

“Drama as a Strategy for the Social
Development of Students with
Special Needs”

By
Mack Smith

Liberal Studies 400
Capstone
Dr. Betty McEady

Background of the Problem

Today, Special Education or Special Needs Programs continue to be a highly debated subject. Parents, teachers, school officials, and policy-makers grapple with the issue of Special Needs Programs? What qualifies an individual as a special needs student? What types of curriculum will be taught in a Special Needs Program?

For the purpose of this research paper, Special Needs Programs are programs implemented for the education of students with psychological or physical disorders. Kathleen Stassen Berger, author of *The Developing Person Through Childhood*, describes children with special needs as “Children for whom learning new skills and developing friendships are hampered by psychological or physical disorders” (351). Because the number and types of psychological and physical disabilities are so great, teachers are confronted with the task of assessing each child’s ability and then designing an Individualized Education Program (IEP) based on the level of the child. Children with an IEP are again assessed in their ability to participate in mainstream or exclusionary programs. Though qualified doctors and teachers perform assessment, parents usually have the final say in the educational choice of their child.

“Mainstreaming is the placement of a special needs student in regular classes with non-disabled peers” (Barry E. McNamara, ED.D, Sec. 2). This form of inclusion is usually prevalent in grades 7-12. Exclusionary programs are the placement of special needs students with like disabilities in one classroom. According to a web page sponsored by the Hawaii Center for the Deaf and Blind, exclusion programs are in schools where there is a specialization such as deafness (“Hawaii”).

Because special needs classrooms vary in their methods of instruction, teachers limit their curriculum to such basics as mathematics, reading, and writing. Teachers also are limited in what they can teach because their classroom often contains students with varying disabilities. These limitations in instruction force teachers to follow IEP's, which in turn segregates students from each other. This segregation restricts students from interaction and provides no medium for social development. It is important for special needs students to develop social skills in order to communicate effectively within society. Without the necessary instruction and guidance in social building techniques, the special needs student disability is compounded. I believe if teachers can incorporate group activities such as drama, student integration will occur and social development will enhance. Therefore, in this paper, I propose a solution to the problem of individualized segregation within the special needs classroom. My approach is valuable because it incorporates alternative teaching methods, which educators can use in the instruction of special needs students. I propose to solve the problem of individualized segregation by creating lesson plans that incorporate self-expression, play, and cooperative learning. These lessons can be used to introduce drama as a strategy to develop social development.

Introduction

Drama has long been a tradition for cultures to express themselves. From ancient Africa to Greece, the use of theater or Oral Tradition was used to create relationships, form public opinion, and wage war. Today, when most children think of drama, they

think of the stage and such popular plays as *The Nutcracker* or *Phantom of the Opera*. Theater is one area of the arts that has long been incorporated within schools extra-curriculum. Though it provides a medium where children can express themselves, it is very limiting and usually utilizes students spare time out of the classroom. The California Department of Education warns that “choices need to be made about the role of the arts in the education of California’s children. Arts education can be seen as extra or it can be viewed as a vital part of the curriculum” (5). From grade school talent shows, junior high revivals, and High school plays, theater today has been limited to schools with adequate funding and resources. According to The California Department of Education, “Throughout California today arts programs are under-funded, understaffed, and undervalued” (1).

Though theater in special needs programs are unheard of, I believe the use of drama can help special needs students in the areas of social development and self-esteem. Special needs students suffer from poor self-esteem because society treats them differently. Theater helps bridge the gap of one’s poor self-esteem and poor self-respect through the creation of artistic perception. “Artistic perception involves processing sensory information through elements unique to the arts and sensitizing the individual to the aesthetic qualities of the world. Heightened artistic perception through active participation in the arts stimulates imagination and creativity, potentially affecting all learning” (“California” 9). It is when the special needs student sees himself or herself in a positive learning environment where he or she creates cooperatively with his or her peers; he or she is able to free him or herself from the stigma he or she harbors.

Through research, interviews, and theater games I will show how teachers can use drama as a strategy for helping special needs students build self-expression, learn the benefits of constructive play, and enjoy cooperative learning. I will also provide insight on how to combine drama for students who utilize assisted technology due to disability. With the use of drama within the classroom, teachers will also become aware of the fun opportunities they can share with their students while providing an environment that encourages integration rather than segregation.

In my experience as an instructional aide in special needs programs, I have found that many special needs students have problems with obedience, patience, and a lack of respect for themselves and others. A home environment that shelters and spoils them usually brings on these attitudes. When they come in contact with an authoritative figure such as a teacher, most students expect the same sheltering they receive at home. When this does not happen, the special needs student withdraws and makes the learning environment a hostile environment. As an actor, I always wanted to see how these students would act and react if I could devise some drama games and exercises to make the learning environment enriching and beneficial for all.

Literature Review

Finding Literature for my topic was painstaking. Drama and theatre arts searches resulted in broad categories with lots of irrelevant information. When I narrowed my search down to drama and special needs, I came up with three pretty good books. Drama for People with Special Needs by Ann Cattanach was by far the best book I found. In her book, I was able to find pertinent information regarding special needs students and self-

esteem. The information I read reinforced what I was seeing in the special needs classroom. Cattanach pointed out all the areas within social development within her book that I was looking for. She stressed the importance of using drama to improve self-esteem, cooperative learning, and constructive play. Cattanach also believes individualized instruction segregated students. She states that the best way to work with self-esteem, cooperative learning, and constructive play was within groups. “In the drama group all these processes function continuously and actively while the group exist. There is the emotional and internal process of each group member, the creative development of each individual, the groups dynamic process and the creative development of the group” (Cattanach 7).

The second best book I found dealing with drama and special needs was Drama Education and Special Needs by Andy Kempe. I really enjoyed this book because it gives detailed instructions on how to use drama within the special needs classroom. Kempe explores ideas on how drama can improve self-esteem and be used as a cooperative learning method. Kempe stresses the importance of allowing special needs students the chance to express themselves through art. As Andy Kempe states, “to create something that successfully expresses a feeling or belief, is to engage with those cultural aspects of human life which joins people together regardless of any individual physical or mental differences” (6).

The third and final book that I captured most of my information from was Teachers, Schools, and Society, by Myra Sadker. This was a book that I had used one semester in a class called Schooling in a Culturally Diverse and Linguistic Society. I really enjoyed

this book for its easy to read nature, and wealth of information. As I looked through the book I found it had an entire section on special needs and cooperative learning. Sadker shared the same views as Kempe and Cattanach when it came to self-esteem and constructive play. But it was Sadker who stressed the importance of cooperative learning methods. Myra Sadker states, cooperative learning is a learning method that “promotes cooperation over competition and builds self-esteem” (98). This book really showed me how teachers must be constantly aware of how they teach, and what they teach.

I used Kathleen Berger’s book The Developing Person Through Childhood to reinforce my knowledge about special needs classrooms. This book put into perspective how schools segregate students based on disability. It also promoted self-esteem building methods.

An interesting book that dealt with drama teaching was Micheal Fleming’s The Art of Drama Teaching. Fleming argues that the cultural context of drama needs to be studied rather than using drama as a form of creativity, play, or self-esteem building. Fleming states:

There has been a gradual shift from a theoretical focus on the subjective, personal growth of the individual through creative processes of self-expression, to a recognition of the social nature of drama and the importance of the development of understanding in objective, cultural contexts (7).

I agree with this point of view but in the special needs classroom attention must be given to the individual and his or her development before more complex drama theories are introduced.

Finally, I was able to incorporate a pamphlet, Artwork: A Call for Arts Education for all California Students by The California Department of Education. In this pamphlet legislators expressed the importance and the need of using theater arts in the classroom. I used the pamphlet because it talked about special needs students. It was particularly interesting to see the direction California is trying to go in the education of its youth.

I was amazed at the lack of information about drama as a strategy for the social development of special needs students. I was also astonished at the lack of quality literature for drama and special needs students. I believe the three quality books mentioned above are not enough to satisfy one's curiosity on this subject. This has led me to the possibilities of writing my own book on this subject.

Methods and Procedures

Drama Survey

In trying to gauge my philosophy of the use of drama as a strategy in the social development of special needs students, I produced two survey questionnaires. The first questionnaire was produced for teachers and included the following questions:

1. Do you think drama or theatre games could be useful in your classroom?
2. Do you feel drama could be used as a strategy for teaching special education?
3. Do you feel drama builds social skills in special needs students?
4. Do you feel drama creates a cooperative learning environment?
5. Do you feel drama is a waste of time?
6. Do you feel students will use drama time for horseplay?

The second questionnaire was produced for special needs students and included the following questions:

1. Do you like to watch movies?
2. Do you like to pretend you are characters on TV or movies?
3. Do you think you could work with classmates to create a scene or skit from your favorite TV show?
4. Do you think you would learn how to be an actor if your teacher taught drama for an hour a day?
5. Do you like to work with others?

Survey population

I chose two special needs classrooms that I had worked in as a substitute instructional aide. I chose these two classrooms because of their exclusionary nature.

Classroom A

Classroom A consists of a teacher, three instructional aides, and seven students. The seven students' disabilities are mild to moderate retardation. I was unable to access the files of each student to determine each particular disorder but the students' ages ranged between 17-21. The teacher stated that their mental capacity is that of a 14 year old. The primary goal of this classroom is to integrate the students into the work force. Though the students would probably never be able to maintain a job without daily assistance from qualified personnel, the teacher insisted with apprehension that that was the goal. Each student in classroom A has good motor skills. I chose this particular classroom population exclusively for their current level

of development. Because of their social functioning level, I believe the use of drama would benefit their social development and provide an alternative approach towards the goals of the program.

Classroom B

Classroom B consists of a teacher, instructional aide, a behavioral therapist, and 8 students. The students in this population are of the age 12 and 13. Though the teacher and instructional aide run the classroom, it is the therapist who interacts with the students on a one-on-one basis. The therapist explained to me that the student's primary disabilities were behavioral and that they could not be mainstreamed because they create distractions for teachers. These students tended to be from broken homes and raised by either a grandmother or guardian. Their behaviors are demonstrated through a poor self-esteem and are evident in their attitudes and lack of respect for authority. I chose this particular population because of their behavior and social skill problems. I believe the use of drama could improve their self-esteem and aid in their social development so that one-day they would be able to enter mainstream programs without being a distraction for teachers.

Results

Classroom A

I received four teacher surveys from classroom A. Every question was answered with a 'yes'. The teacher had a concern about developing drama games for the students that would be beneficial. He was concerned with the limited amount of resources for the use of drama in the classroom. I was particularly interested in one

of the responses from an instructional aide. His primary concern was he believed that teachers and aides needed some form of drama instruction or training so that they would not be in the dark when trying to implement drama in their classroom.

A California Department of educational Data Systems Survey of arts teachers in four counties (Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Francisco, and Ventura) found that in most school districts an average of two percent of all teachers were qualified arts teachers. The highest rate was seven percent (“California” 17).

This information from the instructional aide and the California Department of Education shed light on the subject that teachers themselves need some form of dramatic arts instruction in order for drama to be successfully administered with the classroom. With the aid of the instructors, I received all the surveys from the seven students and all their answers were ‘yes’. This concluded for me that drama would be a useful tool in the instruction of special needs students.

Classroom B

I received three teacher surveys from classroom B. Again every question was answered with a ‘yes’. The behavioral therapist’s response was quite positive because he stated that drama would help his students act out their emotional disturbances as a group, in conjunction with their one-on-one therapy. He also had a concern that the students would get carried away with the use of drama and that strict guidelines would have to be implemented to ensure respect for all students and faculty involved. I also received all the students’ surveys and 5 students answered yes to all of the questions and the remaining 3 students answered no to every question. I asked the Behavior therapist why three students answered negatively and his response was that they act negative towards everything.

Discussion

I think drama would be useful in both classroom A and B. Based on the data, both teachers and students are eager to explore the use of drama in their classrooms, but as I found out, teachers must be trained in the use of drama, and more importantly, drama lessons that are geared towards each particular classroom. In Classroom A, lesson plans would have to be devised to aid in the acquisition of social skills necessary to obtain employment. The type of drama that would be most beneficial to this classroom would be lesson plans geared at improving self-esteem. Because these students will be going out into the work force, they need instruction that is not only written down, but acted out. Teachers can devise games in which students are placed in real life problem solving scenarios and as a class work them out.

In classroom B, drama lesson plans would have to be devised to explore anger management and behavioral issues. I believe drama lessons that explore self-esteem, cooperative learning, and play would benefit this classroom. Because these students have behavioral issues, teachers need to express the importance of feeling good about one-self, and working as a team. Teachers can devise lesson plans that explore attitude and opinions. Students would then be led in the creation of real life situations in which they have to accomplish positive results. But in both cases drama would be an excellent strategy for the social development of these special needs students.

I also feel teachers could explore culture in both of these classrooms. By including cultural lesson plans in both of these classrooms, teachers can stress the importance of

recognizing cultural differences. Through this recognition, students will have an understanding of how to interact in a multicultural setting. This is extremely important because each culture deals with disabilities differently. When the special needs student is knowledgeable in these cultural differences, they are able to distinguish cultural practices from ridicule or discrimination.

Drama promotes self-expression

In most of the literature I reviewed, authors complained that some educators and parents believe that the use of arts in schools is only to make children more creative. But as Ken Robinson states in his book Exploring Theatre & Education, “ ‘Creativity’ is a myth if we think of it as a separate faculty which only springs to life in certain types of activity, like ‘art’. We do not have creativity, like we have jaundice, in a measured dose. The activity of the mind, if it is active, is essentially creative” (161). Because the special needs students’ minds are actively creative, it is important for teachers to utilize their students’ creativity through drama. By allowing students to express themselves, teachers can take the first step in creating social interaction and development.

In the special needs classrooms where I have worked, I have found that students are not given the chance to express themselves. The California Department of Education states, “Through creative expression students produce artworks by creating them or by performing the works of others. Expression in the arts includes learning through acting in plays and improvisations” (“California” 9). I agree with this point of view because too often teachers follow students’ IEP’s and attempt to keep them on task. This daily routine segregates them from each other and limits interaction. Sure, most mainstream

and exclusionary programs have the students gather first thing in the morning for circle time, but this limited time for self-expression is not enough. During circle time students are asked how they feel and are encouraged to share anything that may be on their minds. Usually most students say they feel “fine” or “ok” and have nothing else to share with the group. I believe if teachers could incorporate some form of creative expression within circle time, social development would occur due to the encouraged interaction with each other. As Andy Kempe states in his book Drama Education and Special Needs, “to create something that successfully expresses a feeling or belief, is to engage with those cultural aspects of human life which joins people together regardless of any individual physical or mental differences” (6). But some researchers believe that drama should be used in the understanding of literature and culture. As Micheal Fleming states in his book The Art of Drama Teaching:

There has been a gradual shift from a theoretical focus on the subjective, Personal growth of the individual through creative processes of self-expression, to a recognition of the social nature of drama and the importance of the development of understanding in objective, cultural contexts. (7)

I agree with this point of view but in the special needs classroom attention must be given to the individual and his or her development before more complex drama theories are introduced. In many special needs programs, these theories may never be introduced due to the very nature of each student’s special needs. But when special needs students are encouraged to express themselves the teacher and group must be supportive. Drama requires the special needs students to open up their feelings and emotions, which reflects

aspects of their self-esteem. Ann Cattanach states in her book Drama for People with

Special Needs:

For any work on the self-esteem of the group to be successful the group must feel comfortable and safe, know the rules and limits and what is expected. This atmosphere is created by the way the facilitator builds relationships and creates a caring environment and by the ground rules set at the beginning of the life of the group. (49)

Once the teacher has created an environment that respects the feelings and emotions of the special needs students, the students are then able to express themselves through their physical movement and mental imagery. Ann Cattanach points out “when the ground rules include listening to each other and respect for each other’s point of view, children begin to feel competent and valued for their strengths and can acknowledge their weaknesses as individuals and as members of the group” (50). In order for teachers to implement drama lessons that focus on creating positive self-expression and self-esteem, schools must have the resources to allow special needs students the space to utilize their artistic expression. In the event of limited space and budgets, I have included lesson plans at the end of the paper that can be performed in any classroom.

Discussion

Drama as a form of play

Throughout my experience working with disabled students, disabilities ranged from physical, mental, and behavioral. The overriding theme in all of these classrooms is keeping students busy in order to maintain order and control. It is true that classroom management is very important, but within special needs programs, students must be given the opportunity to experience constructive play. Because of the sheltered nature of most

special needs students, allowing students to play helps them to explore the world around them. Ann Cattanach states, “play is one way to develop communication with people who may find direct talking difficult because they haven’t access to words or because they are uncomfortable just talking. It can be safe to play and use play material to share feelings and ideas” (137). Play helps the special needs student create a space where he or she is in control. It gives them the power to manipulate toys and objects. Unfortunately, most parents and educators see play as an activity that is to be conducted outside the school environment. But drama is a form of play that allows the special needs students to release themselves from reality and enter a realm of exploration that lets them view experiences from a distance. In other words, drama play is a form of transforming dreams and desires into a real life situation. Kathleen Berger Stassen states in her book The Developing Person through Childhood, “sociodramatic play is pretend play in which children act out various roles and themes in stories of their own creation” (313). This form of play is particularly important for social development because it allows the special needs student to test emotions such as anger, love, and sympathy.

Structured and constructive play

For drama play to be successful, it must be constructive and structured. Ann Cattanach explores four basic concepts that will help in the structuring of drama play for special needs students:

Firstly: play is the way children make sense of their world and what is happening to them in that world. Secondly: play is a developmental process and this determines the complexity of the play but there is much pleasure to be gained from re-enacting early forms of play. Thirdly: play is a symbolic process where we use objects and ourselves to represent other objects and other selves. Through this symbolic process, the child can experiment with imaginative choices and because it is play and not 'reality' we are appropriately distanced from the consequences of such symbolic choices. Fourthly: play happens in a special place. When children play they choose their own space for play be it under the table, in a 'den', or in the garden. The child finds a safe place and this is the playing space where our creative life begins (138).

Through sociodramatic and symbolic play, the special needs student is able to establish meaningful relationships in a positive social environment. I have incorporated lesson plans at the rear of the paper for teachers to establish play within their special needs classroom.

Drama as a cooperative approach

As I have pointed out earlier, most special needs classrooms segregate students because they "incorporate independent study or learning contracts" (Myra Sadker 73). It is only during lunch and circle time when they all gather together. The bond that is formed between the students and teachers during this time is precious. It is wonderful to see the special needs students socialize with each other. I believe if teachers set aside at least an hour outside lunch and circle time for drama, it will enhance their socializing capabilities and at the same time, foster a cooperative learning environment. Usually in the special needs classroom competition is minimal. Games such as Uno, Monopoly, and playing cards help establish emotions of winning and losing but they fail to establish cooperative learning.

Myra Sadker states in the book Teachers, Schools, and Society, Cooperative learning is a method that “promotes cooperation over competition and builds self-esteem” (98). Drama provides this cooperation because it incorporates each student within the exercise and allows their self-expression and creativity to be shared with each other. But in most special needs classrooms today individualized instruction is encouraged. Stigler and Stevenson state that when teachers provide individual instruction, they must leave the rest of the class unattended, so instructional time for all remaining children is reduced (185). This individualized instruction keeps the students from working together and provides no time for cooperation. But “In the drama group all these processes function continuously and actively while the group exist. There is the emotional and internal process of each group member, the creative development of each individual, the groups dynamic process and the creative development of the group” (Cattanach 7).

The most important aspect of drama as a cooperative approach is the teacher and how he or she aids in the development of the special needs students’ social development. Myra Sadker offers the following steps to help create cooperative learning in the classroom:

1. Start with cooperative learning projects that are short and simple.
2. Make sure students understand how important it is to work cooperatively with other people-not only in the classroom but throughout life.
3. Don’t assume that students automatically know how to work in groups in the classroom. Teach and model social skills, such as how to talk quietly in groups.

4. Praise students when they use skillful social behaviors. (98)

Drama helps establish the social development of the special needs student through group interaction and more importantly cooperative learning. I have incorporated lesson plans at the rear of the paper that provide examples of how teachers can use drama to foster cooperative learning.

Limitations of Study

I don't think I faced any obstacles in obtaining reliable answers, but I wish I could have devised a survey that would give me better results than 'yes' and 'no' answers. Due to the nature of special needs students, I had to make the questionnaire as simple as possible and also take into consideration the time necessary for both teachers and students to fill them out. I believe my collection of data is sufficient to prove that drama is a strategy that can assist in the social development of special needs students, but I am sure if I surveyed classrooms with students that use assisted technologies like: wheelchairs, walkers, voice-boxes, and computers, teachers would be more apprehensive in using drama because of the added time and responsibility they must provide. I Also believe if I had the opportunity to teach one of my lesson plans, I could have convinced the three negative students that drama would be a valuable tool in their classroom.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of drama in the special needs classroom would benefit both teacher and student. Because of drama's natural nature of self-expression, creativity, and exploration, teachers would possess a tool that can be used to aid in their craft. With

proper training, teachers could devise lesson plans that would be appropriate for their classrooms, and more importantly, for their particular student's disabilities. With correct drama instruction, teachers can break away from the standard of individualized segregation. Teachers can also replace the barriers of exclusionary programs by incorporating drama within the classroom. This can be done to help build social skills in students and aid in their assimilation into mainstream programs.

Special needs students would also benefit from the use of drama in the classroom. According to lawmakers and The State Board of Education, the arts should be a "part of the core curriculum at every grade level for all students, including those with special needs" (California 17).

Drama allows special needs students the time to play. Drama builds self-esteem and provides an environment where students can learn cooperatively with each other. Once these skills have been developed and refined, the students would have more opportunities to explore the education and extra-curricular activities that so called 'normal' student's experience. The key to drama as a strategy in the social development of the special needs student is the ability and patience of the teachers and the willingness of the students.

Lesson Plan
Name Game

Author: Mack Smith

Grade Level: 7-Adult

Overview: This lesson plan fits under the unit of social development and is the first of a series of games that help special needs students develop self-esteem and self-expression.

Purpose: To help students answer the question ‘who are you?’ When asked. It is important that other people respect your name, can pronounce it properly and can spell it.¹

Time: 60 minutes

Teacher background: Teacher must have experience working with special needs students and have the understanding that responses will vary due to disability. Teacher must also be able to incorporate the use of assisted technologies such as wheelchairs and walkers. Teacher must also have knowledge of nursery rhymes.

Materials: Enough space for the class to form a circle.

Procedure: The group stands in a circle. Each student takes turns standing or sitting in the middle. The person in the middle gives a name, a sound and a movement. Everyone imitates the person in the middle while they watch and then another person takes their place. Once everyone has stood in the middle, the group sits down together and sings songs, using their own names instead of the name in the song. The children are asked to

¹ For abbreviated form, see Cattanach 50

suggest songs or rhymes that include a name: 'Mary had a little lamb', etc. Then they use their own names instead.²

Wrap-up/Tying it together: 'This game helps people own themselves and the gestures and sounds indicate their feelings about themselves and their place in the group. The teacher then reinforces the importance of everyone respecting each other's names and personalities'.

²For abbreviated form, see Cattanach 50,51

Lesson Plan
Name Game

Author: Mack Smith

Grade Level: 7-Adult

Overview: This lesson plan fits under the unit of social development and is a game that helps special needs students develop self-esteem, self-respect, and responsibility.

Purpose: To help students understand respect for other people and their property. It also promotes ethics, responsibility, and aids in the demonstration of doing the right thing.

Time: 60 minutes

Teacher background: Teacher must have experience working with special needs students and have the understanding that responses will vary due to disability. Teacher must also be able to incorporate the use of assisted technology such as wheelchairs and walkers. Teacher must also have knowledge of storytelling.

Materials: Enough space for the class to form a circle.

Procedure: The group sits in a circle and the teacher asks who would like to sit in the middle. Once a student has taken his or her place in the middle, the teacher describes the scenario; the class has discovered that the person in the middle has stolen some money they were collecting for a Halloween party. The teacher then discusses the implications if the class pretends the person in the middle had done nothing. The teacher then discusses what would happen if someone reported the person in the middle to the teacher. The class discusses what is the best course of action and they decide to confront the

person themselves and plan what they are going to say. Each student then goes to the person in the middle and expresses their concern about the issue. The class observes everyone's dialogue with the person in the middle.³

Wrap-up/Tying it together: This dramatic game helps the special needs student learn responsible decision making and at the same time fosters their self-esteem in congratulating them on doing the right thing. The skills gained in this exercise help the special needs student distinguish right from wrong.⁴

³For abbreviated form, see Kempe 41

⁴For abbreviated form, see Kempe 41

Lesson Plan
I'm going to Disneyland

Author: Mack Smith

Grade Level: 7-Adult

Overview: This lesson plan fits under the unit memory play. This game helps the special needs student develop memorization through creative expression and language.

Purpose: To help students with memorization and the use of lists in planning for shopping or taking a trip.

Time: 60 Minutes

Teacher Background: Teacher must have experience working with special needs students and have the understanding that responses will vary due to disability. Teacher must also be able to incorporate the use of assisted technology such as wheelchairs, and walkers. Teacher must also have good organizational skills.

Materials: Enough space for class to sit in a circle, pencil and paper.

Procedure: The teacher starts with the line, 'I'm going to Disneyland and I'm going to take my toothbrush'. The student sitting on the teacher's left repeats the line and adds something of his or her own. For example, 'I'm going to Disneyland and I'm going to take my toothbrush and my toothpaste'. Objects can be mimed and a combination of words and actions can help reinforce the memory of the growing list.⁵

Wrap-up/Tying it together:

Once the game is complete students are then asked to write their own list and are encouraged to incorporate what they memorized as well as adding anything else they

⁵ For abbreviated form, see Kempe 39

would like. The teacher then wraps it up with instructions on the importance of planning and how sometimes we cannot rely on our memory to remember everything.

Lesson Plan
People to People

Author: Mack Smith

Grade Level: 5-Adult

Overview: This lesson plan fits under the unit play with an emphasis in movement.

Purpose: To help the special needs student develop dramatic play and social skills. It also helps establish social relationships and the importance of boundaries.⁶

Time: 60 Minutes

Teacher Background: Teacher must have experience working with special needs students and have the understanding that responses will vary due to disability. Teacher must also be able to incorporate the use of assisted technology such as wheelchairs, and walkers.

Materials: Enough space for a small group to move freely.

Procedure: People choose partners and stand face to face. The teacher calls out “elbow to knee” or “nose to finger” and the pair respond together to the instructions. When the teacher shouts “people to people” pairs re-form and repeat the game. People to people can be played in wheelchairs if the teacher chooses appropriate body parts.⁷

Wrap-up/Tying it together: Teacher will gather students and discuss appropriate behaviors when interacting with each other and people outside of the classroom. Teacher will stress the importance of understanding personal boundaries within play.

⁶For abbreviated form, see Cattanaach 25

⁷ For abbreviated form, see Cattanaach 26

Lesson Plan
Geography

Author: Mack Smith

Grade Level: 5-Adult

Overview: This lesson plan fits under the unit of geography and is the first in a series of games that help special needs students develop cooperative learning skills.

Purpose: To help the special needs student learn geography through friendships and opposition.

Time: 60 Minutes

Teacher Background: Teacher must have experience working with special needs students and have the understanding that responses will vary due to disability. Teacher must also be able to incorporate the use of assisted technology such as wheelchairs, and walkers. Teacher must have knowledge of geography and in particular the voyage of Columbus.

Materials: Enough space for the class to be divided into two groups. Feathers, yardsticks, and a Captain's hat.

Procedure: Class is divided in half and placed on opposite sides of the room. Group/Team A represents the Indians. Group/Team B represents Columbus and crew on the boat. Group B cheers at the sight of land, while Group A imagines themselves as Indians on the shoreline watching and commenting on the strange boats full of shouting wild men, which appear to be coming closer and closer. Having discussed both perspectives, the teacher invites them to re-enact the jubilation of the men on the boat and

then slowly move across the room to the astonished expressions of the Indians on the beach. In both cases, the stark contrasts are captured for the special needs students.⁸

Wrap-up/Tying it together: Once both groups meet, the teacher discusses the friendships that developed during Columbus's first encounter with the Indians. The teacher then discusses the opposition and hardships both Indians and explorers faced in the exploration of the New World. This is an excellent example of using drama and Geography in a cooperative learning environment. It also allows students to explore and re-enact feelings and emotions of both Indians and explorers.

⁸ For abbreviated form, see Kempe 19

Lesson Plan
Common Sense

Author: Mack Smith

Grade Level: 12-Adult

Overview: This lesson plan fits under the unit of cooperative learning through storytelling.

Purpose: To help the special needs student learn aspects of different cultures through storytelling. Through dramatic play between groups, students learn morals of various cultures. This lesson also helps students compete in a constructive dramatic fashion.

Time: 60 Minutes

Teacher Background: Teacher must have experience working with special needs students and have the understanding that responses will vary due to disability. Teacher must also be able to incorporate the use of assisted technology such as wheelchairs, and walkers. Teacher must also have knowledge of various culture stories that teach moral lessons.

Materials: Any short story that has morals present within its theme. Blackboard, chalk and candy. Free-time privileges can be substituted for candy.

Procedure: See attached story. Teacher divides the class into two groups. The teacher then writes the following questions on the blackboard. What is common sense? What bit of common sense did you get? What bit of common sense would you like that you haven't got? Each group cooperatively discusses the questions and is awarded a point for each correct answer. Once questions are answered, Group A takes on the role of a shopkeeper who has a shop full of different bits of common sense. Group B represents buyers of common sense and are challenged to see what common sense they can buy and what they will have to give up in exchange for it.⁹

Wrap-up/Tying it together: Teacher then discusses the many elements of common sense that the students expressed. The teacher expresses that common sense is not something that can be bought or sold but has to be learned or experienced. Teacher then awards everyone a prize for his or her participation. Cattnach provides the following example of a short story:

⁹For abbreviated form, see Cattnach 60-61

Afro-American Stories**Getting Common Sense (Jamaica)**

Once upon a time Anansi thought that he could collect all the common sense in the world and keep it for himself and in that way he would get plenty of money and power because everyone would have to come to him with their problems and he would charge them for his advice. Anansi started to collect up and up all the common sense he could find and put it together into one big calabash. He decided to put the calabash on top of a tall tree so nobody could find it.

So Anansi tied a rope to the end of the calabash, tied the two ends of the rope together and hung the rope round his neck so that the calabash balanced on his belly. He started to climb the tall tree but couldn't climb very well or very fast because the calabash got in the way. He was trying very hard when all of a sudden he heard a voice burst out laughing at the back of him. And when he looked he saw a little boy standing under the tree. 'What a foolish man if you want to climb the tree front ways why don't you put the calabash behind you?' Well, Anansi was so angry to hear such common sense from such a little boy when he thought he had collected all the common sense in the world that Anansi took the calabash broke it into pieces and the common sense scattered out all over the world; everybody got a little piece of it but nobody got it all.

It was Anansi that made it so. (Cattanach 60)

Works Cited

- Berger, Kathleen S. The Developing Person Through Childhood. New York: Worth, 2000: 313-351.
- Bergstesser, Kendig. Personal Interview/Survey. 31 Mar. 2001
- California Department of Education. Artswork: A Call for Arts Education for all California Students. California: California Department of Education, 1997: 5-17
- Cattanach, Ann. Drama for People with Special Needs. New York: Drama Book, 1992 7,49-51,137.
- Fleming, Michael. The Art of Drama Teaching. London: Ormond House, 1997: 7
- Greenberg, Noah. Personal Interview/Survey. 5 Apr. 2001
- Hawaii Center for the Deaf and the Blind. 12 Feb. 2001
<<http://library.thinkquest.org/10905/conclusion.html>>.
- Kempe, Andy. Drama Education and Special Needs. England: ellenborough House, 1996: 6.
- McNamara, Barry E. ED. D., and Francine J. McNamara. Keys to Parenting a Child With a Learning Disability. M.S.W., C.S.W., Barron's, 1995: 1. Parent Soup. Feb. 2001 <<http://www.parentsoup.com/library/bsa070.html>>
- Robinson, Ken. Exploring Theatre & Education. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1980: 161.
- Sadker, Myra, and David Sadker. Teachers, Schools, and Society. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2000: 73-98.

Works Cited

Stevenson, H.E. and J.S. Stigler. The Learning Gap: Why Our Schools Are Failing and What We Can Learn from Japanese and Chinese Education. New York: Summit Books, 1992: 185