and respond to these barriers as a future teacher, policy-maker, and/or citizen?

AREAS OF FOCUS

During the course, we will focus on 4 main areas of focus:

1: INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE AND EACH OTHER

As an introduction, we will:

- Focus on our roadmap for the course
- Make explicit the hidden curriculum
- Introduce ourselves
- Activate prior knowledge and emotional connection to 'special education'
- Define our personal interests in 'special education'
- Explore the philosophy behind Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
- Define our personal learning goals in relation to future career aspirations and philosophy of DI

Essential Questions:

- What is my role in the course as a student?
- What is Debbie's role as the instructor?
- How does the defined curriculum relate to my area of interest and/or future aspirations?
- What are the ideas behind DI and UDL?
- How does my prior experience with school lead me to perceive DI and UDL (where do I feel invited by the philosophies, or threatened by them?)

2: UNDERSTANDING MYSELF AS A LEARNER AND 'TEACHER'

In order to help others learn effectively and work through their own barriers to learning, it is important to understand our own learning profiles and some barriers we may have faced (or may still be facing).

Essential Questions:

- What are my strengths, affinities and demons (barriers to learning)?
- How have these strengths, affinities and demons impacted my relationship with learning in the past?
- How will these strengths, affinities and demons impact my performance in this course?
- Does my teaching style reflect my personal learning style?
- How will my experiences as a learner impact my role as a 'teacher' (mentor, leader)?

3: EXPLORING CURRENT ISSUES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

During the course we will explore the history of Special Education and current laws and procedures that guide the identification and delivery of services to students served under the umbrella of 'Special Education'. We will also explore current issues such as how our culture interprets and reacts to people who are considered 'different', the over-identification of minority students designated as 'special education students', and the current wave of inclusion.

Essential Questions:

- What are my cultural values, and how do they impact me as a teacher, advocate and individual working with students?
- Does 'Special Education' as it is defined and implemented today have any validity or benefit to students?
- What is 'normal'?
- Are students 'disabled' or is our system of educating students disabled?
- Is there a more effective way to implement services for students who are struggling?
- Is inclusion effective for all students?

4: WHO ARE OUR STUDENTS?

We will spend a lot of time in this course getting to know some students who are legally identified as 'special education' students, and other students who are not identified by our system, yet are still struggling in school. We will explore the reasons students struggle, and consider how we as educators and advocates can serve ALL students, whether they fall into the neat categories of IDEA or not.

Essential Questions:

- Who *are* my students?
- (How) can we meet the needs of ALL learners in our classrooms?
- When a student is struggling, what is my responsibility as a teacher and as a person?

FIELDWORK GOALS

As a participant in this course, you will be required to use fieldwork as a form of experiential learning to enrich the study and understanding of the issues and dilemmas presented in the course. You will be expected to develop active, engaged partnerships in your placement so that the experiences are beneficial and meaningful for you, your field supervisor and, most importantly, the students in your field placement classroom.

FIELDWORK LOGISTICS

You will be expected to complete one field site visit per week (approximately 2-3 hours per visit) for 10 visits. **Ann Brown** (abrown@haverford.edu) in the Education Program will arrange for your field placements and will provide you with more detailed information about the fieldwork logistics and expectations.

FIELD NOTES

After **each** visit to your field placement, you will need to take field notes. You will be given a separate handout that outlines the method required for taking field notes.

You will be required to *submit* your field notes before the semester break, and at the end of the semester. Your grade for field notes will be assessed based on your level of insight and applicability to our coursework. You will use the notes in class at various times in the semester.

DISCUSSION BOARD

Each student is expected to post a **minimum of 5 posts (both generated posts and responses)** to the Blackboard Discussion Board. These observations can be generated from experiences during the praxis, observations from the field notes, or questions generated from content covered in class. The relationship may be as narrow as a comment that directly relates to a student whose learning is impacted functionally in a way we have discussed in class, or as broad as an observation on a school rule or something you heard or happened to read about that may impact non-typical learners in a way others may not have considered. You are strongly encouraged to respond to the posts of your peers to encourage ongoing discussion and debate.

In addition to student-generated postings, you will also be required to post specific responses related to questions I pose or readings I prescribe. These responses are **not** included in the minimum of 5 posts described above.

When posting, please remember to replace names of people (students, teachers, administrators, et. al) with fictitious names or descriptions (e.g. 'the very experienced 3rd grade teacher'..., or 'the student who had difficulty raising his hand instead of calling out...'). Also, when talking about students with disabilities, remember to DESCRIBE THE BEHAVIOR rather than label the student. Finally, if you have to label the student, please use 'person-first' language (e.g. 'the student who is visually-impaired' instead of 'the visually-impaired student').

Course Overview

WORTH BEING FAMILIAR WITH

Understanding by Design

Differentiated Instruction Strategies for Summarization

Universal Design for Learning

IMPORTANT TO KNOW & DO

Brain based learning Multiple Intelligences

Your own personal learning profile and demons IDEA

Which students are considered 'special education' students according to law

Become an 'expert' in teaching one group of students with a specific disability

IFPS

Impact of disabilities on social relationships

Inclusion

ADD

504 Plans

NCLB

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

All students benefit from informed advocates

Every teacher is a Special Education Teacher

All teachers need to model strong organizational skills, consistency & flexibility

All students benefit from considered instruction and assessment

Being smart and being good at school are not synonymous

We are successful in school when we draw on our personal strengths to acquire information, process and memorize information, and effectively output information

Some students designated 'learning disabled' may simply be 'school disabled'

Students with disabilities have many abilities

REQUIRED TEXTS

Connell, J. D. (2005). *Brain-Based Strategies to Reach Every Learner*. New York: Scholastic.

Mooney, J. (2007). *The Short Bus: A Journey beyond Normal*. New York: Henry Holt

ATTENDANCE POLICY

I expect all students to attend class consistently, and to arrive on time. If the need arises for you to miss class, arrive late or leave early, please call or email me ahead of time. We have limited time to explore a large amount of material. Please be sensitive to arriving on time so that we can maximize our productivity.

SUPPORTS PROVIDED

Based on my belief that *fair is giving students what he or she needs to succeed*, all students will be provided with appropriate accommodations as long as the student:

- Advocates appropriately
- Advocates in a timely manner
- Requests reasonable accommodations based on valid need

GRADED COURSE PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

The course performance outcomes will help students experience a model that may be emulated in a classroom. Students will be assessed on the following performance outcomes:

- 10% Consistent attendance and positive, collaborative community participant**
- 10% Insightful and applicable Field Notes**
- 10% Minimum of 5 insightful and applicable Blackboard Posting (both generated and responsive)**
- 20% Written assignment: Personal Learning Reflection**
- 20% Written assignment: Research Paper**
- 15% Group Assignment: Literature-Based Assignment**
- 15% Summative Assessment: Integrating Theory and Practice**

All written assignments need:

- to include:
 - Name
 - Date
 - Assignment Title
- to be typed
- to be double spaced
- to be in 12 sized font
- to be referenced either according to MLA or APA (I am not a stickler for style, as long as all work is appropriately referenced)

Revision Policy: As the ultimate goal is mastery, you may revise any paper at any time during the semester. *However, before you do any revision, you need to meet with me to talk about your proposed revisions.* All revisions are due the last class that we meet (*Monday December 8th*).

Extensions: if you need an extension, you have to advocate appropriately (either in person, via phone or email) **at least 24 hours ahead of time.** If an assignment is submitted late without prior arrangement, your assignment grade will be penalized.

GRADING POLICY

For each performance outcome, you will be given a detailed description of

- The purpose of the assignment
- The task
- Key criteria for assessment
- Due date

Your assignments will be graded according to the following rubric:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Numerical Value</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
4.0	A	Demonstrates <i>exceptional</i> ability to explain, interpret and apply knowledge with <i>exceptional</i> empathy, and perspective. Demonstrates <i>exceptional</i> self-knowledge.
3.7	A-	
3.3	B+	
3.0	B	Demonstrates <i>good</i> ability to explain, interpret and apply knowledge with empathy, and perspective. Demonstrates <i>thoughtful</i> self-knowledge.
2.7	B-	
2.3	C+	
2.0	C	Demonstrates <i>partial</i> ability to explain, interpret and apply knowledge with some empathy, and perspective. Demonstrates <i>some</i> self-knowledge.
1.7	C-	
1.3	D+	
1.0	D	Demonstrates <i>little</i> ability to explain, interpret and apply knowledge with <i>little</i> empathy, and perspective. Demonstrates <i>little</i> self-knowledge

When we truly understand, we

- Can **explain** via generalizations or principles: provide justified and systematic accounts of phenomena, facts, and data; make insightful connections and provide illuminating examples or illustrations.
- Can **interpret**: tell meaningful stories, offer apt translations, provide a revealing historical or personal dimension to ideas and events, make it personal or accessible through images, anecdotes, analogies, and models.
- Can **apply**: effectively use or adapt what we know in diverse and real contexts – we can “do” the subject.
- Have **perspective**: see and hear points of view through critical eyes and ears; see the big picture.
- Display **empathy**: find value in what others might find odd, alien, or implausible; perceive sensitively on the basis of prior direct experience
- Have **self-knowledge**: show metacognitive awareness; perceive the personal style, prejudices, projections, and habits of mind that shape and impede our own understanding; be aware of what we do not understand; reflect on the meaning of learning and experience.

Adapted from Figure 5.2, *Integrating Differentiated Instruction and Understanding by Design*, Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

- Levine, M. (2002). *A Mind at a Time*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Levine, M (1990). *Keeping A Head In School*. Cambridge: Educations Publishing Service, Inc.
- Mooney, J. and Cole, D. (2000). *Learning Outside the Lines*. New York: Simon & Shuster
- Sousa, D.A. (2007). *How the Special Needs Brain Learns, 2nd Edition*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.
- Tomlinson, C.A. (2003). *Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom*. Alexandria: Association for Curriculum and Development.
- Tomlinson, C.A. (1999). *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*. Alexandria: Association for Curriculum and Development.
- Wormeli, R. (2005). *Summarization in Any Subject*. Alexandria: Association for Curriculum and Development.