

Deconstructing the NYSTCE



Deconstructing the NYSTCE

*A Teacher's Guide to Passing
the EAS and the CST Students
with Disabilities*

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Foreword

Why is this book different?

Hello Teacher,

I thought it was important to tell you why this book is different from other test prep books. To begin it was written and compiled by a teacher who only teaches Test Prep. My name is Bridgette Gubernatis and I have been teaching NYSTCE test prep exclusively for the last eight years.

When I wrote my first study guide, I had just assumed that I had picked up a strategy based on the pattern of the wording of the tests. I'm an INTP personality profile in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. (By the way I really recommend that everyone takes this test. It will help you understand your strengths and weaknesses in studying. You can find one online if you google Myers-Briggs.)

What is an INTP? Let's see a description from a website:

<https://www.16personalities.com/intp-personality>

“THE LOGICIAN”

Great Analysts and Abstract Thinkers – People with the INTP personality type view the world as a big, complex machine, and recognize that as

with any machine, all parts are interrelated. INTPs excel in analyzing these connections, seeing how seemingly unrelated factors tie in with each other in ways that bewilder most other personality types.

They love patterns, and spotting discrepancies between statements could almost be described as a hobby, making it a bad idea to lie to an INTP.

As you can see, INTP's love patterns. This is why I enjoy deconstructing tests and figuring out the pattern in the wrong answers and then sharing it with others. I also find patterns in the way people think and interpret questions. Figuring out how to create strategies to help test takers understand strategies to take a test is something that comes naturally to me, although it doesn't for most people. Many of the teachers I get in my class are incredibly smart people who are just not good at taking timed exams.

At the same time, as I went through class after class teaching thousands of prospective teachers, I started hearing a regular form of feedback, (Another pattern, if you will.) Teachers in the class often came up to me and said, "I learned more in this one day class than I have learned in my entire Master's Degree program." That's a pretty nice compliment even though it's an exaggeration. What I realized is not that I had taught people more information or new information, but that I had shown them a meaningful **connection** between what they have learned and how it relates to teaching in real life. This understanding is the key to passing the tests because the tests are theoretical and based on the Constructivist Learning Approach.

Many of you have been immersed in Constructivism without realizing it. You have been taught about Piaget, Bloom, Gardner and Vygotsky as theorists, but for some reason no one ever took the time to connect them all together and explain the reason why these particular theorists are considered the experts.

One of the most common statements I have heard in the class is, “I just had an AHA moment.” I love when that happens. It makes what I do so much more than just “Test Prep.”

We run classes every week in Manhattan down by Wall Street so be sure to look online if you feel you need more support for passing the tests. Our Facebook page has lots of motivational videos and informational videos to help you combat your test anxiety. Our goal is that everyone passes the first time.

Cheers

Bridgette



Introduction

Why do I keep failing?

Over the years it seems that the test prep students I meet fall into two different categories. Some of my students have never taken a NYSTCE exam and decide to be proactive and prepare. But most of my students are desperate because they keep failing over and over again and they don't know why.

It doesn't seem to make any sense. Usually when I get a phone call from a prospective teacher, it is on the day the test scores have come out. The tension in the teacher's voice is clear over the phone. The teacher has failed, sometimes by only 1 or 2 points. These teachers are stressed out because they have no idea what they are doing wrong.

When you think about it, the format of the test is really unfair. You never get the test back so you don't know which questions you answered correctly and which answers were wrong. On top of this, the results are given in a "plus sign" format that gives no real feedback about your areas of weakness. How is a teacher supposed to interpret a ++ score? Teachers are disappointed, exhausted and frustrated. It can be very expensive to continually have to re-take the test over and over again.

Some of my teachers are ashamed. This bothers me the most. The teacher's husband or parents or friends are saying "What is

wrong with you, why can't you pass the exam?" And teachers are embarrassed and feel guilty. Teachers are also afraid. I have had students who have lost their jobs, even teachers who have almost lost their homes because of these tests.

The most frustrating part of the whole thing is that nothing that you see on the exam ever seems to come up in the real life situations of teaching. Most of the test takers, including myself, have said, "What the heck does this have to do with teaching? I don't use any of this in my job."

This is a very good question. But it is also the key to changing the mindset you use when taking the exam. **It is precisely because you are taking the exam by trying to answer the questions based on what you do in the classroom, that you are failing the exam.** The example I use to explain this to my students is a driver's license exam. This is the equivalent of the type of test you are taking. It is the key to passing the exam.

The NYSTCE is like taking a Driver's License Test?

Yes! It is important to think about what happens when you take a driver's license test. When do you take a driver's license test? You take it *before* you can start driving. The test is not compiled of questions testing your life-long experience as a driver. It is just testing you on the basics and the rules of driving. "Can they trust you on the road to start driving?"

By the time teachers are ready to take the NYSTCE, many have completed a Master's degree or worse they have already started teaching in the classroom. Teachers are not necessarily taught the Constructivist Approach when attending college. Because these tests are so important for a teacher in his or her path to certification, the teacher will treat the test as a sophisticated exam based on the education they have received in college. This is the wrong idea. The NYSTCE is **not** that kind of exam.

I usually explain it to my students by using a driver's test as an example:

Q: *What do you do in real life when you are driving and the light turns yellow?*

A: *You slow down or prepare to come to a stop.*

Q: *That is what you are supposed to do, but is it what you really do in real life?*

A: *(Laughs!) Actually no, in real life I'd probably speed up because I don't want to get stuck behind the red light.*

Q: *So you actually do the opposite in real life of what you'd answer on the exam?*

A: *Yeah that's true!*

Q: *Why did you answer it the other way?*

A: *Because I know that is the answer they are looking for.*

Q: *So you didn't really think about it too much.*

A: *No, I just knew that was the answer.*

Think about this. When we drive on the road, most of us will break some of the rules. We cross a solid yellow line; we don't come to a complete stop at a stop sign; we speed up when the light turns yellow; we cut people off and we don't always signal when turning. This is our real life experience when driving. Yet we know not to choose any of these as answers to the questions on the exam.

The teaching exams have the same strategy. It's the same type of exam: a licensing exam. This is a certification exam needed to get your teaching license, not a college exam. You take a drivers permit test because they want to make sure that you know the rules of the road *before* they let you on the road. You take a teaching certification exam because they want to make sure you know the rules of teaching *before* they let you in the classroom.

Part of the problem is that most schools do not follow the rules according to the Constructivist Approach. Even if your school does,

most of us went to schools that didn't follow the rules. So we've been immersed in the incorrect system where no one follows the rules.

This book is going to teach you the rules. As you learn the rules many of you will be surprised to find out that many of the things you are doing in the classroom are the opposite of what you are supposed to be doing. I very often have students in my class completely stunned by this realization. However, we're not here to get you to change what you do in the classroom. We just want you to pass the test!

The Format of the Book:

The format of the book will be broken down in different categories. It is very important for you to read the section on the Constructivist Approach and Trap Words to Avoid. These sections will cover the rules in detail. The strategies used in these sections will help with the EAS and the CST Students with Disabilities exams.

If you are studying for the CST Students with Disabilities, **make sure you read the entire book, including the EAS section.** 60% of the test is based on the information in the section on the EAS. When teachers jump ahead and only read the SWD section they sometimes fail because they are missing key points for the exam.

Each test will have an explanation of strategy for the multiple-choice and also the essay. There will be practice essays and examples for each essay. I will try not to put too much information in the book so that it will be easier to read. However I will recommend resources for more information on topics with which you might not be as familiar. The purpose of this book is to be a strategy guide not a text book about teaching. You already know how to teach or you wouldn't be taking this exam.

And please note that throughout the book I sometimes change font sizes. When possible I use a larger font for ease of reading. I also may have sections that have extra white space to be able to draw attention to images or charts. This is done deliberately to make this book as accessible as possible.

Chapter 1

What is a Teacher according to the Constructivist Learning Approach?

Two ways of Visualizing the Teacher:

Teacher as Swim Coach

According to the Constructivist Approach, teaching is more like coaching. I encourage my students to think of “teacher as swim coach” when preparing for the NYSTCE. What is the difference between how we think of a teacher compared to the way we think of a swim coach? A teacher is generally thought of someone who is doing the work in the classroom. The teacher is teaching. A coach is generally ***on the sidelines watching*** the team and players. The action happening is that the team is playing, not that the coach is coaching.

Many teachers have the habit of visualizing themselves standing in front of the students “teaching.” In this concept teachers are the ones who are doing the action in the classroom. This is wrong.

This is not how the Constructivist Approach works. Teachers are not “teaching;” students are “learning.” The action happening in the classroom is “students learning.” A teacher is not teaching. A

teacher is “facilitating learning.” You have to flip it in your head or you will get many questions wrong on the exam. This is the first rule to remember. The teacher is a facilitator of learning. The students are learning. Many teachers take these tests and read the question thinking “*What is the teacher supposed to be doing?*” But that’s not necessarily the answer. Sometimes the question is asking “*What is the student supposed to be doing and why are they having difficulty?*”

If you think of a swim coach the difference becomes easier to see. A swim coach might at times demonstrate a style or technique in swimming. But usually the swim coach isn’t going to dive into the pool and demonstrate it for the students himself. Instead, he will use other students at a higher skill level to demonstrate for the students. This is presented as a goal for the novice swimmers. In addition, timing and competition in swimming starts with and is built upon a swimmer improving his skill set, paying attention to his strengths and weaknesses and trying to achieve a goal (usually in skill and speed.) The student, as he develops his skills, doesn’t compete against other students. Instead he competes against himself.

A swim coach’s job is basically to **observe** the swimmer. Picture a swim coach walking along the edge of the pool watching the swimmer as he goes down the lane. Then as the swimmer gets out of the pool the coach gives him **immediate and specific feedback**. “*You held your breath instead of breathing, you are lifting your head out of the water, your arm is too far away from your body, you forgot to kick consistently,*” etc. In this way the swim coach acts as a **guide** to the swimmer. The swim coach is the **observer, evaluator and giver of feedback**. But the action is happening in the pool, not in the coaching.

As teachers begin to work in the Education field, they are often bogged down by curriculum requirements, paperwork and the reality of overcrowded classrooms. In reality teaching becomes about behavior management and test scores. But the NYSTCE is not about

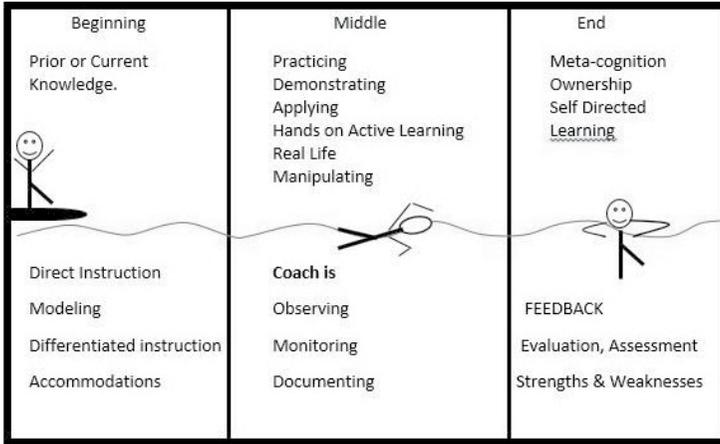
the reality of teaching. It is about the Constructivist Approach to learning. You are being tested on an Educational Theory more than the reality of teaching in real life.

In this learning theory, the goal of a teacher is to move the student through the stages of **cognitive development** to become a self-sufficient learner who, in time, begins to **self-evaluate** and take **ownership** in learning.

Think of a professional swimmer like Michael Phelps. You can imagine that Michael Phelps at his skill level no longer needs his coach to walk along side of the pool observing and giving that kind of feedback. Indeed Michael Phelps probably gets out of the pool and goes to the coach and critiques his own performance asking for support from the coach on self-imposed goals. For example, *“Hey coach how can I improve my speed, I feel like I am lagging when I get to the end of the pool right before the flip-turn.”*

This is the mark of **meta-cognition** and **self-directed learning** and it is the goal of educators in the classroom as well. Meta-cognition is defined as an awareness and understanding of one’s own thought processes: thinking about how you think. Knowing what you are good at in learning and knowing where you struggle.

Remember, the teacher is a facilitator of learning, they are teaching the students HOW to learn, not what to learn.



The importance of self-directed learning and ownership in learning cannot be underestimated in the classroom. This is especially important in understanding how to build curriculum with modifications for learning styles, diversity and students with disabilities.

Think of a swimmer on a team. The team creates a sense of community, belonging and motivation to other students. Swimmers on a swim team are generally not separated by ability. Even though some swimmers may be amazing, an afterschool swim team is generally made up of **mixed ability** kids. How can a swim coach work with the team? Would it be fair to only pull out the good swimmers? No. The coach must learn to work with all different kinds of abilities and learning styles within reason. The commitment and the motivation of the swimmers is very important. If a swimmer doesn't want to learn it is the coach's job to motivate the student.

These skills are what the NYSTCE is testing on. The questions about teaching will reflect this understanding. You must answer the questions with this kind of thinking in mind. This brings us to the second way to think of a teacher.

The Doctor and the Nurse

In my experience, the two most common reasons that teachers fail the EAS are the following:

- They have experience in the classroom. (As a teaching assistant, paraprofessional, substitute or as a teacher in a private school or during your practicum.)
- They have a background in Special Education.

Why would having a background in Special Education cause a problem on a test that tests your ability to work with Students with Disabilities? That doesn't seem to make any sense, right?

A good way to understand the reason is to think of the General Education teacher as a NURSE and the SWD teacher as a DOCTOR. Many times teachers with a background in Special Education will fail the test because they are answering the question like a Doctor, but the test is testing your understanding and liability as a Nurse.

Consider it this way, a Nurse who has worked in a hospital for a very long time knows what the Doctor does because she has seen it for a very long time. For example a Nurse knows that if a woman is in labor, the Doctor will give the patient an epidural for pain management. But the NURSE is not allowed to do this, she's not qualified to do this. If a Nurse were to give a patient an epidural, she could lose her job for liability reasons. Remember that this is a driver's license test; they are testing you to see if you know the rules and liability issues associated with teaching.

So if the question on the Nursing exam asked, "What should you do if a patient is experiencing pain, during labor?"

- A. Consult with the Doctor
- B. Document the issue
- C. Give the patient an epidural

D. Ask her parents what to do.

Many of the teachers would pick C, “give the patient the epidural.” But the Nurse would fail if this was the test for Nursing because she doesn’t have a license to do this. Even though she knows this is what you should do, she is not legally allowed to do it.

Once you understand that the answer would be “Consult with the Doctor” you understand why you are failing the test.

So let’s look at it for a General Education Teacher:

A General Education teacher notices that a student diagnosed with Down Syndrome is not meeting the learning goals as outlined in the IEP. What should the General Education teacher do?

- A. Contact the parents and ask them for suggestions.
- B. Document the issue and continue teaching the same way.
- C. Proceed with immediate intervention and change the IEP to reflect the accommodation.
- D. Consult with the Special Education teacher in order to address the issue.

Can you see how some of the teachers may pick C even though they do not have the authority to change the IEP at all? The answer is D.

So this is why it’s a good idea to take the NYSTCE EAS and SWD one at a time. Even though both tests use the exact same strategy, you just have to ask yourself, “Am I the Doctor or the Nurse?” On the EAS you are always the Nurse.

It is also important to notice how you reacted to “Ask her parents what to do” in the question about the woman in labor. Didn’t that seem like a ridiculous option? Many times teachers pick this as an option on the test because in schools they are told to call the parents when there is an issue with their child.

But keep in mind that calling the parents is a form of communication and collaboration. You are not calling to “ask them what to do.” You are a professional and you are including the parents as part of working with the student. There are legal reasons for doing this as well. But unless the question is specifically about collaborating with parents, it’s not the best answer. Remember that on this test, we’re looking for the best answer.

Expectations of the Teacher:

A teacher is expected to always reflect on their own practices and try to improve. If the student isn’t learning properly it is the teacher’s responsibility to try to use a different approach. Teachers are considered professional educators. Therefore it is important that a teacher be confident in their choices but willing to also make adjustments and accommodations if the learning is not proceeding as expected. Teachers must be willing to communicate, cooperate and self-evaluate. Words a teacher should use would include: Honor, Foster an appreciation of, Support, Help, Encourage, and Guide.

Teachers are expected to “Engage Schema.” This means it is the teacher’s job to get to know her students and help create a learning strategy that takes into consideration the student’s culture, background, learning style and strengths and weaknesses.

Teachers in the classroom are operating “In loco parentis.” (*No this doesn’t mean “the parents are crazy!”*) In Locos Parentis means “In Place of the Parents.” This is a legal obligation that means that the teacher and the school system take on a responsibility for the well-being of a child in place of the parent.

The Online Legal Dictionary defines it this way:

(source: <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/In+loco+parentis>)

In loco parentis is a legal doctrine describing a relationship similar to that of a parent to a child. It refers to an individual who assumes parental status and responsibilities for another individual, usually a young person, without formally adopting that person. For example, legal guardians are said to stand in loco parentis with respect to their wards, creating a relationship that has special implications for insurance and Workers' Compensation law.

*By far the most common usage of in loco parentis relates to **teachers and students**. For hundreds of years, the English common-law concept shaped the rights and responsibilities of public school teachers: until the late nineteenth century, their legal authority over students was as broad as that of parents. Changes in U.S. education, concurrent with a broader reading by courts of the rights of students, began bringing the concept into disrepute by the 1960s. Cultural changes, however, brought a resurgence of the doctrine in the twenty-first century.*

It is important for teachers to remember that this is a legal obligation and not a personal one. A teacher must never overstep these bounds. For example a teacher should never concern themselves with “peer friendships” only “peer relationships.” Peer friendships are personal but peer relationships are professional. This is an important distinction. The slightest difference in connotation in the wording is what creates a right and wrong answer.

Terminology is very important:

As you may have noticed, certain words are bolded in the preceding information. You will see these words throughout the study guide. These words are the terminologies that are within the Constructive Approach to Learning. It is important that you familiarize yourself with these words and use them in your essays. You will also look for these words in the answers on the multiple-choice section of the exam.

Chapter 2

Trap Words to Avoid

There are certain words used in education that must be carefully evaluated. Sometimes they lead the test taker down into a trap because they are common words that we use every day in our classrooms. I always tell my teachers to “think like a test *maker* not a test *taker*.” If you have ever created a test yourself, you know first-hand how hard it is to come up with wrong options on the test. You can’t make the wrong answers too obvious, so you word it in a tricky way. This what all test makers do.

One key point I always tell test takers is that if you don’t understand what the sentence is saying it is probably not the answer. Sentences that use jargon and sound really sophisticated but are not easily understood are time wasters. You sit there reading the question and answers over and over again trying to figure out the meaning. I’ve seen this strategy used on every single test I’ve ever prepped for, including the SAT, ACT, GRE, NYSTCE etc.

For example:

Facilitating the numeric awareness and meta-cognitive compliance of regulatory instruction for the purpose of scaffolding the proxies.

Um.....what? Yes there are some words in there you might be able to decode, but if you don't know what the sentence means right away, it's probably not the answer. But usually my test takers will pick it as the answer **because** they don't know what it means. They think, *"oh wow, that must have been something I was supposed to study and forgot! That sounds really smart and I know I'm an idiot so yeah! I'll pick that one!"* Do not do this. It's an old test maker's trick. You are not an idiot.

Below are some trap words that are used to lead the test taker astray. So when you see them be mindful to carefully pay attention to how they are being used in the sentence. Later in the book there is a chapter explaining why they could be a trap. But for now I will just list them. Some of them might surprise you.

- Alternative assignment
- Separate
- Special seating arrangements
- Send to the resource room
- Pairing the student
- Partnering the student
- Handouts, worksheets
- Giving out materials, books
- Posting a list
- Copying in their notebooks
- Whole class discussion
- Rewards, stickers, gold stars
- Encouraging the student
- No Boundaries
- Parent Advice

Whenever you see these words it should be a red flag to you to carefully read the option. These words will sometimes be in the question itself, and that is OK. But you should approach with caution when you see them in an answer. Also please note, the purpose of this study guide is **not** to change you as a teacher in real life. A lot of times in my workshops teachers will start getting upset saying "But this is what we're told to do in the classroom!" I am not trying to get

you to change what you do in the classroom. I am only trying to get you to pass the test.

It is very important for you to memorize these terms. As we continue through the prep book I will explain why these terms are trap words to avoid. It is vital that you understand not just the terms but the reason why they are wrong. This will help you quickly eliminate the wrong answers.

But first we need to examine the Constructivist Approach. Once this is understood then it will be easier to explain the Trap Words.



Chapter 3

The Constructivist Approach to Education

There are two very important names that are connected to the idea of the Constructivist Approach: Piaget and Bloom. You may remember these names from your classes on educational theory.

A general understanding of the Constructivist Approach can be found on the **Teachnology Online Resource Website**: I have quoted it below. This site is a great site for teachers. Please visit it.

(Source: <http://www.teachnology.com/currenttrends/constructivism/>)

Constructivism Learning Theory

Constructivism learning theory is a philosophy which enhances students' logical and conceptual growth. The underlying concept within the constructivism learning theory is the role which experiences-or connections with the adjoining atmosphere-play in student education.

The constructivism learning theory argues that people produce knowledge and form meaning based upon their experiences. Two of the key concepts within the constructivism learning theory which create the construction of an individual's new knowledge are accommodation and assimilation. Assimilating causes an individual to incorporate

new experiences into the old experiences. This causes the individual to develop new outlooks, rethink what were once misunderstandings, and evaluate what is important, ultimately altering their perceptions. Accommodation, on the other hand, is reframing the world and new experiences into the mental capacity already present. Individuals conceive a particular fashion in which the world operates. When things do not operate within that context, they must accommodate and reframing the expectations with the outcomes.

The role of teachers is very important within the constructivism learning theory. Instead of giving a lecture the teachers in this theory function as facilitators whose role is to aid the student when it comes to their own understanding. This takes away focus from the teacher and lecture and puts it upon the student and their learning. The resources and lesson plans that must be initiated for this learning theory take a very different approach toward traditional learning as well. Instead of telling, the teacher must begin asking. Instead of answering questions that only align with their curriculum, the facilitator in this case must make it so that the student comes to the conclusions on their own instead of being told. Also, teachers are continually in conversation with the students, creating the learning experience that is open to new directions depending upon the needs of the student as the learning progresses. Teachers following Piaget's theory of constructivism must challenge the student by making them effective critical thinkers and not being merely a "teacher" but also a mentor, a consultant, and a coach.

This sounds familiar doesn't it? That is because the terminology is similar to the beginning description of a teacher. As you can see the terminology is very important.

The Constructivist Approach Simplified:

The constructivist approach is based on the idea of guiding students in their learning. Instead of just learning information for a test, students

are encouraged to embrace learning for life. The job of the teacher is not to teach the student “*what to learn*”; it is to teach the student “*how to learn*.” It is important for students to take ownership in the learning and to build meaning as they learn. Classroom instruction should create an environment of “hands on” active learning. Students are respected as “knowers.” Instead of treating a student like a “blank slate,” educators treat students as if they come into the classroom with **prior knowledge** and an innate ability to learn. (Any time a teacher begins a lesson she should encourage the students to use their prior knowledge.)

Students are encouraged to work with others to contribute to the learning process. Collaborative learning, also known as Cooperative Grouping, is used as an important foundation in the learning approach. Students work with others of different abilities to learn and share their perspectives. Students rely on the teacher for guidance and feedback. Students are encouraged to continually self-reflect throughout the learning process.

This sounds like a very flexible and positive approach to education. However it is also important to remember that Evaluation and Assessment are also part of the learning process. Teachers must also know how to properly assess students in order to test to see if learning is proceeding as expected. There is a specific path that learners must travel through learning, and assessment in order to master areas of education. These stages are based on the Theory of Cognitive Development.

Bloom’s Taxonomy:

Taxonomy simply means categories. Bloom basically broke learning down into different categories or stages through which students pass as they are learning. Recently this taxonomy has been updated to

include “Creativity” as a stage. But for the purposes of the test I will discuss the old version. The stages are as follows:

(source: <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html>)

Remembering: Recall data or information.

- **Examples:** Recite a policy. Quote prices from memory to a customer. Knows the safety rules.
- **Key Words:** defines, describes, identifies, knows, labels, lists, matches, names, outlines, recalls, recognizes, reproduces, selects, states.

Understanding: Understand the meaning, translation, interpolation, and interpretation of instructions and problems. State a problem in one’s own words.

- **Examples:** Rewrites the principles of test writing. Explain in one’s own words the steps for performing a complex task. Translates an equation into a computer spreadsheet.
- **Key Words:** comprehends, converts, defends, distinguishes, estimates, explains, extends, generalizes, gives an example, infers, interprets, paraphrases, predicts, rewrites, summarizes, translates.

Application: Use a concept in a new situation or unprompted use of an abstraction. Applies what was learned in the classroom into novel situations in the work place.

- **Examples:** Use a manual to calculate an employee’s vacation time. Apply laws of statistics to evaluate the reliability of a written test.
- **Key Words:** applies, changes, computes, constructs, demonstrates, discovers, manipulates, modifies, operates, predicts, prepares, produces, relates, shows, solves, uses.

Analysis: Separates material or concepts into component parts so that its organizational structure may be understood. Distinguishes between facts and inferences.

- **Examples:** Troubleshoot a piece of equipment by using logical deduction. Recognize logical fallacies in reasoning. Gathers information from a department and selects the required tasks for training.
- **Key Words:** analyzes, breaks down, compares, contrasts, diagrams, deconstructs, differentiates, discriminates, distinguishes, identifies, illustrates, infers, outlines, relates, selects, separates.

Synthesis: Builds a structure or pattern from diverse elements. Put parts together to form a whole, with emphasis on creating a new meaning or structure.

- **Examples:** Write a company operations or process manual. Design a machine to perform a specific task. Integrates training from several sources to solve a problem. Revises and process to improve the outcome.
- **Key Words:** categorizes, combines, compiles, composes, creates, devises, designs, explains, generates, modifies, organizes, plans, rearranges, reconstructs, relates, reorganizes, revises, rewrites, summarizes, tells, writes.

Evaluation: Make judgments about the value of ideas or materials.

- **Examples:** Select the most effective solution. Hire the most qualified candidate. Explain and justify a new budget.
- **Key Words:** appraises, compares, concludes, contrasts, criticizes, critiques, defends, describes, discriminates, evaluates, explains, interprets, justifies, relates, summarizes, supports.

The Taxonomy was revised in 2001 to include CREATING. This revision underscores the importance of self-directed learning. They want the students to create their learning experience, not the teacher to teach it to them.

- Remembering
- Understanding
- Applying
- Analyzing
- Evaluating
- Creating

For the purpose of understanding I'm going to use the OLD taxonomy which had slightly different wording to show an example of how these stages of learning can build life-long learning.

Bloom's Taxonomy is Like Riding a Bike:

Think about riding a bike. Do you know how to ride a bike? Think about how old you were when you learned how to ride a bike. Most people were younger when they learned. It has been said that once you learn how to ride a bike, you never forget. Why is this? This is because you go through all Bloom's stages of learning when you learn to ride a bike.

The first stage is Knowledge. Do you know what a bike is? Most kids will see friends riding their bikes and want to learn to do it as well. You know what a bike is. You have that knowledge.

The second stage is Comprehension. Do you understand how you are supposed to ride a bike? Do you understand how a bike works? You probably watched your friends riding and understood the basic mechanics of it. You sit on the bike, you balance, and you pedal with your feet.

Great! But how did you learn to ride the bike? Even if someone showed you--tried to walk you along while you practiced--the only way you learn how to ride a bike is by getting on the bike and doing it.

This is Application! You get on the bike. This is “hands on, active learning.” This is the first stage of higher learning. This is the first stage of critical thinking. This is the most important stage for young students. Students are always encouraged to learn in an active manner. You mastered the first part of riding a bike.

Then what did you do? Most people started playing around on the bike. Maybe you rode standing up, you let go of the handle bars, or you rode the bike in circles. This is Analysis! You are taking the idea apart and playing around with it.

Next perhaps you decided to pedal really fast as you went down a hill. Zoom! But then what happened? In most cases the bike chain pops off. Then you lost control of the bike. Now what do you do? Well you try to solve the problem. Perhaps you put your sneaker down to drag to a stop, perhaps you turned the handle bars to steer the bike to a safe stop, or perhaps you just crashed somewhere that was safer than the street. This is problem solving, this is Synthesis.

Finally you got up and you dusted yourself off and you thought about what just happened. You assessed the situation and realized that you should never pedal really fast when you are going down a hill. And you never forgot it! This is Evaluation. You have gone through all of the stages. Congratulations!

And now let's consider Creating. A biker who is very experienced and understands all the working mechanisms of a bicycle could probably build their own bicycle couldn't they? We often read stories of famous people who became so talented at a skill they were able to build their own equipment. For example, Eddie VanHalen is a master guitarist

and he built his own brand called the EVH Wolfgang which he now sells publicly. Creating is the final stage.

This is the way teachers are expected to educate students in the Constructivist Approach. Students are encouraged to engage in all the learning stages. As students move through the different stages they become learners for life. The goal is to foster a life-long appreciation and love of learning.

When we consider learning a physical skill, it is easier to see the results of learning compared to cognitive learning because we can see the tangible results of such learning.

For example, many of us do not know how to ice skate. Those who do know how to ice skate often look at us and wonder why we have such difficulty with learning this skill because for them it is not that hard. But usually when you learn a skill at a younger age it is easier to maintain that skill through your life. It's much harder to learn how to ice skate as an adult than it is as a child.

Now let's compare that to a cognitive learning skill like learning a language. Can you see the same thing? It's much easier to learn a language as a child than it is as an adult. This is why teaching students how to learn rather than what to learn is so meaningful.

The most significant of these stages is Application. It is important for students to always be taught in an active way rather than a passive way. Passive learning is against the rules.

Sounds fantastic! But there's something that is important to remember. Piaget pointed out that until a student has developed in a certain cognitive stage it will not be possible for the student to go through all of Bloom's steps. For example I couldn't very well take a four year old and push them down a hill on a bicycle and say "They will figure it out!" That would be a disaster.

Piaget has four Stages:

- **Sensorimotor ages 0-2**
- **Preoperational ages 2-7**
- **Concrete operational ages 7-11**
- **Formal Operations ages 11-15**

For the purposes of the NYSTCE it is important to carefully distinguish between the Preoperational stage and the Concrete Operational stage. These are the two that are most often used to create questions for the multiple-choice portions of the EAS and the CST-Students with Disabilities.

The Preoperational Stage: This is the stage when most students begin their education. Children in this stage have a goal towards APPLICATION according to Bloom's Taxonomy. Children in this stage have limitations in what they are able to comprehend. They include the following:

- **Egocentric thinking:** students have difficulty understanding other perspectives. They truly believe that everyone thinks the same way they do. This is why sharing is so difficult for children in this stage. It is not a selfish behavior (not to be confused with Egotistical thinking) but rather a real blind spot as to how their peers think and feel. Students in this stage are also rigid in their thinking. Classroom teachers will encourage students to engage with other students to help develop this skill. Most preschool classrooms have students sitting with their desks grouped facing each other in order to encourage and awareness of the relationships of their peers.
- **The Principle of Conservation:** students don't understand that quantity is not related to physical appearance. If a student sees a pile of pennies on the table compared to a roll of pennies, they don't understand that the quantity is the same. They will probably tell you that the pile of pennies is more than a

roll of pennies of the same amount. Classroom teachers will encourage the use of manipulatives in order for students to engage in hands on activities that help develop this awareness.

- **Classification and Seriation:** students don't understand how to independently break things down into groups. They might be able to be directed to do so, but will struggle to do it on their own. For example if you asked the student to look around the room and give you four categories of shapes in the room and the items that go in those categories, they would struggle. Students also have difficulty putting things in order of size or a common property. Classroom teachers will encourage this skill by asking children to "circle all the triangles you see in the picture" or similar activities. Classroom teachers will encourage students to use hands on manipulatives to practice grouping things.
- **Reversibility:** students have a lack of awareness that actions can be reversed. An example of this is being able to reverse the order of relationships between mental categories. For example if you show a student the following equations they don't see a relationship between them:

$$2 + 3 =$$

$$3 + 2 =$$

$$5 - 2 =$$

$$5 - 3 =$$

- **Logic and Time:** students have difficulty with logic and abstract reasoning. Time is a good way of understanding this issue. Small children are known for interrupting Mom while she is on the telephone. If the child says to Mom, "Can we go to the playground?" If Mom says "Yes, when I am finished the phone call we can go later." What happens next? Usually a few minutes go by and the child comes up and repeats the question. Children in this stage don't understand the concept of "later." They have difficulty with abstract concepts and logic. This is why the phrase "Are we there yet?" has been a

source of humor in many American movies such as “Shrek” and even a movie called “Are We There Yet.” Educators work throughout the day to introduce the concept of time in the classroom as a way of developing abstract thinking. But students will not be able to master this skill until they are in the Concrete Operational Stage.

The Concrete Operational Stage:

One way I encourage teachers to remember this stage is to think of the grocery store that is called 7-11. Just remember the 7-11 is in a concrete building.

Children have begun to de-center. They recognize that others don’t think and feel the same way they do. This allows them to work with others in collaborative grouping with maximum results.

Children in this stage should have a mastery of reversibility as awareness that actions can be reversed. An example of this is being able to reverse the order of relationships between mental categories. For example, a child might be able to recognize a fruit is an apple, that an apple is a fruit, and that a fruit is a food.

This stage is where students start to master critical thinking skills:

- Inductive reasoning-involves drawing conclusions from specific observations e.g.

All students can learn

Jenny is a student

Jenny can learn

- Deductive reasoning - Drawing conclusions about cause and effect -- (e.g. Since this happened then this will happen)

- Decentralization- involves thinking about two or more properties of a problem at once
- Transformational thought - Comprehension of the change from one state to another

The developments in these stages move along Bloom's Taxonomy from the Application stage which is the goal of Preoperational learning into the Analysis and Synthesis stages which are the goals of the Concrete Operational learning. It is an important distinction when you are taking the NYSTCE.



Chapter 4

The EAS

The EAS is a pedagogical test evaluating if a prospective teacher is fit to teach in the classroom. (Remember, it's like a driver's license test, "Can we trust you on the road?") EAS stands for Educating All Students, so they are testing you on General Education, Special Education and ELL students. The test is designed with 45 questions and three short 200 word essays. The hardest part of the EAS is the amount of reading you must do. Instead of giving you a question and asking you to pick an answer, you are provided background information about the class, students, lesson plan and goals. These are accessed through tabs located at the top of the screen and you have to click on the tab to read them in order to properly answer the questions. Sometimes the excerpts describe more than one student and so you have to carefully pay attention to which issue is related to which student.

There's been a lot of criticism about the design of the test because of these tabs. It's hard to have to jump back and forth between screens while you are taking the test, especially on a timed exam. You are only given a small white board to use to take notes and most test takers are not used to studying this way so it presents problems when you are taking the test. Make sure you read all the tabs before you begin in order to familiarize yourself with the lesson, the student

and any issues described. Often key details are further down in the excerpt and you will miss the point of the questions if you don't read the entire screen. Pay attention to if there are scroll bars on the side and be sure to scroll all the way down when reading.

For example, if you look on the Preparation Guide on the NYSTCE website, you will notice that while Valeria is described as an ELL student, further down it states that she speaks English almost indistinguishably from a native English speaker and that her real difficulty is in Math. When we have gone over this question in class, many students miss this detail and assume that because Valeria is an ELL student, she has issues understanding English and so she will need support in literacy. But she really needs support in Math. Be sure to carefully read all the tabs in order to have the details you need to answer the questions.

Over the last year we've developed the **PAGED** strategy to help you organize and deconstruct the information properly. Remember that on a timed exam you don't have the luxury of rereading the excerpts. Many people fail only because they ran out of time and couldn't complete the entire test. So you must have a strategy in place to help you pull out key details that are essential to understanding the point of the question.

Obviously it is important to have an understanding of how to teach in a classroom. It's expected that test takers have gone to college for education and understand ideas like scaffolding, classroom management, motivating students and the core curriculum associated with the lesson. But far too often teachers miss the point of the question because they overlook crucial details. The PAGED strategy will keep you on point easily. Make sure you use the marker board and write down PAGED to draw out important details as you read.

Problem

Age

Goal

ELL

Disability/Diversity

Not every question will have each of these issues, but if they do mention them, they are the **key** to understanding the reason they are asking you the question. First we will examine how the questions about Disabilities should be deconstructed. Understanding this first, will help you see the goal of other questions.

The Disability is NOT the PROBLEM.

The difference between a problem in *learning* and a disability is a critical part of understanding what the question is asking. We wouldn't use the word "problem" in our writing or in the classroom, but I use that word in this study guide to make the distinction clear. The Constructivist Learning approach requires teachers to engage students in learning by considering who they are teaching when planning instruction. The IEP provides the teacher all the background information about the student. I always tell teachers to remember the following sentence:

You do not know *what* you are teaching until you know *who* you are teaching.

The purpose of the PAGED strategy is to make sure you understand **who** you are teaching. It is important to know the background of a

student with an IEP. But you want to be careful not to make biased predictions about a student based on their ELL, Disability and Diversity status. If we think about DIVERSITY first it is easier to see why it is wrong. We don't encourage people to use race or gender to make predictions about a student's potential in school, do we? Doing so would be seen as discriminatory. In fact there have been a lot of issues regarding how girls are treated in school when learning Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. (STEM studies) We are concerned when educators make assumptions about a student's abilities based on her gender. So, why would a Disability be any different?

Over the years, when I've asked students to change a statement made about a student with a disability by replacing the disability with a race, they have been very surprised to see how easy it is to see the discrimination. It's a very effective strategy for deconstructing the options in the answers on the test.

As a person with a disability myself, I've been privy to many years of hearing statements made about my disability. Very often, people think they are complimenting me or being encouraging when in reality they are being rude and patronizing. I have profound hearing loss. I basically am completely deaf in my right ear and have only 20% hearing in my left.

Teachers who have attended my classes have watched as I switch off with chargeable hearing aids in order to get through the class. I cannot hear students when they ask questions if I am not looking at them because I read lips to supplement understanding. For years I struggled to find a job that I could do with my disability. But teaching test prep classes is a nice fit for me because I can control the environment better and I don't have to do it every day. In addition, I think I am more sensitive to body language, so when someone doesn't understand something I can usually tell instantly because of their body language. I am constantly scanning the room for these

informal cues. My hearing loss actually helps my teaching in this way. I'm gregarious and outgoing when I'm working. And yet in my private life I've had a lot of issues with people insulting me straight to my face even though they think they are complimenting me.

Here's my favorite one; people say this to me all the time.

"Wow, you have profound hearing loss? What you're deaf? That's amazing! You don't sound like a deaf person at all, you sound like a normal person! Go you!"

Or

"I know what you are going through, my friend suffered from hearing loss, but don't you worry! You can do it. Don't let your hearing loss get you down, if you try really hard you can do anything."

Or

"Oh wow, you don't seem like you have hearing disability at all, that's interesting."

Or someone giving advice to a friend of mine.

"Jane, stop talking about Bridgette's hearing loss, don't mention it anymore because you are just embarrassing her. Don't bring it up; you're making everyone uncomfortable."

Well no, they aren't embarrassing me because they are talking about my hearing loss, I could talk about that for days. I am not embarrassed by my hearing loss. The truth is sometimes *other people* are embarrassed by my hearing loss and feel awkward around me because of it.

Let's change each of those statements to a race instead of a disability and see how they sound.

“Wow, you’re Asian? What you’re Chinese? That’s amazing! You don’t sound like a Chinese person at all, you sound like a normal person! Go you!”



Really? And guess what? She’s not Chinese, she’s Korean. Just like I’m not deaf, I have profound hearing loss. They are not the same thing!

Or

“I know what you are going through, my friend suffered from being black, but don’t you worry! You can do it. Don’t let being black get you down. If you try really hard you can do anything!”

Uh huh.....



Or

“Oh wow, you don’t seem like a Hispanic person at all. That’s interesting.”



Oh really? What does a “Hispanic person” “seem like?”

Or

“Jane, stop talking about Bridgette being Jewish. Don’t mention it anymore because you are just embarrassing her. Don’t bring it up; you’re making everyone uncomfortable.”

Is that so?



The last one is especially interesting. Why would a Jewish person be embarrassed about being Jewish? They aren’t embarrassed, they are just sick of you making a big issue out of something because YOU feel awkward around them because of *your bias*.

People with disabilities live with their disability every day of their lives. It's part of who they are. It's not "the problem" in their life; it's a challenge sometimes, but a disability is part of a person not the **problem** with a person. Can you see how rude the above statements are? People say them to me **all the time**. Would you say them about a student in your classroom? Oddly, many teachers do without realizing it.

For example, how many times have you been told by a more experienced teacher, "If you get students with disabilities in your class, make sure you sit them together in the front of the room, by the teacher. It will make it easier to work with them."

Would you ever say:

"If you get Hispanic students in your classroom, make sure you sit them together in the front of the room, by the teacher. It will make it easier to work with them."

Or

"When you do the lesson, you'll need to accommodate David, by giving him an alternative assignment written on an easier level but that basically covers the same thing that the regular students are doing."

Would you say this:

"When you do the lesson, you'll need to accommodate the black student by giving him an alternative assignment written on an easier level but that basically covers the same thing that the white students are doing."

Or

“Group the students with autism together in a quiet part of the room so they will not be distracted by the other students and will be able to focus.”

Would you say this:

“Group the Jews together in a quiet part of the room so they will not be distracted by the other students and will be able to focus.”

The look of *horror* on my teacher’s faces when I point this out in my class, underscores how wrong this is. And yet, many of them are horrified because they realize they talk like this about students with disabilities all the time. One time I had a teacher burst into tears when we went over this. It was like a light bulb went off in her head and she told us about a high school student with ADHD with whom she had been working for over three months who was resentful of her “help” in the classroom. She finally understood why he was so reluctant to work with her. Up until that point she had written him off as having a behavior issue and not being nice to her. But she realized how she was patronizing him every single day by treating him like he was stupid when he was just unorganized. When you are taking the test, look at the answer options carefully and change it to race to see if there is a hidden discrimination in the wording.

Remember this:

The purpose of an accommodation is to make it EQUAL not EASIER.

It surprises a lot of people to learn that the Civil Rights movement was core in helping promote fair education to students with disabilities. That movement was not just about race, it was about creating equal opportunity for everyone.

When I ask teachers in my class if my hearing issues are the “problem” in my ability to do my job, most people will say “Not really, as long you let people know about it, you seem to function just fine.”

And this is true. This is why Self-Advocacy is so important. I choose to tell people that I can't hear because it's not something you would notice right away. So I'll point it out to people and make sure they understand. This is because I am a 45 year old woman who has figured out that there's nothing to be ashamed of and because it's essential that people understand this in order for me to engage socially. This is why it is important **not** to make a student feel like their disability is a problem. It creates shame, ostracism, exclusion, and can make them feel like they are not like others. In fact, studies have shown that the number one problem that students with disabilities have in functioning in the real world after high school is that many of them drop out of high school because they are so tired of being treated this way. This impacts their ability to get a job because they don't have a high school diploma.

And usually the disability is only a contributing factor in the learning difficulty. My actual problem is that I am extremely unorganized. Once I get my class going I'm usually fine. But I have a habit of not showing up with enough copies, forgetting to charge my hearing aid before class, misplacing materials, giving out the wrong documents and having to take them back and give out the right ones. *That's* my problem Not my hearing loss.

Remember the driver's license test? Can they trust you on the road? Can they trust you in the classroom? Are you the kind of teacher who is going to discriminate against a student with a disability? Do you see the point in why they are testing you on this? It makes a lot of sense when you think about it this way, doesn't it? Can they **trust you** in the classroom?

Let's deconstruct an example:

Gerard is a gifted fifth grade student with Cerebral Palsy who has difficulty with fine motor skills. In addition to Speech therapy, he is being taught to use a touch-to-speech software in the classroom. In the

last few months he's started to have difficulty enunciating his words. During the cooperative learning parts of the class, when students are working in small groups, he will often sit silently and not contribute to the discussion.

What is the Disability?

His disability is Cerebral Palsy. Cerebral Palsy is a muscle disorder that is usually progressive. It is typically caused by brain damage during or after birth. The tongue is a muscle and so it's likely that without intervention he will lose the ability to speak clearly over time.

So what's the **problem**? Is that the problem? No. The problem is that he's starting to not speak because of the issues he's having and so this causes him to lose out on the cooperative learning parts of the lesson. We want to support him in being able to communicate so that he can fully participate in the class. And we want to keep in mind that he is a *gifted* student. So we don't want to patronize him by treating him like his physical disability is a learning disability. It is not.

Why do you think he's suddenly not participating? This brings us to the next important part of the PAGED Strategy. A is for AGE.

Problem

Age

Goal

ELL

Disability/Diversity

A is for AGE

Before we begin, let's do an experiment. I'm going to write a sentence and I want you to picture the student and think of the age of the student you are picturing. There isn't a correct answer, I just want you to visualize it.

John has autism.

Are you picturing John as a student?

How old is he?

When I do this in the classroom I go around the room and ask each teacher to tell me the age they visualized. It usually goes something like this 3, 8, 4, 8,7,7, 8, 10, 4, 5, 15, 8, 7, 9, 3, 4, 12, 2, 3, 5, 8, 7, 8, 7, 3.

As you can see the ages vary. Many teachers visualize the age of the student they are working with in their classrooms. But often teachers visualize this "anonymous KID" and they picture a John as being about 7 or 8 years old. This is careless pitfall on the test.

In fact, if you are a Birth to 2nd Grade teacher who has classroom experience, be extremely mindful of this. I've noticed that many of you will answer the questions and write your essays for that grade level even when the question is about a teenager. This is especially important when the question mentions "transitions." In lower levels of education transitions refer to moving from one activity to another in the classroom. In high school this refers to preparing a student to transition to independence after graduation and refers to teaching life skills like money management, traveling, applying for jobs and cooking.

The test almost always mentions the age of the student. They might not actually point out the age but they generally will state the grade

level that the teacher is teaching. You can figure out the approximate age of the student simply by adding 5 to the grade. Most students start Kindergarten when they are 5 years old.

So let's take a look

- First grade. $1 + 5 = 6$ years old
- Third grade $3 + 5 = 8$ years old
- Sixth grade $6 + 5 = 11$ years old and so on.

The reason the age is important is that it goes back to Piaget's stages of cognitive development. We want to consider what the students should be able to do for that specific age. How much support will they need from us as a teacher? If you think about the swimming pool it is easy to understand. For example, if I had a group of 4 year olds in the pool I would have to watch them very carefully and be on hand to help them more than I would if I had a group of 12 year olds in the pool.

The two main stages on the test are the Preoperational stage, (about 2-7) and the Concrete Operational stage (about 7-11). The shift between these two stages generally has to do with a student becoming aware of other students' perspectives and how they themselves fit into the social hierarchy of their peers.

There are many profound and well examined ways to explain this in a sophisticated way. But I'm going to just make it easy to understand by simplifying it in a way that is a stereotype. We know that stereotypes are wrong, but for the purpose of the study guide I want to keep it as simple as possible.

Think of the difference between a 4 year old and a 10 year old. If you are a parent, you will know exactly what I mean. Typically a 4 year old has absolutely no concern about how they fit into a social situation. They will scream at the top of their lungs in public places. What about sharing? They are not fond of sharing their toys with other kids. But!

When they go to the other kid's house they have no problem grabbing all the other kid's stuff as "mine!" Four year olds will pitch a temper tantrum right in the middle of a funeral if they get upset. Then the embarrassed parent must drag them out of the funeral. This is why most people don't like to invite little children to their weddings. Little children are not as motivated by what others think of them and will often act on impulse.

In the Concrete Operational stage, students are starting to become aware of how others think of them. They realize that when they do these types of things they are acting "weird." They are more concerned about parents embarrassing them. I raised three sons and finally when they hit around 10 years old, I realized I could actually negotiate with them by playing on their feelings of this awareness. If we went to a friend's house for dinner I would line up my three sons and threaten them like a drill sergeant, *"If you embarrass me in front of my friends, I can do the same thing to you! The next time **your** friend, Jimmy, comes over I'll sit there and pick my nose the entire time he's visiting and I'll start dancing around the living room to "Stayin' Alive" singing along with the Bee Gees."* They were terrified I'd really do it so they behaved at dinner. I could have said the same thing to them at 4 and it would have been meaningless.

So the way the age relates to the stages of development is important to keep in mind. Not so much that you can threaten kids this way. Don't do that, you'll get fired. And also keep in mind that the attitude of the teacher towards their students has a **profound** impact on how they think of themselves as learners. Just because a child is younger doesn't mean you don't have to be mindful of their feelings.

But when we think back on the situation with Gerard, doesn't it make sense why he's starting to become reluctant to participate in the class discussions? Gerard is in fifth grade; he's about 10 years old. He's becoming more aware that he sounds different than his peers. It's starting to affect how he feels about his place in his social status with

his friends. He doesn't want to sound weird. He doesn't want to be different. So he doesn't say anything at all.

Keep in mind that the age of the student will relate to the way a teacher should evaluate their need to intervene with the student and when they should encourage the student to work independently. For example, if ten year old Gerard is having difficulty using his touch to speech software the teacher would first try to help him by using guided practice. She would guide his hand to help him figure out how to use the device. She wouldn't take the device from him to show him by modeling, she would support his independence with guided instruction.

Age also comes up with regard to behavior management in the classroom. The younger the student, the more the teacher will need to be involved with behavior management. For example if I am working with a 5 year old that is throwing the crayons on the floor and stomping her feet, I would of course need to immediately intervene. It would be my job to figure out the problem.

But as the student gets older it is important for the student to be able to manage their own behavior. If a ten year old threw their pencil on the floor and started stomping their feet, I would intervene but also want to talk to them about the behavior. So first they would need a cool down period and then *the student and the teacher* would figure out what was going on.

When the student is approaching their teenaged years, they are not going to be able to rely on the teacher for behavior management as much as they did when they were younger. We would not expect teenagers to behave this way. However some teenagers continue to struggle with these issues because of emotional issues, poor impulse control, ODD or ADHD. Sometimes a student has a history of behavior issues documented in their IEP. So in this case the teacher would want to sit with the student *before* the incident happens and

create some clear boundaries and consequences. This is not done to punish the student, but rather to help them be able to be self-reliant in order to develop their own skills in this area.

The number one problem I see with teachers writing the essays is that they do not pay attention to the age of the student and write the essay based on the idea that the student is about 7 or 8 years old. Or they write it based on the grade they are used to working with. I have read many essays that were written with strategies you would use for an elementary aged student even though the essay prompt is talking about a 15 year old student. No wonder they failed! If you have failed the test before, ask yourself if you paid attention to the age of the student when you wrote your essay? Chances are you never even noticed it.

The Kickball Game Theory

This brings us to the next two parts of the PAGED strategy: the Problem and the Goal. The problem and the goal are mirror images of each other. Once you know what the problem is, then you know what the goal is in learning.

Remember PAGED

Problem

Age

Goal

ELL

Disability/Diversity

Now that we have deconstructed for Age and Disability and Diversity, we want to put this information to use in determining what the actual problem might be. Remember, the problem is usually about learning issues, not behavior management. Unless the question is specifically talking about behavior management, the problem we are addressing is how to develop the student's learning skills to help them reach the goal. Here we want to determine what kind of support the student needs in order to reach the learning goal.

One of the difficulties that many teachers have on the EAS is in misunderstanding the difference between planning the lesson and then accommodating the student who has a learning issue and *using the accommodations to plan the lesson*. This is called differentiated instruction.

Many teachers think of differentiated instruction this way:

- **Write the lesson**
- **Read the IEP**
- **Make accommodations for the student to be able to do the lesson.**

But this is not the order in which you should be planning instruction. It's the other way around.

- **Read the IEPs of the students in the class**
- **Figure out which accommodations will be needed for students**
- **Then write the lesson.**

Inclusive learning is the goal of the lesson. In real life, teaching in the classroom doesn't always work this way. For example, if I have a student in a fourth grade classroom who is reading on a third grade level, I certainly can't write the lesson for all the students based on the needs of that student. However, this test is based on a **theory**. And one of the main problems we see in our real classrooms is that

parents often are reluctant to have their kids evaluated because they are afraid of their child being “labeled” as Special Education. When I discuss this in my workshops, I will ask teachers who have been working in a classroom, “How many of you have a student in your class that you know has a learning disability or an issue with ADHD but the parent refuses to allow their child to be evaluated?” Every teacher raises their hand.

This test is designed as if we are dealing with the ideal situation. So this means that all students on the test have been evaluated and properly placed in the classroom. We are dealing with an unrealistic version compared to what you actually see in the classroom.

This also relates to how teachers misunderstand push in and pull out services in the classroom. I use the example of a **kickball game** to explain this to teachers.

Let’s say we’re at company picnic and a group of kids gather together and say “We want to play kickball!” So they all run over to the kickball field and start making teams. And here comes Timmy. Timmy has Cerebral Palsy and he has difficulty walking. Some parents at the kickball game would say:

“Hey Timmy can be the umpire!”

or “Timmy can be the pitcher!”

or “If Timmy gets to second base, that’s a home run!”

And what do the other kids say? They say, “That’s not fair!” They are correct. If Timmy is going to play the game, he has to play it just like everyone else. And, in reality, Timmy probably *wants* to play the game just like everyone else. He doesn’t want to be given a “special role.”

So, how would we accommodate Timmy in this situation? The first thing we would do is evaluate Timmy's strengths and weaknesses. Then we need to set a realistic goal. Remember, Timmy doesn't have to be able to get a home run. He just needs to get to the bases one at a time. He just needs to be able to play a regular game of kickball the same way everyone else does.

We know that he is probably going to have difficulty running. So we would have him do a warm up on the side with a coach. We might ask a parent to act as the coach and work with Timmy for about 15 minutes to encourage him to practice running. The coach would work on practicing and developing his running skills. It is important for Timmy to understand exactly how his disability affects him as he prepares to participate in the game. He needs to understand what can he do and what he finds difficult. So for example, if Timmy is good at running short spurts but not long runs, we would say "Ok you are good at the short spurts, so don't try to run around all the bases, just get to one base at a time." This strategy is developing his meta-cognitive awareness.

But then we also need to figure out what Timmy's strengths would be. So consider, if Timmy is really good at kicking the ball, he will have more time to run around the bases. So the coach would also work with Timmy on building his strength as well. The coach would also help him practice kicking. These strategies are empowering the learner to understand himself which is essential in helping to guide the student in taking ownership in his learning.

This "side coaching" would be the equivalent of working in a Resource Room with a Special Education teacher. Many teachers confuse the work done in the resource room as a supplement to the lesson instead of *preparing* the student for the lesson by pre-teaching and working on goals. Many times in real life, the teacher teaches the lesson and "whatever the student didn't understand is gone over in the Resource Room." But again, this is backwards. The lesson should

be written in an inclusive way and should account for any issues and accommodations that are needed. Resource Rooms should be used to *prepare* a student for a lesson, not to make up what is lacking in the lesson. The coach of the kickball game is the General Education teacher and the side coach is the Special Education Teacher.

So, this side coaching is preparing Timmy for the game by helping him to understand and to practice his strengths and weaknesses. But, when Timmy comes back into the game, he plays the game **just like everyone else**. The purpose of an accommodation is to make it equal, not easier.

And stop and think about the reality here. Be honest. When the parent is saying, “Timmy can be the umpire!” who is the parent really trying to make it easier on? Are they doing it for Timmy? Or are they doing it to make it easier on themselves? Is the parent really looking out for Timmy, or is the parent trying to figure out a way to “let Timmy play without ruining it for everyone else.” Ouch! That’s not very nice, is it? But ask yourselves honestly how many times you’ve felt this way when preparing a lesson for your class? Sometimes teachers are so excited about their lesson ideas that they push ahead with the plan and then give the students who struggle with the lesson something “different to do” and call it an “accommodation.” This is wrong.

Keep this in mind in your teaching. Many of the things that you do in the classroom are picked up from years of habits in making the teacher’s job easier, not the student’s learning equal. Equality in education is a fundamental rule in empowering students to be able to learn independently, which is the ultimate goal in teaching.

Remember, the “problem” is figuring out how to get the student to be able to do the lesson just like everyone else. If a student who requires an accommodation can’t do it like everyone else, **we need to change the lesson**. The goal is based on the strengths and needs of the student. And we should not be giving the students something

different to do, they should be playing the same game like everyone else. If the student isn't learning, the problem is not the student; the problem is the lesson planning. It is a teacher's job to be mindful of planning inclusive lessons that accommodate all students.

Remember PAGED

Problem

Age

Goal

ELL

Disability/Diversity

E is for ELL English Language Learners

As we discuss ELL, I will be over-simplifying the information because this is a test prep guide, not a book about literacy. The way I explain ELL is based on my own strategies that help test takers decode the purpose of a question on a test. You may have learned a more sophisticated explanation in your college classes. But I am not a college professor; I just want you to pass the test!

This section is a little bit overwhelming. So just read through it once and continue through the book and then come back and read it again after you are done.

It is important to keep in mind that being an English Language Learner doesn't necessarily mean that the person doesn't speak English. Many people who have advanced English language skills are ELL students. However, learning a language as a second language is a very different experience from learning a Native Language. Most

children learn their home language organically, by speaking in daily interactions with their parents, caregivers, siblings or peers. You do not really have to be “taught” how to speak your Native Language. You usually learn it naturally by being exposed to it and gradually speaking the language.

There are two important theories about how language acquisition occurs. B.F. Skinner was a Behaviorist who felt that children learned words through positive reinforcement. For example, a baby who says “milk” will be given milk by their care giver. And often the caregiver smiles at the child and praises them for using the word. So this word is reinforced.

However, Noam Chomsky felt that there was an innate “Universal Grammar” that applied to all languages which is why young children can learn multiple languages with much more ease than adults. In other words, once you learn how to read and write in one language it is easy to learn to read and write in another language. This is because he felt that human beings, unlike other animals, were born with an innate understanding of “Universal Grammar” related to syntax (sentence structure) and semantics (word choice).

Speaking a language is learned through *immersion* in a language. However, reading and writing must be *taught* through *explicit instruction*. And a teacher’s job is to develop literacy skills by using language skills.

It is easy to distinguish these two skills by thinking of it this way:

- Language skills: learning to speak the language through immersion in the language. (speaking)
- Literacy skills: learning to read or write the language through explicit (step by step) instruction.

It is also important to know that students should be encouraged to continue to learn their Native Language. The purpose of English instruction for ELL students is not to replace their use of their home language. It is to add another language to their skills. Most countries around the world have people who speak multiple languages. The United States is one of the only countries in the world where people speak only one language. There are many fascinating theories to explore with regard to language and linguistics. However for the purposes of this study guide I will use my own strategies for explanation.

To begin, I always ask teachers to remember this sentence:

We do not learn to speak by reading; we learn to read by speaking.

If you think back on your own experiences in learning a language as a second language, many of you will have taken Spanish or French in high school or college. When I go over this in class, I ask teachers to raise their hand if they have studied a second language. If I find a Native English speaking teacher who learned Spanish as a second language, I will ask them to volunteer for an experiment.

I then ask the volunteer two questions:

1. How long did you study Spanish?
2. What grades did you receive in your Spanish classes?

Most times the volunteer will reply, “I studied it for a few years and I did well in my Spanish class.” At this point I will ask one of my Native Spanish speaking teachers in the class to start a conversation in Spanish with the volunteer.

The conversation usually goes something like this:

- **¡Hola como estas?**
Estoy bien, gracias.

- **¿Cuánto tiempo has estado estudiando para ser maestra?**
Yo estudiado por cuatro años.
- **¿Qué le inspiró para elegir la carrera docente?**

It typically takes less than four sentences of dialogue for the volunteer to give up and say “I don’t remember any of this! I’m so sorry!” (That last sentence translates as: What inspired you to choose a teaching career?)

Why would this happen? How could someone study a language for several years and yet not be able to have a simple conversation? Consider your own experiences in learning a second language. Are you fluent in that language? Most people are not fluent in a language if they don’t use it every day. For example, if you studied Spanish for several years and then worked in a Spanish speaking environment for a year or more, you probably have much better language skills. But even then, you might be able to speak the language but not be fluent in *reading the language*.

Think of how many second generation Americans you know whose parents speak their Native Language at home. Those second generation people probably can also speak their parent’s language in addition to English, but they might not be able to *read* the Native Language. For example a person can speak Mandarin or Greek or Arabic, but not be able to read it. True literacy requires speaking, then reading, then writing.

This is extremely important to keep in mind when evaluating an ELL student’s needs in the classroom. Many times teachers confuse the fact that the student “doesn’t speak English” with the fact that the student has not learned basic literacy skills in their Native Language. Literacy skills include reading and writing. Again, it is important to pay attention to the AGE of the student if this is the situation. There is a difference between the levels of literacy development at different

stages in a student's education. If a kindergarten aged student hadn't learned to read the alphabet that's easy to work on. However if a student is 9 or 10 years old and they don't have basic literacy skills in their *Native Language*, it will be much more difficult for them to learn to read and write in English. These students need more support.

In addition, NY is home to many immigrants from around the world. Many immigrants come from beautiful cultures with excellent educational resources. They may have a lot of support from their families as well. But we also want to be mindful of students who may not have had the same educational opportunities in their countries due to wars, access to schooling or socioeconomic issues that prevented them from learning literacy (reading and writing) skills in their *Native Language*. If a student has not received appropriate literacy instruction in their home country, the issue is **not** that they don't know how to speak *English*, it is that they **have not developed foundational literacy skills**.

If we think of Language and Literacy Skills separately it is easy to see why. Language is easily learned by exposure and practice. But Literacy must be taught. Writing is not the same thing as speaking. Reading is not the same thing as speaking. Students have to be taught to read or write in a language. Most of your own learning of a second language was focused on teaching you to read and write in that language. But ***you already had foundational literacy skills*** in English before you tried to learn another language. Think of the difference between trying to learn to read and write in Spanish versus Mandarin? Which one would be easier for you to learn? Spanish has similar linguistic and literacy skills compared to English, so it would be easier for you to learn.

However, we don't learn to speak by reading, we learn to read by speaking. We need to know how to speak a language first, before we can really begin to read it.

The reason that most adults don't retain a second language, even though they did well in their classes, is that they didn't continue to practice speaking it after the classes were over. This practice develops "automaticity" over time. Automaticity means that you automatically recognize a word when reading without having to decode the phonological structure of the word. You instantly decode the word because you know what the sentence is supposed to say. This is because you have spoken the language to the point of fluency.

It's hard to grasp this concept when you already know how to read in English so I use the excerpt below to demonstrate automaticity. You may have seen the following example online. Read it aloud. Don't try to decode it, just start saying it aloud. Speak.

Aoccdrnig to rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttar waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoetnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteres are at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a tatol mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae we do not raed ervey lteter by it slef but the wrod as a wlohe.

Most people can easily read this without a problem. The explanation that is given, suggests that the order of the letters in a word don't matter. However this is not necessarily true. If I gave you a few words in isolation, instead of in a sentence, you probably wouldn't be able to read them as easily. Try the examples below:

- Makiste
- Pacharmy
- Istnerneig
- Teepolohne

Most people would sit for a moment, trying to decode these words. Yet, in the previous paragraph, readers are able to speed right through

the paragraph reading it fluently. Why is this so? This is because your brain knows how sentences are supposed to **sound**. You have developed syntax (sentence structure) and semantic (word choice) recognition from years of speaking the language. You already know what words are supposed to be there before you even read the entire sentence.

*The words above are: mistake, pharmacy, interesting and telephone.

So for example if I wrote:

I walked into the _____ and opened the _____ and took out the _____.

You would not be able to decode this sentence.

But if I wrote:

I walked into the _____ and opened the _____ and took out the milk.

Most of you would easily be able to fill in the blanks with “I walked into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator and took out the milk.” You don’t have to think about it, you just automatically fill it in. This is why context clues are so important for students. The word “milk” is the context clue.

Consider that if I gave the student the words “refrigerator” and “kitchen” in isolation to decode, they may struggle to decode the word, just like you did with the individual words. But if I asked them to read this sentence they would automatically decode the words.

I walked into the *kitchen* and opened the *refrigerator* and took out the milk.

Even if they can’t decode the words in isolation, when they read the sentence above they “fill in the blank” because they know what the

sentence is supposed to say. In doing this they are teaching themselves how to read the words **kitchen** and **refrigerator**.

Understanding this makes it clear why the most important thing we need to do with an ELL student is encourage them to SPEAK and to interact in conversations with their peers in the classroom. I have seen many teachers mistakenly criticize an outgoing student who is trying to engage with their peers as having a “behavior issue.” It is not a behavior issue, it’s exactly what we hope the student will do. If I have an ELL student who is sitting quietly at their desk, they are not learning to speak English because they are not practicing it. It’s not enough to just listen to others speak English, they must also practice speaking it. Socializing is an excellent way for ELL students to develop language skills in English. Again, this is another reason why cooperative learning is so important.

ELL Students with Learning Disabilities in Reading.

ELL students are just like any other student and may also have disabilities. This is important because if we have a student who has a learning disability we will need to carefully evaluate which issue is causing them to have difficulty with the lesson. For example, if I have a student who has a learning disability in reading comprehension but who is also an ELL learner who speaks Arabic as their native language, I’d need to understand which issue might be contributing to their difficulty in understanding when reading. Are they not understanding because they don’t speak English well or are they not understanding because they have a learning disability? This is a very important consideration when planning accommodations and instruction.

Teachers are usually familiar with strategies to help support understanding which include graphic organizers and concept maps. These supports help scaffold for understanding. In addition,

determining which vocabulary words must be pre-taught before a reading exercise is an essential explicit instruction strategy that helps students read more fluently.

When writing lessons most teachers will include a vocabulary list. But many teachers are not as familiar with the different Tiers of vocabulary words and why it is important to distinguish them. I have been told by many teachers that current lesson planning doesn't include designating the difference between the Tiers but that doesn't mean you shouldn't understand the difference yourself.

Examples of Tiers of Vocabulary

Tier 1: I drove the car. (everyday language that doesn't require explicit instruction.)

Tier 2: I operated the vehicle. (sophisticated words that are often encountered in reading but don't necessarily require explicit instruction.)

Tier 3: I drove the automobile to the mechanic to fix the carburetor. (technological words, science words, mathematical words, computer terms, historical terms etc. Words that you can't figure out from "context clues." They must be pre-taught).

The Tier that requires the most explicit instruction is Tier 3. I use the word "carburetor" because even though you can **read** the word carburetor, most of you don't know exactly what a carburetor does in a car. Without knowing what a carburetor is, you would struggle with comprehension.

Example:

Although modern transmissions use fuel injection systems to regulate air, some older cars still use a carburetor. Without careful maintenance the car will not function as smoothly because the fuel will burn "lean" or "rich."

What? Most people would have no idea what the heck the sentence above is trying to say.

But if I pre-taught you the Tier 3 words, you could understand the sentence. Reading comprehension relies on students not only being able to decode or read a word, but also knowing the definition of Tier 3 words in order to be able to read fluently and to comprehend what they are reading.

What is a carburetor?

Source: <http://www.explainthatstuff.com/how-carburetors-work.html>

A **carburetor** regulates the way air is mixed with the gasoline in a car in order for the fuel to “burn” in the proper balance. When you burn the fuel in a car, it’s what makes the car move. Too much air and not enough fuel means an engine burns “lean,” while having too much fuel and not enough air is called burning “rich.” The carburetor regulates the balance of air and fuel. Modern cars use a **fuel injection system** which is an electronically controlled system that injects the proper amount of air into the fuel.

Now go back and read the sentence again and you will see that you understand it better.

Although modern transmissions use fuel injection systems to regulate air, some older cars still use a carburetor. Without careful maintenance the car will not function as smoothly because the fuel will burn “lean” or “rich.”

One of the key issues you should always remember when you are preparing lessons for all students, but especially ELL students is if you will need to pre-teach vocabulary or present background information about the topic in order for the student to be able to read a passage and understand what they are reading.

Please keep in mind that Tier 3 words are not necessarily harder words. Indeed, in the example above “lean” or “rich” are not difficult vocabulary words, but they have specific meaning in the field of mechanics which is different from typical use.

Let’s look at another example:

Say we were learning about the United States government and the Legislative, Judicial and Executive branches of government and the “checks and balances” used in this system.

Let’s imagine a person who has a strong background in accounting reading these words in context. Imagine an accountant from Pakistan who is just beginning to learn English.

Can you see how the accountant might misinterpret the meaning of the words “checks and balances?” They might interpret this to mean that the way our government works is that we send “checks” to them and we bribe our government to do what we want. They may read “balances” as “balancing the check book.”

The words “checks” and “balances” are not difficult words. They are words with a specific meaning as they are used in the discipline of Social Studies. And giving them a list of synonyms would not quite explain it carefully. The words would need to be pre-taught. This is explicit instruction.

In a Science class the teacher would want to show the students what the items were before beginning the lesson. For example the word “beaker” is not a difficult word. But if told the student to “pour the solution into the beaker” it might be more confusing than it needs to be. If I had gone over the vocabulary prior to the lesson, it doesn’t just benefit the ELL student. It benefits all the students in the class.

Please note that I've been told that the term "Tier 3" is not used when writing lesson plans. So although it's important for you to understand the difference, you shouldn't use this term in writing your essays because it sounds like you are inserting outdated "jargon" into your writing. Just keep the ideas in your head when reading through lesson plans. I find that once teachers understand the Tiers of Vocabulary, they have a much easier time understanding the ELL prompts on the EAS so this is why I explain them here.

Key points to remember:

- ELL students often have good English skills. ELL doesn't mean that they don't know how to speak English, it simply means they have learned or are learning English as a second language. (Sometimes this is referred to as ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages).
- Make sure you evaluate if the student has learned previous literacy skills in their Native Language.
- Pay attention when the student has a double diagnosis. If the student has a learning disability in reading comprehension as well as being ELL, it's important to be mindful about evaluating which issue is causing the problem with reading comprehension.
- Vocabulary words that are specific to a discipline, technology, history or industry must be pre-taught before beginning the lesson in order to maximize reading comprehension.
- Strategies for helping ELL students include graphic organizers, concept maps, scaffolding, reading aloud, modeling and working with a partner which facilitates speaking the language.

Remember PAGED

- **Problem**
- **Age**
- **Goal**
- **ELL**
- **Disability/Diversity**

Using this mnemonic device to help you deconstruct the questions will help you pull out the important details about the question that will help you understand what the question is really asking. Use your marker board to write down PAGED each time you read the tabs with the background information of the students and the lesson before you begin to answer the questions. Now let's move on to the trap words.

Trap Words to Avoid:

- Alternative assignment
- Separate
- Special seating arrangements
- Send to the resource room
- Pairing the student
- Partnering the student
- Handouts, worksheet
- Memorize
- Giving out materials, books
- Posting a list
- Copying in their notebooks
- Whole class discussion
- Rewards, stickers, gold stars
- No Boundaries
- Parent Advice

Chapter 5

Trap Words to Avoid Explained

Some of the words that are trap words are wrong for the same reason. So we will deal with these trap words in groups, not necessarily in the order they are listed.

And keep something important in mind. On a test, the reason answers can be a trap is because they are good answers but they are not the **best** answer. The words below can sometimes in real life be a good answer. But on a test they are usually not the best answer.

Think of what happens on a test when you use process of elimination. If you have four options you usually can eliminate two of them pretty quickly. But then you sit there debating the last two options. **The test makers know this.** So they will often use terminology that you use in the classroom as one of the wrong answers. If you don't read it carefully it can sound like a good answer. As the answer to the question it's not necessarily a bad answer. It's just not the best answer. They are looking for the **best answer**, not a good answer.

Alternative Assignment, Separate, Isolate, Special Seat, Group according to academic ability

The NYSTCE is all about inclusion. When you see an answer with one of these words in it, usually it will have something to do with a student who is having difficulty during the lesson. This can include a student with a disability, an ELL student or a student who is falling behind in the lesson. The question will often ask how the teacher can help the student deal with these issues. The terms above are about exclusion, not inclusion. They are wrong. Even though many of these things are done in the public school system, they are not the best answer. You are not supposed to *assign* a student a special seating arrangement because they are disabled. Why not?

Remember how I told you that I have a hearing impairment? Well consider this. When I was in graduate school, many times the professors would tell me to sit right up by the front of the room so I could read their lips better. Sounds like a great accommodation, right? But the problem for me was that when my peers in the room would start participating in a class discussion, I couldn't hear them. I'd have to turn around in my seat and look at them to read their lips. At the same time I wouldn't be able to see or hear what the professor was saying. The professor choosing the seat for me didn't help. I actually did better when I could sit on the side of the room so that I could see both the professor and the other students in the classroom.

If it is worded this way it is wrong. Instead you would say "make modifications as needed to ensure the student can participate fully in class." You would never say to **assign** the child a separate seat or arrange a special part of the room for the child.

All grouping must be mixed ability. We never ever group students according to academic ability. Many schools still do this and many colleges teach Special Educators that it is important to separate the student based on ability. However if a child is capable of being educated in the public school system then you must not separate according to ability.

You also need to understand that the General Education teacher should not ask a co-teacher to work separately with a student. This can only be done if there is an IEP in place and within the parameters of that plan. The Special Education teacher can work separately with a student but a General Education teacher should have planned a lesson that is modified to address these needs. It's okay if the co-teacher or paraprofessional *stays at the desk* to support the student in the class during the lesson. But sending the student off to the side to work with them is wrong. And a Special Education teacher cannot ask a General Education teacher to separate this student in her classroom. If you see this in the answer on either the SWD or the EAS **it's a trap**. You need to read it carefully to be sure that the question isn't about work done in the Resource Room.

Resource Rooms

Keep in mind that there is a difference between strategies used in a Resource Room and the strategies used in the classroom during the lesson. If the question is talking about working with the child in the Resource Room, then of course the answer would be about working with the student one on one. But we don't send students away or off to the side during the lesson. Remember the kickball game. We treated Timmy the same way we treated everyone else when he played the game. The lesson in the classroom is the **game**. We don't send students away during the game. We work to prepare them *before the game*. So questions about the work done in the Resource Room are a different type of question. Separating the student, **during the game** or giving them a "special role" or giving them something different to do, is usually wrong.

Let's look at two different examples:

Eric is a student with an expressive language disorder who is in an inclusive classroom. The teacher plans for the students to give a five

paragraph speech as part of an upcoming lesson. What would be the best way for the teacher to accommodate Eric's needs in this lesson?

- A. Partnering Eric with peer to complete the activity and assigning Eric the role of note taker during the lesson to help him develop his organizational skills. (TRAP!)
- B. Reducing the length of the speech from five paragraphs to one paragraph to accommodate Eric's needs. (TRAP!)
- C. **Asking Eric's Special Education teacher to help him practice his speech in the Resource Room before he has to give the speech during the class.**
- D. Allowing Eric to submit a paper instead of giving the speech. (TRAP!)

See how the way the Resource Room is used is like Timmy's coaching? It's not happening during the lesson. It's happening before the lesson. The key to the question is to use PAGED to figure out who we are teaching and to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the student. Eric's weakness is speaking. So we want to help him practice speaking before he has to give the speech. As opposed to:

During a lesson on Math concepts, Tara, a student who has a math learning disability, is struggling to add two digit numbers. What would be the best approach for the teacher to address this need?

- A. Pairing Tara with a high achieving student who will help her complete the assignment. (TRAP!)
- B. Giving Tara an alternative assignment that covers similar math concepts but on an easier level than what the others are doing. (TRAP!)
- C. Sending Tara to the side of the room to work with the para professional to help her work on her weaknesses and continuing on with the lesson with the rest of the class. (TRAP!)
- D. **Paying attention to which of Tara's needs are important to incorporate into future lesson plans and re-teaching the lesson.**

Can you see the difference in how Resource Rooms, Push in and Pull Out services are supposed to be used? Just remember the kick ball game.

A lot of teachers will read the question above and say, “Wait a minute, but the teacher is already teaching the lesson? So she’s going to have to teach it again? We don’t have time for that in the classroom.”

Exactly! This is because the teacher made a mistake. Remember, this is a **test**. They want to make sure you don’t make the same mistake when they let you begin teaching. This is why they are testing you to see if you know the rules. The teacher in the question wrote a bad lesson plan. When the teacher wrote the lesson she should have prepared **before** she wrote the lesson and been mindful of the needs of her student. She should have known that Tara would struggle with two digit numbers because she has a learning disability in Math. She should have incorporated this need into the lesson plan she was doing. Your student should not be struggling to keep up during the lesson. If they are, you haven’t written the lesson correctly.

This is why you should remember this sentence:

*You do not know **what** you are teaching until you know **who** you are teaching.*

Let’s think about it a different way. Imagine you have decided to teach the book, The Very Hungry Caterpillar for a lesson in your class. Teachers get really excited when they have a “great idea” for a lesson and sometimes they forget to read the IEPs or be mindful of the diversity of the students in the classroom. So say, for example, you start doing this lesson. And the next day the mother of one of your students comes up to you. Mohammed’s mother points out that he is fasting for Ramadan and he’s having hard time because the book is about eating.

Many teachers would think this “Oh, OK I’ll give him a different book to do while he’s fasting.” And they think, “See what a great teacher I am! I’m accommodating the student’s needs by giving him a different assignment because of his religious practices.”

NOPE.

You made a mistake. You should have already known that one of your students was fasting for Ramadan and you should *never have chosen that book* for the lesson. Accommodations should be taken into consideration *before* you write your lesson plans, not after!

What about specific types of accommodations?

The only specific types of hands-on accommodations that I would recommend for students would be during a *reading activity* if a student loses their place. Giving students a card to place under each line of text as they read is helping guide them in reading. Giving students a piece of paper with a window cut out to help keep them focused on one question at a time while going over Math questions helps them stay focused. But can you see how these types of accommodations are more about helping a student stay on task than about making the work easier? Remember, the purpose of an accommodation is to make it equal not easier.

Pair, Partner, Buddy Up

You’ll notice in the practice questions above that the answers with pairing in them were a trap. These words are tricky. In general they are wrong when used in an answer. Although most schools have students work in pairs as part of collaborative learning, there is a difference in the wording that is often hard to distinguish. The rule I use is this:

If it is used as a noun it is correct, e.g.:

- *Have the students work in pairs.*
- *Have the student work with a partner.*
- *Have the students discuss in pairs.*

However if it is used as a verb it is WRONG e.g.:

Pair the student with another high achieving student to help them complete the assignment.

Partnering Johnny with another student who will do the activity while Johnny takes notes.

Why is it wrong? To decode the question you have to look to see if there is a sense that the teacher is *dumping the responsibility* for the student's learning on the partner. Collaborative learning needs to be flexible and on a rotation of sorts. In other words we don't want students to always work with the same partner. Think of it this way.

Say we have Jane and Kim in the classroom. Jane does very well in math but Kim struggles. So we "pair" the low performing student with a high achieving student. On a temporary basis this would be a good strategy. Kim can learn from Jane. Jane can develop her skills as she helps Kim. Kim can also show Jane different ways of analyzing a problem. But think about what will realistically happen if Jane and Kim *always* work together as partners. Eventually Jane will dominate the pair because she has a stronger skill set. Also Kim might find herself falling into a passive role because she knows Jane is usually correct. In the end Kim will begin to rely on Jane. Jane will then fall into a role of "taking care" of Kim and the partnering will be unbalanced.

To avoid this, partners should always rotate for short term learning goals. This is not what realistically happens in the classroom. Constructivist Learning Theory encourages students to work with others to gain insight into different perspectives and learning styles.

When you see questions that have partnering in the answer the question is usually testing you to see if you know the difference. Be mindful to see if the wording of the answer reads as if the teacher is dumping the weaker student on the stronger student to complete the lesson. It's ok if students are discussing in pairs or brainstorming with a partner because this is considered active learning.

Pairing and partnering **will** be used if the student is **ELL** because as I mentioned before, speaking the language is an essential part of learning the language. Can you see the difference when the student is speaking with the ELL learner in a partner situation? The pairing is helping the ELL student develop English language skills. But the partner is not doing the lesson **for** the ELL student, they are simply working together as peers. Whenever the option reads like you are dumping the responsibility on the partner, the answer is wrong.

Memorize, Handouts, worksheets, reading a book, copying notes into the notebook, posting a list, whole class discussion.

Constructive Learning Theory is about active learning and the phrases above are considered passive learning. Again, I know that teachers do this all the time in the classroom. I am not trying to get you to change your classroom approach. I am just trying to get you to pass a test. Remember, the test is about teaching students **how** to learn, not what to learn. So stop and think about it for a second. Most of the phrases above are “teach to test” strategy. For example, if a teacher asks a student to write down the vocabulary words five times each, the goal is usually to get them to memorize the spelling of the words for a vocabulary test. Then at the end of the week students are tested on the words and the lesson moves on to another goal.

But does memorizing the spelling of the words actually help with understanding? Remember what we talked about in the ELL section about Tier 3 words and the word *carburetor*. We might memorize the spelling and might be able to read the word but we still don't have a

deeper learning of the word. We don't really understand it. If we don't really understand it we have not actually learned the word, we've only learned how to spell the word and read the word.

Why do you use these in real life?

In real life classrooms teachers must have a “measurable achievement” in order to give students a **grade**. In this way, classwork is used for grading purposes. As teachers, one of the biggest challenges that you deal with in your classrooms is a student who you can tell understands the concepts and meets the learning goals intellectually, but doesn't show their work. Think of it as a student who can easily solve a math equation but doesn't show the steps of their work. How can you grade that student?

Students who do not complete work make it very difficult for teachers to properly justify their grades for that student. And this is emphasized by the administrators of the school as documentation and evidence that students have achieved their learning goals. This is extremely important in accurately grading the student and justifying the grade to the district, parents, caregivers and student. Classwork is an important part of this documentation. This includes, handouts, tests, homework and worksheets.

But the NYSTCE is **not** testing you on your ability to provide a **grade** to the student. The same way a driver's license test is not testing you on your ability to get car insurance. Yes it is part of what you need in order to be able to drive, but it is a different issue related to driving. A driver's license test is testing to see if they can trust you on the road. A teaching license test is testing you to see if they can trust you in the classroom as a teacher not as a grader. Making sure you know how to grade a student properly is your principal's job.

The EAS is testing you on a **learning theory**. Far too often teachers will choose answers with these words in them because they reflect

the way teachers actually teach in real life classrooms. But again, remember, this is a test on Constructivist Learning Theory.

In my workshops I usually demonstrate it a specific way. I'll have a pile of handouts on the desk. (If you want, grab a stack of old papers yourself and do this experiment.) I'll stand in the front of the room and say, "Let's discuss learning theory." And then I'll just start throwing the handouts at the walls of the room or on the floor and saying to the teachers, "Here, read this, there ya' go!" They look at me like I'm bonkers and of course they are right. Throwing papers and materials at students is not the way to get them to learn. It's just a way for you to justify your grades.

Instead we want to use materials that will scaffold for understanding. Materials can include graphic organizers, concept maps, reading material and most importantly, **class discussion**.

Why is "**whole class discussion**" a potential trap? Small group discussions match cooperative learning style in the Constructivist Learning Approach. When students have discussions in small groups, there is more of an opportunity for each student to participate. It also gives the teacher the opportunity to rotate throughout the room to observe the students working in groups. This observation is like a coach informally assessing the students to see if learning is proceeding as expected. Whole class discussions are not necessarily wrong, but on a test, small group discussions are the better option.

Encouraging, Rewards, Stickers, Gold Stars, Token Economy, No Boundaries, Ask the Parents for Advice

It's interesting to me when I teach my workshops, that these words above seem to surprise teachers as Trap Words more than any of the other Trap Words. I've only ever seen a "reward" system be a correct answer on a pedagogical test when the teacher is using ABA approach. ABA approach is Applied Behavior Analysis and it's not

Constructivist Learning Theory. If I had a student with a profound intellectual disability who had no confidence in their ability to reach a learning goal, I would start off with a reward system to motivate the student. But it's an extremely rare situation. In general this is not the **best** strategy to use with students.

These words have less to do with it being “wrong” or “against the rules” and more to do with it being a test makers trick. They sound like nice answers and so teachers feel as though they are being evaluated to see how supportive and kind they will be with students. NOPE.

Anyone who has ever worked in a classroom knows how hard it is. And “being nice” is always a good thing, but it is not necessary to be nice to be an effective coach. Think of your own teachers in your own life and I know that you will remember one that was tough as nails but you respect and think of fondly because they helped you learn. When we think of a strong coach working with a team, we don't think of one who gives out prizes and is really encouraging to everyone. We think of a coach who takes a group of kids who have very weak skills and gets them to the championship game. That coach has done her job because she taught her team to **own** the game.

What about No Boundaries?

The wording of the terminology won't specifically say “no boundaries” but you can tell from the way the option is worded that the teacher doesn't have clear boundaries in place. These types of answers will say things like “*give them as much time as they need*” or “*if they don't finish let them take it home for homework*” or “*let the student decide when they should take the test.*” There's a sense in the wording that the teacher doesn't have strong classroom management skills.

Students need boundaries. Think of the swimming pool again and you'll understand why. When you see a pool that is being used to train

students to swim it doesn't look like a recreational swimming pool in someone's back yard or at a play area. What's the difference? A pool for training has lane lines designated. There are floating line markers that separate the pool into different lanes. Swimmers must stay in the lane. They don't get to swim diagonally or randomly around the pool. Structured support is required for effective coaching.

And what about asking the parents what to do?

This is another one that seems to trap test takers. There is a difference between involving a parent in the student's learning and deferring the authority of the parents during classroom instruction. Again, think of the swimming pool. If a coach is coaching the swimmers in the pool, the parents may be there on the sidelines watching to support their child. A coach might speak to a parent after the training session about an issue that could be worked on at home. But what would you think of the coach that kept going over to the seating area and asking the parent for advice during the swim practice?

For example, one of the big problems I had with my kids when they were swimming is that they would hold their breath. When you hold your breath when you are swimming you basically inflate your lungs with air and it throws off your whole body alignment in the water. I would sometimes go up to a parent at the end of practice and ask them to try to work with the child at home in the bathtub to get them to practice blowing out air with their face in the water. Just like a teacher might go up to a parent at the end of the school day and try to keep the lines of communication open by asking the parent to look at notes, check the homework, or address a behavior issue.

But what kind of coach would go up to the parents during the swim practice and keep asking them for advice? Can you imagine how you would feel about a coach that did this? *"Mr. Johnson, Tommy keeps holding his breath, what should I do?" "Mrs. Alvarez, Jose keeps running on the side of the pool instead of walking, what should I do?"*

Make him stop it!” You’d be looking at the coach like they were bonkers, wouldn’t you? You’d be thinking, *“What kind of coach is this? She has no idea what she’s doing and has no control over her students!”*

Collaboration, Communication and Cooperation with parents and caregivers *will* show up on the test. Usually these issues will be addressed in the last section of the test about Home Relationships. But they are usually not the best option during classroom instruction unless there is a social worker involved and specific issue related to the home. Generally these options are a trap.

WORDS TO LOOK FOR

Now that we know how to analyze the trap words, we’ll want to consider what words are usually indicators of the best answer. When I wrote my last study guide I made a mistake with this. (*See how teachers must always evaluate if their strategies work in order to improve?*) The mistake I made is that I wrote “Words to Look For” before I explained the trap words. So, many of my teachers only memorized those words and never read the section on the trap words. And so when a “best answer” word was in the same sentence as a “trap word” they didn’t notice it.

The trap word ruins the “good word.” So make sure you use the trap words to carefully analyze the answer and don’t just assume because you see these words in the answer, it is the correct answer.

There are only three of them: **Own, Practice, Demonstrate**. These words relate to the idea of a student in a swimming pool. The students are demonstrating their learning by practicing swimming. They are using their own strengths and understanding their own weaknesses. This is self-directed hands-on active learning and it is the essential goal of the Constructivist Learning Theory.

But **be careful**. Let's look at two examples that have these words in them but are wrong.

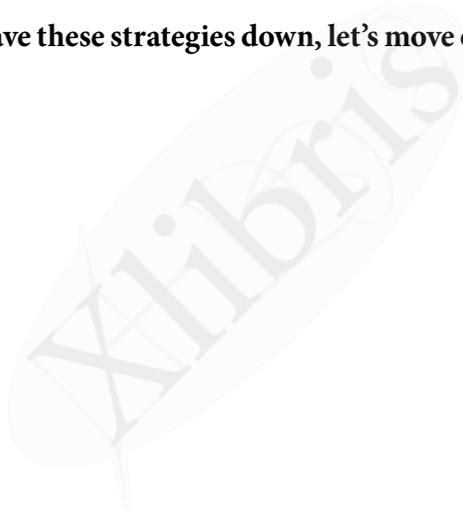
Having students practice learning vocabulary words by looking up the definition in the dictionary and copying them into their notebook.

NOPE!

Having students demonstrate understanding by memorizing the 2 times table using flash cards.

NOPE!

Now that we have these strategies down, let's move on to the essays.



Chapter 6

The EAS Essays

The EAS will have three different 200 word essays. Each of the three essays addresses working with different types of students. One essay will be about working with an ELL student; one will be about working with the Student with a Disability; and one will be an essay about working with the Diversity in a classroom. Remember to read all the background information that is accessed through tabs at the top of the screen.

Many teachers struggle because the word count on these essays are so short. Teachers often are used to writing long papers in which they have many paragraphs to justify their reasoning. The length of college papers allows space for teachers to explain their teaching approach by using citations and quotes from pedagogical experts. And so when teachers take this test they often fail the essay simply because they wrote a lot of information that **didn't answer the prompt**.

Remember, essay evaluators for Pearson are not necessarily teachers or college professors. I have read in The New York Times, that in order to work for Pearson as an essay evaluator, you need a Bachelor's Degree in *any field* and evaluators are paid about \$15 an hour to grade the essays. These are not elite college professors who are interested in your sophisticated ideas. They just want to make sure you can read and follow directions and clearly answer a specific prompt.

The number one reason that teachers fail the essay is that they didn't answer the question that was asked of them. Let's take a look at a typical prompt:

EAS Essay Prompt (source: NYSTCE Preparation Guide)

After analyzing the information provided, write a response of approximately 150–200 words in which you:

- identify a specific learning **need** for the Student or Class
- describe a **strategy** for differentiating instruction **related to this lesson** to address the need that you identified; and
- explain **why the strategy** you described would be effective in addressing the identified learning need.

The final version of your response should conform to the conventions of edited American English.

Why do teachers fail the essay?

The number one reason that test takers fail the essay is that they don't write an essay that **answers the prompt**. The prompt asks you to look at the draft lesson plan provided in one of the tabs. Then to read the background information about the students and examine how a student's ELL, Disability or Diversity status would make it difficult for them to do the lesson as it is written. Then to suggest a strategy to **improve the lesson** and explain why you think this will help.

Most of my teachers write vague general strategies about working with a student with a specific issue. But they don't seem to grasp the idea that basically the prompt is asking you to assist the teacher by helping them **modify their lesson**. The key to the essays is to explain why a student would have difficulty with the draft lesson and to modify the lesson. The fact that the lessons in the tabs are referred to as "draft lessons" should be a clue to you that there is something wrong with *the lesson*.

Too many teachers write the essay as if there is something wrong with *the student*. No matter how many times I go over this in my workshops, when I get the practice essay for homework the teachers totally ignore the lesson in their essay. It's very strange to me how often teachers make this mistake even when I have stood at the front of the room and made them repeat aloud: "It's not the student, it's the lesson, the lesson, the lesson." I still get the essays with no mention of the lesson.

Let's take a look:

Anisa is a 10 year old ELL student who recently moved to the United States from Egypt. Anisa began attending Mr. Nelson's class several months into the school year. As an ELL student, Anisa struggles with her reading comprehension skills and often loses her place when reading. This causes her to fall behind in the class during the read aloud activity. When this happens Anisa often becomes distracted and loses focus.

One strategy for differentiated instruction that I would use would be to go over key vocabulary words in both English and Arabic to be sure that Anisa understands the meaning of the words in order to help improve fluency. By using a flash card system and working with the paraprofessional, we can help Anisa develop important literacy skills. It would be helpful to also have pictures on the flashcards to help reinforce understanding.

This strategy is an effective strategy because it helps Anisa by building on her own understanding in her native language. Pre-teaching key vocabulary words with the paraprofessional will also help Anisa by reading aloud and developing an understanding of phonics sounds that are different in English. This approach will scaffold for understanding and help improve reading fluency.

Almost 90% of the homework assignments I give in class, asking students to write a practice essay, look exactly like the essay above. Again, in class I walk around the room like a drill sergeant and ask the

test takers to “repeat after me: What are we writing about? The lesson!” I make the teachers say it again and again, “the lesson, the lesson, the lesson!” “What are we writing about? The LESSON!” Then I get practice essays that look like the above essay. Go re-read the essay and see if you can figure out what the lesson is about just from reading the essay. You can’t, can you? You just know it has “something to do with reading.”

So let’s go look at the Draft Lesson

Excerpts from Mr. Nelson’s Draft Lesson Plan

Topic : Learning Idioms
Standard: Describe and Identify a variety of idioms used in writing. Recognize and explain the meaning of common idioms, adages, and proverbs. English Language Arts Standard.
Lesson Objective: Students will be able to read a book that uses idioms and identify and explain the idioms in the story.
Essential Question: What are the idioms used in the story?
Vocabulary: idiom, figurative language, literal, adjectives
Materials: Students will provided a copy of the book <u>Amelia Bedelia</u> by Peggy Parish. Students will also use graphic organizers to help visualize in understanding.

The first thing we want to ask ourselves is “what is an idiom?” I bet some of you reading this book aren’t even sure. And yet this teacher

is planning this lesson for a class that includes an ELL student who is beginning to learn English. Idioms are phrases that are used that don't have a literal meaning.

- Barking up the wrong tree
- Cat got your tongue
- Cry over spilt milk
- Drive me up the wall
- Have an axe to grind
- Jump the gun
- On pins and needles
- X marks the spot

When you stop and think about the student in this situation you can easily see that the problem here is not the student. The problem is with the lesson. Let's look at the description of Anisa:

Anisa is a 10 year old student who has recently moved to the United States from Egypt. As an ELL learner, Anisa often struggles with reading comprehension and will stop reading when she doesn't understand. Anisa has good decoding skills when she is reading vocabulary words, but often struggles to comprehend meaning when the words are used in a sentence.

Mrs. Lockner is an ESOL teacher who is working with Mr. Nelson to help plan instruction that ensures that the English Language Learners in the class receive adequate support in literacy skills. Anisa has learned basic English language skills and is making good progress in language acquisition. However, she often shuts down when she is reading independently if she doesn't understand what she is reading. She stops reading and begins playing with the lesson supplies which is distracting to the others in her group.

Please notice something important. The behavior is not the problem. Far too often teachers zoom in on the fact that the student

is disrupting the class and they veer off into behavior management skills and address that, instead of the learning and the lesson. The student's behavior, in this situation, is a symptom of the problem. It is not the problem.

What's the problem here? The problem is that when Anisa gets confused she shuts down and doesn't continue reading. When I'm looking at Mr. Nelson's lesson plan, I'm thinking, "Why in the world would you choose such a difficult lesson when you know you have a student in your class that is struggling to understand basic English skills?" If Anisa already struggles with understanding the meaning of regular words in a sentence, imagine how confusing a lesson on idioms will be for her. Although she can decode words individually, she struggles when using them in a sentence. This detail seems to have been overlooked by the person who wrote the sample essay. The issue is not her decoding vocabulary words, it's understanding their meaning when they are used in a sentence. Flash cards are not a good strategy for this issue.

So how can we improve this lesson? Let's think about it.

Although the lesson is difficult, it's probably a good idea for all ELL learners to understand the difference between literal and figurative language. Idioms are used in everyday language and if an ELL student doesn't realize this, it can make learning and understanding the language more difficult. So even though this is a difficult lesson, it's a good opportunity for Mrs. Lockner to work with Anisa in adding to her understanding of how English is used.

So what's wrong with the lesson? The teacher plans to have students read the book, Amelia Bedelia and identify the idioms in the story. The problem is that there should be a pre-teaching part of the lesson that explains what idioms are and how they are used in writing. And keep in mind, this won't just benefit Anisa, it will benefit all the students in the classroom. This is a good lesson if we modify the

lesson and instead of just jumping right in to reading the book, we take time to explain what idioms *are* before we begin the lesson. The teacher should start off by discussing idioms and figurative language to set a foundation in the understanding before the students begin their independent reading. Now that we understand what we need to do, let's write the essay.

EAS ESSAY OUTLINE

We need a total of about 10 sentences to get to 200 words. If we are writing 3 paragraphs we should break it down the following way.

- Paragraph 1 3 sentences.
- Paragraph 2 3-4 sentences.
- Paragraph 3 3 sentences.

Paragraph 1: Describe the student and describe why they will have difficulty with the lesson.

- Sentence 1: Name of the student, age of the student, background of the student.
- Sentence 2: Explain why the student will have difficulty during the lesson.
- Sentence 3: Describe what part of the lesson will be most difficult.

Paragraph 2: Describe a strategy you would use related to the lesson.

- Sentence 1: One suggestion for a strategy to help differentiate the instruction in Mr. Nelson's lesson plan would be to _____
- Sentence 2: Explain what this means. For example, if you say you are going to "pre-teach" you need to explain what that means. If you say you are going to use a graphic organizer, you need to explain what a graphic organizer is.

- Sentence 3: Explain how you would do this during the lesson, when you would do it (before the lesson begins, during the lesson etc.).
- Sentence 4 (if needed): Explain what part of the lesson this would relate to.

Paragraph 3: Justify your suggestion by explaining how it will help the student.

- Sentence 1: Explain why you feel this is needed for the student.
- Sentence 2: Explain why you feel it will help the student in this lesson.
- Sentence 3: Explain why you feel this will help set a foundation in future learning.

Sample essay broken down by paragraph:

Paragraph 1

- Sentence 1: Name of the student, age of the student, background of the student.
- Sentence 2: Explain why the student will have difficulty during the lesson.
- Sentence 3: Describe what part of the lesson will be most difficult.

Anisa is a 10 year old ELL student who has recently joined Mr. Nelson's class. Anisa is learning English but also struggles with literacy skills and will frequently stop reading if she becomes confused. During the lesson on Idioms it is likely that Anisa will struggle to understand the figurative nature of idioms.

Paragraph 2

- Sentence 1: One suggestion for a strategy to help differentiate the instruction in Mr. Nelson's lesson plan would be to _____

- Sentence 2: Explain what that means. In other words if you say you are going to use flash cards, explain what a flash card is. Remember you are writing it like the person reading it is not a teacher and doesn't know what a flash card is.
- Sentence 3: Explain how you would do this during the lesson, when you would do it (before the lesson begins, during the lesson etc).
- Sentence 4: (if needed) Explain what part of the lesson this would relate to.

One suggestion for a strategy to help differentiate instruction during the lesson plan would be ask the ESOL teacher, Mrs. Lockner, to work with Anisa prior to the lesson to help clarify the definition of idioms. Because idioms are not based on literal comprehension reading skills it will be important for Mrs. Lockner to go over this concept with Anisa and to be on hand to provide guided instruction during the lesson. This instructional support will go over the difference between figurative and literal language and give Anisa the opportunity to ask questions for clarification.

Paragraph 3

- Sentence 1: Explain why you feel this is needed for the student.
- Sentence 2: Explain why you feel it will help the student in this lesson.
- Sentence 3: Explain why you feel this will help set a foundation in future learning.

This strategy will help Anisa improve her reading comprehension skills by building on previous language skills and adding new concepts for understanding. As ELL students continue to develop skills in English, it is important to scaffold for understanding in the different types of expression used in the language. Developing an understanding in both figurative and literal writing will help

promote self-directed learning and enable the student to be able to read independently with greater comprehension.

Now let's put it all together

Anisa is a 10 year old ELL student who has recently joined Mr. Hadar's class. Anisa is learning English but also struggles with literacy skills and will frequently stop reading if she becomes confused. During the lesson on idioms it is likely that Anisa will struggle to understand the figurative nature of idioms.

One suggestion for a strategy to help differentiate instruction during the lesson plan would be ask the ESOL teacher, Mrs. Lockner, to work with Anisa prior to the lesson to help clarify the definition of idioms. Because idioms are not based on literal comprehension reading skills, it will be important for Mrs. Lockner to go over this concept with Anisa and to be on hand to provide guided instruction during the lesson. This instructional support will go over the difference between figurative and literal language and give Anisa the opportunity to ask questions for clarification.

This strategy will help Anisa improve her reading comprehension skills by building on previous language skills and adding new concepts for understanding. As ELL students continue to develop skills in English, it is important to scaffold for understanding in the different types of expression used in the language. Developing an understanding in both figurative and literal writing will help promote self-directed learning and enable the student to be able to read independently with greater comprehension.

Notice in the essay above there isn't a lot of detail about the lesson but the **perspective** of the essay is one addressing how to use accommodations to modify the lesson for this specific student. The other practice essay doesn't address the lesson. Instead it addresses

vague strategies about teaching ELL students. And the strategy doesn't address the actual issues that Anisa would have doing this lesson. Instead it reads as a series of random ideas strung together.

On the EAS you will be given three different essays. You need to first read the lesson tab to understand the learning goal. Then read the description tabs about the student. Then analyze what part of the lesson would be difficult for the student to do based on this information.

The essay on Diversity will address the mixed abilities of students in the classroom and so you will have to pay more attention to the needs of all the students.

Some key points to keep in mind for the different types of essays:

ELL:

- Prior knowledge and language and literacy skills in their Native Language.
- Previous education in their Native language.
- Double diagnosis of ELL and learning disability in reading.
- Distinguishing between the ability to decode the words and understanding the words when used in a sentence.
- Collaborative learning skills such as working with a partner during group activities.

Disabilities:

- Physical difficulties during hands-on work like science activities.
- Visual perception issues with reading, spatial relationships.
- Cognitive issues related to intellectual disabilities and Down Syndrome.

- Behavioral issues related to ODD, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Anxiety Disorders.
- Organizational issues related to ADHD, being able to stay focused for more than 15 minutes.

Diversity:

- Gender issues: The modern educational approach often examines how female students deal with STEM topics including Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. Often female students don't consider themselves good students in these areas.
- Cultural diversity: Cultural Inclusiveness. Often times, students themselves segregate themselves into cultural groups. It is important for educators to be mindful of ways to promote cultural diversity.
- Socioeconomic Background: It is important to remember that while we live in a society that has access to many different technologies including cell phones and computers, not all students have access the same way. Assuming that all students know how to use a computer, for example, is a careless mistake.
- Mixed Ability Grouping: This includes ELL students and Students with Disabilities. Key issues would relate to pre-teaching scientific vocabulary and time management. For example, if a teacher plans an activity that expects students to watch a video for 30 minutes, it could be problematic for ADHD students who have difficulty staying focused.
- Home Issues: Students may have stressful home lives that can negatively impact their ability to deal with classroom instruction because of anxiety. Without proper support students may have difficulty managing their own reactions in group activities.

Chapter 7

CST-Students with Disabilities Exam

The CST Students with Disabilities exam has 45 questions and a 600 word essay. It is set up very similar to the EAS in the way tabs are provided at the top with detailed information about the student and lesson.

Please note, you **must** read the EAS section of this book if you want to pass the SWD. The strategies in this study guide build on each other. Consider how you use “scaffolding” in your own teaching. You set a foundation in one learning goal and then you build future learning on that foundation. This book does the same thing. The first chapters explain Constructivist Learning Theory in a way you need to understand in order to take the CST SWD.

It disappoints me when I receive a phone call and a teacher says, “I used your study guide and I almost passed.” When I ask them if they read the entire study guide they always say no. They skipped the first part of the book and jumped right to the SWD section. There is a reason I have combined the EAS and the SWD into one book; you should use the same strategies for both tests. In fact when I teach the workshops I teach both the EAS and the SWD at the same time.

If you have not read the first part of the book, you are missing 60% of what you need to know in order to pass the test. Go read it now. Also, please note that I have not ever seen another study guide out there that helps properly prepare for the SWD. One of the reasons I wrote my first study guide is that when I read the other study guides they were filled with wrong information; many of the practice questions had the wrong answers. Additionally they were padded with useless information that wasn't on the test. They were a waste of time to use. They will do nothing but confuse you. Only use this study guide and the links I suggest in here.

To properly prepare for the CST SWD you will need to know five things:

- Constructivist Learning Approach
- Strategies for decoding the question
- The roles of the members of the IEP team
- Types of Disabilities
- How to write the essay

Although this book gives a brief explanation of different types of disabilities, it is wise to brush up on this topic. At the end of the book I will include explanations for the steps of the IEP. These types of specific questions rarely show up on the test, but I thought it would be helpful to include it in the book for better understanding. But if you have to skip anything in this book, it's ok to skip that section. This is because most of you are already taught the steps for the IEP in the college classes. However make sure you read the section in the following chapter about "What is an IEP." Many teachers understand the steps but don't understand the "Why" part.

Common Problems with understanding the CST-SWD:

As you can see in the previous chapters, the most important part of the exam is to understand the rules of Constructivist Learning

Theory. The CST Students with Disabilities takes it a step further to include understanding the Collaborative Learning Community and the Committee of Special Education (CSE). One of the difficulties that teachers have in this section is that they are using real life experience to answer the questions. This can be a problem for several reasons.

- Most schools don't follow the Constructivist Learning Approach.
- Many schools are underfunded and have their educators double up on responsibilities so educators don't actually know what each job entails in the CSE.
- Many parents are reluctant and uncooperative with the IEP process and so corners are cut and rules are bent when they should not be.
- Most schools are overcrowded and struggle with the ability to handle the needs of students with disabilities.
- Many teachers do not understand the purpose of an IEP.

It is important for you to really master the Trap Words to Avoid. It is also important for you to refresh your understanding of the role of a General Education teacher in the classroom. Remember that the General Education teacher is core of the Committee of Special Education. A student might be in a General Education class and not yet have been evaluated as a Student with a Disability. This is why there are a lot of questions on the test asking you to identify the characteristics of different disabilities.

First of all let's think of the role of the General Education teacher. Many teachers tell me that the experience of working in public schools has given them the impression that the General Education teacher is in charge of the student in her class and she sort of uses the Special Education teacher as an assistant for her students. Part of the reason teachers think this way is because schools are often under-funded and Paraprofessionals regularly wind up doing the job of the Special Education teacher.

There is another problem as well. Your experience can backfire on you. Say you are a General Education teacher who has been teaching for a few years. Several years in a row you have a student with a learning disability in your class. These students have IEPs. You know the system and how it is done in your school. Sometimes parents are reluctant to have a student diagnosed. So you have the student in the classroom who doesn't have an IEP but you use the same strategies with this student as you do with your other kids with the IEP. You **know** what to do because you've done it so many times before. After a while it starts to seem like part of your job is to make informal IEP strategies to use with your student. **Well it isn't.** Your job is to troubleshoot by observing the student and bringing any issues to the attention of the Special Education teacher. The same way a Nurse observes the patient and brings any issues to the attention of the Doctor.

At the beginning of this book we talked about the role of a General Education teacher being like a Nurse and a Special Education teacher being like a Doctor. Let's explore that a little bit. In a hospital, an experienced Nurse probably goes through the same thing. Let's pretend Nurse Tamika is a geriatric Nurse. She usually deals with older patients that have typical symptoms. She makes her rounds each day reading the patients chart and following the protocols on that chart. The Doctor has given one of her patients Codeine for pain and it doesn't seem to be working. An experienced Nurse probably knows what medications to substitute for the patient. She has a lot of experience and knows exactly what the Doctor will do. Nurse Tamika knows that Doctor Smith will give them a different medication. But is she legally allowed to just substitute the other medication for the patient? Unless she's an RN she cannot just switch the medication. She could be fired for doing so. She has to contact the Doctor first before she makes any changes.

Even though she's the one who spends the majority of the time with the patient and she's the one who knows the patient's care plan and

speaks to the patient all day long, she is not qualified to make changes to their care plan. The same way that a General Education teacher who works with the student all day long and who knows their learning plan and accommodations must use the student's IEP to make decisions. The General Education teacher cannot just change the IEP on her own. She has to work with the Special Education teacher, the Committee of Special Education, the parents or caregivers and the student in order to make any changes.

When you take this exam you need to follow the rules. You can't go by what you do in the classroom.

What is an IEP?

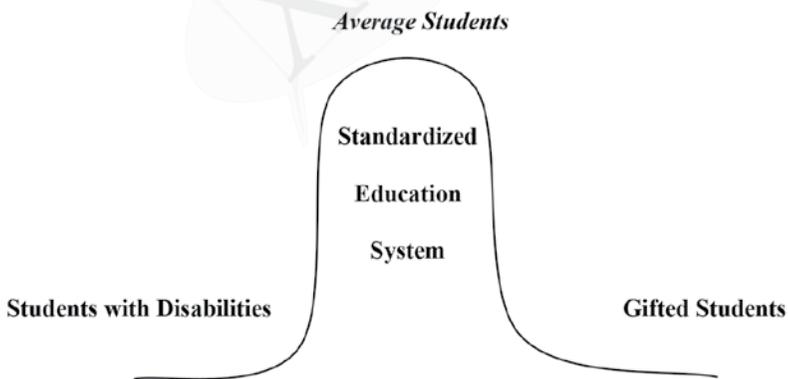
An IEP stands for Individualized Education Program. One of the reasons so many teachers get confused about the "*separate, different, alternative, individual activity*" answers is that they confuse an Individualized Education *Program* with Individualized Education *Plan*. The word plan makes them think of "lesson plan" and it seems like you are doing a different lesson plan with the student. This is not correct. An Individualized Education Program is designed for students who will have difficulty being educated in the Standardized Education Program that we use with most students.

When the state decides how to best educate our students, the people creating the Standards are going to look at the most efficient and effective way to educate the **majority** of the students. Think of it as a system that the State has created that works well most of the time. The reason that some students will need an IEP, is because we have created a Standardized Education System for the average student but some individual students will have difficulty with the system we have decided to use. If we are using the Constructivist Learning Approach and Common Core Standards as our system of education and a student will have difficulty succeeding using this system, then the

system itself is the problem. The student's educational opportunities will not be equal.

For example, if Constructivist Learning Approach relies on cooperative learning groups where peers will interact and have discussions, an Autistic student who struggles with social skills will have difficulty engaging in the group the same way as the other students. Likewise, if I'm going to use hands on activities during a science lab and one of my students has Cerebral Palsy and struggles with fine motor skills, they will not be able to engage in the learning activity the same way. Additionally, if I have a Gifted Student who is in Kindergarten but reads on a 5th grade level, it's going to be necessary to find a way to meet their needs both socially and academically. I can't just place a five year old student in a class of ten year old students. It's going to require an individualized approach for this student.

Think of a bell curve to visualize this. Notice that both Gifted Students and Students with Disabilities fall outside the parameters of the Standardized Education System. This is why both kinds of students have IEPs.



When a student is evaluated, the information gathered about the student is assessed and recommendations are made by the School

Psychologist. Then the CSE will use this information to create an Individualized Education Program for the student.

The Individualized Education Program is designed to support students who will have difficulty being educated using the Standardized Education System. Understanding this is an essential part of being able to encourage parents to utilize the support system in place. The problem isn't the student, it's the education program we are using.

When students are evaluated for an Individualized Education Program, they are tested cognitively, physically, psychologically and emotionally. The evaluation of the student includes background information about their home life and previous academic performance. Assessment of students is done in using Functional Behavioral Analysis (FBA).

FBA is important because students are evaluated at different times of the day and in different classroom settings. This is to make sure we are getting a clear picture of the student's abilities and needs. For example, if I only evaluated a student in Mr. Chen's class at 11 a.m. for a week, it could be that the problem is actually Mr. Chen's teaching approach. Or it could also be that 11 a.m. is right before lunch so the student is cranky and hungry and this is impacting his behavior. In order to get a clear picture of what is going on with the student we evaluate him with different teachers and at different times throughout the day.

Ask yourself if this makes sense? One of the things I always ask teachers in my workshops is if it "makes sense." This shouldn't be a confusing concept, instead it should make logical sense to you as an educator. Remember! We do not know what we are teaching until we know who we are teaching.

Who is allowed to see the IEP?

The IEP is allowed to be seen by any teaching professional who is working with the student. This includes substitutes and paraprofessionals. Often school administrators confuse confidentiality issues with the legal access to the IEP.

When in doubt use Wrightslaw as a source:

34 CFR 300.323 (d) Accessibility of child's IEP to teachers and others. Each public agency must ensure that-

- (1) The child's IEP is accessible to each regular education teacher, special education teacher, related services providers, and any other service provider who is responsible for its implementation; and
- (2) Each teacher and provider described in paragraph (d)(1) of this section is informed of-
 - (i) His or her specific responsibilities related to implementing the child's IEP; and
 - (ii) The specific accommodations, modifications, and supports that must be provided for the child in accordance with the IEP.

This is important for many reasons. Years ago I had a teacher in one of my classes who shared a story about her first experience as a substitute teacher. She had begun working in a classroom with a student who had an emotional and behavioral issues and had a Behavior Intervention Plan in place. There were certain triggers and clues that the student was going to lose control. But the teacher had not been informed of any of this. The principal didn't think a substitute was allowed access to the information in the IEP because it was "confidential." After the second day she could see that the student had struggled throughout the class but was unaware of the severity of the issue. The next day the student attacked the teacher. Obviously, as a new teacher, the substitute was worried about getting in trouble

for putting her hands on the student. So instead of pushing the girl off of her, she didn't protect herself until the student began to try to stab her in the neck with a pen.

The BIP had interventions in place and the teacher should have contacted the student's specialist the minute she started to see the student's behavior escalating. But because the principal didn't realize that substitutes are allowed to see the IEP, the teacher had no idea of how she should handle the student. This is not only important for the safety of the teacher but also the student. When a student who has behavior issues loses control, it has a profound emotional and psychological impact on the student.

The second reason this is important is that there needs to be a **consistency** with regard to how the BIP is being implemented. If only certain teachers have access to the IEP then there will be times when the plan is not followed accordingly. It is important that everyone working with a student using a BIP understands and follows the terms set forth in the plan. This also extends to the parents and caregivers and there should be open communication and collaboration with the family to ensure that the plan is being followed consistently.

Essential Strategies for the CST-SWD:

- Remember that the student is being taught in a public school. This is a very important distinction. The CST SWD is not testing you on how to treat disabled students in a general way. They are not concerned with your knowledge of special education strategies that are outside the parameters of the public school system. The test is testing your ability to teach this student **in the public school system**. This means that the student **must be able** to be taught in the public school system. Do not over-think the question. Do not think of very severe

disabilities. Answer the question based on the Constructivist Approach to Learning.

- It is important to pay attention to the details that are given in each question. Use the PAGED strategy to decode these details Pay attention to **which** team members are collaborating in the question. Be sure to understand the responsibilities for the CSE team members in the question. **Do not answer the question based on your real life experience.** Follow the guidelines listed in the previous section.
- Eliminate the answers with trap words or ideas that sound like trap words. Look for active learning. Many of the questions will actually be worded in a way that directs you to either “behavior management” or “active learning” and “cooperative learning.” If you are left with two answers after eliminating the obvious wrong answers, look to see if one is about behavior management. When the question is asking about collaboration, behavior management is **not** necessarily a priority. Make sure you pay attention to the difference between a question that is asking about behavior management and a question that is asking about learning.
- Watch out for “pity phrases.” There is no reason to feel sorry for a student with disabilities. Many wrong answers will often have phrases in them that suggest the student will be embarrassed about their disability. Or they will have answers that are about “making it easier” Remember, the purpose of an accommodation is to make it equal not easier. Also watch out for being “encouraging” or “nice” to the student as a solution. While it is not necessarily wrong to be nice and encouraging, it’s probably not going to be the best answer on a professional test.
- Self-Advocacy is very important. It is important for educators to encourage students with disabilities to self-advocate. Because the Constructivist Approach has a goal of Ownership and Self-Directed learning, one of the most important things a teacher should focus on is encouraging the student to speak

for herself and not to be shy or embarrassed about having to identify her needs.

- **FIRST:** One of the test maker's tricks I've seen used repeatedly on standardized exams, is using the word *first* in the question. Whenever I see the word *first* in the question it means that two of the options will be correct. But you would do one of them first. I encourage test takers to change the word *first* to the word *next*. What would you do next? These types of questions are usually related to protocol or following procedures in a plan. If you look at the options they usually are a series of steps along the way, but one answer is the correct **next** step.

Example:

Mrs. Johnson is a General Education teacher who has noticed that Simon has difficulty staying on task for more than 15 minutes during the science lesson. Simon is often distracted and rarely completes his classwork. Mrs. Johnson believes that it would benefit Simon to be evaluated for ADHD. What should Mrs. Johnson do first?

- A. Meet with the parents and explain her concerns and explain the process of having the student evaluated.
- B. Ask the Special Education teacher to observe Simon in the classroom and document her observations.
- C. Meet with the School Psychologist to ask for suggestions about modifications needed in the lesson.
- D. Meet with Simon and explain the issues related to ADHD and reassure Simon that with support he will be able to meet his learning goals.

The answer is B. Many teachers would pick A as the answer. Although it is a good answer, it's not what the teacher should do *first*. Consider this: when you meet with the parents, what is the first thing they are going to ask you about the issues with their son? They will ask you to give them information that made you come to the conclusion

that Simon may need to be evaluated. Your opinion as a teacher isn't enough documentation. They will want proof. So, **first** you need to gather information.

The first thing we want to do is to observe the student and document the observations so that we have information to provide for the parents to review in the meeting about their son. The other two options are things we might do later down the line. But the question is asking you what you should do first. Can you see how changing it to **next** clarifies it a little bit better? Watch out for the word **first** in the questions.

Members of the Committee of Special Education and their Responsibilities:

Principals: The primary responsibility of a principal is administrative. The principal's job is to implement building policy procedures and control designation of facilities, equipment and resources. Just remember the principal's main focus is following protocol, watching for liability issues and managing the school team.

General Education Teacher: The most important role the GE teacher has is to **observe** the student's learning progress and monitor the success of the IEP. Her job is to give **feedback** to the student and the IEP team. GE teachers are trained in general and specific instructional areas. They work with the students on a regular basis and contribute information to referrals.

Occupational Therapist: For older students the OT will work with self-care skills including vocational skills. In general most OTs, who will work with students in public schools, will focus on fine motor skills.

Paraprofessional: acts as an assistant to the Special Educator and works in the classroom with the student with disabilities. The Para works as a tutor for individual students or with small groups, creates the materials to be used in the class with the student and also gives important feedback to both the student and the members of the IEP team.

Physical Therapist: the role of the PT is to work with students who have issues with disorders of muscles, bones, joints or nerves after the student has received a medical assessment. Usually this relates to cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy. Students in public schools may also need assistive technologies and or adaptive equipment with which the PT will be familiar.

School Psychologist: the most important responsibility of this team member is to **administer and interpret results of the standardized tests**. He will also contribute to the assessment of the student and help create the IEP. The School Psychologist will observe the student in the classroom, provide testing and evaluation and document a case history of the student.

Social Worker: The main responsibility of the Social Worker is to provide resources and materials to the parents or caregivers of the student. He or she specializes in knowing community and school services available. In addition the SW can do intake, interview and home visits as needed.

Speech Pathologist: Works with students with speech or language disorders on an ongoing basis. Offers support and feedback to the student and his or her parents and or caregivers on an ongoing basis.

The two additional team members include the **School Nurse**, who provides information to the families about health related issues. The SN is also responsible for medications, therapeutic services and care for specific medical conditions. The **Guidance Counselor** is

responsible for counseling services for the family and student. They also can create and provide group counseling services.

And lastly, but most importantly we want to include **the student** themselves to encourage ownership and self-advocacy. We also include the **parents and caregivers** as legal representatives of the student. Parents and caregivers have the right to “appeal” decisions made by the CSE and also to use their own specialists for evaluations. It is important to keep in mind the rights of the student and family and be mindful of **using everyday language to explain the IEP**. Using technical terminology can be confusing for parents and caregivers.



Chapter 8

Special Education Categories and the Issues Mentioned on the CST-SWD

(source: <http://www.nichcy.org/Disabilities/Categories/Pages/Default.aspx>)

The Special Education Categories site includes information, research, resources, and best practices on the following program areas: Deaf-Blindness, Deafness, Emotional Disturbance, Hearing Impairment, Mental Retardation, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, Speech/Language Impairment, Speech/Language Pathology Services, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Visual Impairment.

Key Distinctions between Intellectual Disabilities and Learning Disabilities.

It is important to make sure you know the difference between a **learning disability** and an **intellectual disability**. This is tested several times on the test and if you get either of these as an essay topic it is important to make sure you read the performance scores of the student to understand the issue.

The term “intellectual disability” was formerly referred to as Mental Retardation. MR is a global cognitive delay. Global means “in all subjects.” In other words the student is performing significantly lower than the grade standards in **all** subjects: Math, Science, Reading, Writing, etc.

A learning disability will be specific to one area. In other words the student is performing at standard in Math and Science but they are below average in Reading and Writing. Or the other way around.

Example: In the chart that follows, we can see that the student does significantly better in Numerical Operations and Math Problem Solving. And the student does well with Oral Expression. However she struggles with Reading comprehension. This is an example of a **learning disability** in Reading.

Wechsler Individual Achievement Percentile Rank	
Reading Comprehension	25%
Spelling	35%
Essay Composition	45%
Numerical Operations	65%
Math Problem Solving	65%
Listening Comprehension	50%
Oral Expression	60%

This is an extremely important distinction to understand because it relates to historical Institutionalized Racism. Right now, researchers

are looking into why there are a disproportionate number of African American boys being diagnosed as having “Intellectual Disabilities.” Part of the problem, is the reluctance of parents or care givers to allow the student to be diagnosed. It’s understandable if you stop to think about it. One of the biggest problems we have in this country is Institutionalized Racism.

Many people feel uncomfortable having this discussion but it is important to understand as an educator and also because it shows up on the test. Institutionalized Racism is not the same thing as prejudice. When racism shows up in systems of employment, housing and education, it goes beyond the typical understanding of racism. Unfortunately the United States has a history of racism that has become part of the day to day living of African Americans in this country. It impacts the way people can thrive and succeed.

There are two issues at play here. One issue is providing the proper support that students need in education. But the other issue is early intervention. Because the term “Special Education” tends to have a negative connotation, many parents and care givers are reluctant to have this “label” applied to their child. This can be especially true of African American families who are already dealing with racism in their everyday lives and are uncomfortable with “more labels.” As educators we know that many parents of any ethnic background are reluctant to have their child evaluated. And as educators we need to be able to advocate for both the family and the student. Why? What happens to a student who starts off with a “learning disability in reading” if they do not receive the support needed? Eventually this reading disability starts to impact other areas of learning. This why the “learning disability” turns into an “intellectual disability.”

For example, if you struggle with reading comprehension in elementary school, and you don’t get the support you need, what’s going to happen when you start middle school and now Math questions and Science materials require reading comprehension

skills? Can you see how what actually is a learning disability will start to show up as a global (all subject) delay? Can you see how a student will start failing other subject areas even though they do not have an intellectual disability? When a student doesn't get the support they need right away it makes their journey through the Education System daunting.

This is why early intervention and proper diagnosis is so important. The CST SWD includes several questions examining how you would deal with a parent who doesn't want to have their child evaluated. They will encourage you to reassure the parent that that an evaluation is being done to support the student and that it's not a shameful diagnosis or a "label." Students who receive an early intervention diagnosis will begin to receive the support they need early in their education which will help them taking ownership in their learning.

Task Analysis

If a student has a true intellectual disability, it is important to understand Task Analysis. Task Analysis means you have to break it down step by step including important details that you would not necessarily use with general instructions.

For example, if you were explaining how to brush your teeth in a way that didn't require Task Analysis, you could say "Pick up the toothbrush, squeeze the toothpaste on the toothbrush, wet it under the water and then brush your teeth." Task Analysis is a more detailed explanation.

- Pick up the toothpaste.
- Take off the cap
- Put the cap on the edge of the sink
- Pick up the toothbrush
- Hold the toothpaste above the toothbrush

- Squeeze a little of the toothpaste onto the toothbrush
- Place the toothpaste back on the sink
- Turn on the water.....etc

Pay close and careful attention to the age of the student when dealing with questions related to students with intellectual disabilities. If a student is high school aged, it is important to be mindful of transitions to independent living that include life skills like cooking, transportation, paying bills, and getting a job.

Now let's look at some other types of Disabilities.

Autism

is a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. (A child who manifests the characteristics of autism after age 3 could be diagnosed as having autism if the other criteria of this Section are satisfied.) Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. The term does not apply if a child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disturbance.

Cognitive Disability

means significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Deaf-Blindness

means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

Deafness

means a hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Emotional Disability

(includes schizophrenia but does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance) means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

- An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
- Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
- A general pervasive mood of anxiety or unhappiness or depression; or
- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Hearing Impairments

means an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness.

Multiple Disabilities

means concomitant impairments (such as mental retardation-blindness, mental retardation-orthopedic impairment, etc.), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf-blindness.

Orthopedic Impairment

means a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by congenital anomaly (e.g., clubfoot, absence of some member, etc.), impairments caused by disease (e.g., Poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis, etc.), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures).

Other Health Impairment

means having limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened sensitivity to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment that

- is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, or sickle cell anemia; and
- adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Specific Learning Disabilities

means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, including such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.



Chapter 9

The CST SWD Essay

In my workshops I have gotten into the habit of giving out a picture of a group of actual Pearson essay evaluators. You can find this picture by Googling “New York Times No Experience Needed Pearson.” Click on the link about the Common Core Standards. Then scroll down and you’ll find a picture of a very exhausted looking woman in a room full of evaluators. One of the reasons I show this picture is to help test takers visualize who is actually grading their essays. The most interesting aspect of the picture to me is how exhausted the woman looks. The people in the background look like paid workers in a customer service job, not at all what most people imagine when they think about who is grading their essays.

The reason that these evaluators look like this is because it is extremely draining to evaluate essays. It’s tedious and boring and annoying. In fact, at Brooklyn Education Center, I no longer evaluate essays because I can’t take it anymore; we have a specialist who does them. If you have never evaluated a large number of essays on a regular basis you don’t understand the reality of it. The reason it is so exhausting is that most people *never follow directions*. In all these years of teaching test prep, it amazes me how hard it is for people to follow directions. But I’ve come to realize there are two reasons for this:

- Some people don't read carefully and assume they know what the prompt is asking so they jump ahead and start writing the wrong information.
- Some people are the "rock star" students in college who want to "impress" their professors by going "above and beyond" what is asked of them. You know the types; if the assignment asks for an 8-10 page paper, they turn in a 12 page paper to dazzle the professor with their brilliance. I know, I used to be one of these really annoying people.

Newsflash: ain't no test evaluator gonna be impressed with your brilliance. They will fail you for not following directions if you write way over the word count. In fact, the word count is the first thing I would look at before grading the essay. If it was far over the word count, I wouldn't even bother to read the thing. When someone sends me an 800 word essay when the word count is 400-600...Immediate Fail. Remember, you will never save yourself with good writing if you don't follow the directions.

The essay evaluators are paid by the hour and they are not always teachers. You can read more about this in the New York Times article. Many essay evaluators who work for Pearson, have a BA in an unrelated field. Most of them are not teachers. And they are paid about \$12-\$15 an hour and given bonuses for "productivity." Productivity means that they read your essay quickly. Because of this, evaluators will often scan down the essay expecting to see specific phrases that were asked in the prompt.

For example if the prompt says "identify one academic need" they expect to see the words "academic need," they don't want to have to try to figure out which of your strategies is an academic need or a study skill. This is where my "rock star" test takers get into trouble. They try to "fancy up" their writing by using more sophisticated terminology and the evaluator gets frustrated trying to figure out what they mean.

Another problem with “rock star” teachers is that they want to write something that “stands out” and is special. They try to impress the evaluator with some unusual approach to teaching. Whenever I hear a teacher say to me, “Well my philosophy of teaching is.....” I know we’re in trouble. Remember, this is a test. No one is interested in *your* philosophy of teaching; they want to make sure you understand and can prove that you understand the *state’s* philosophy of teaching. The key to passing is to carefully read the prompt and to read the information provided to you and to keep it simple. Make your sentences basic and clear to understand. This is not the place for sophisticated writing.

Typical SWD Essay Prompt

Use the information in the exhibits to complete the task that follows.

Analyze the information provided in the exhibits, using evidence from all of the exhibits to support your ideas, and write a response of approximately 400–600 words in which you:

- describe one area of need that the student has that is related to academics, and one area of need that he has that is related to study skills;
- recommend one research-based or evidence-based strategy/intervention that you would use to address the academic need that you have described, and explain why this strategy/intervention would be appropriate; and
- recommend one research-based or evidence-based strategy/intervention that you would use to address the study skills need that you have described, and explain why this strategy/intervention would be appropriate.

Be sure to use evidence from all exhibits in your response. They ask you to “use the information in the exhibits;” so you should cite the exhibits. If you don’t you will lose points. Follow the directions!

Outline for the SWD Essay

Although the prompt asks you to write between 400-600 words, you should try to write as close to 600 words as possible. Over the years I’ve come to realize that every 5 sentences is about 100 words. So if you need 600 words you need about 30 sentences. If you write five paragraphs you need about 6 sentences in each paragraph. Sometimes you might need a few more, but you can balance it out by using fewer in other paragraphs. Understanding this can help you break down your essay into a manageable goal.

It is also important to make sure you are answering the prompt. So you should make your outline for your essay match the prompt.

- Paragraph 1 describe the student and describe one need related to academics one related to a study skill.
- Paragraph 2 recommend an academic strategy and explain it in detail.
- Paragraph 3 explain why this is a good strategy to use
- Paragraph 4 recommend a study skill strategy and explain it in detail.
- Paragraph 5 explain why this is a good strategy to use and sum up your essay by explaining how you will monitor for effectiveness.

Unlike the EAS essay which are only 200 words, this essay is 600 words. Because of this I can’t really break it down sentence by sentence because the essay will lose the sense of cohesion and not be a fluid piece of writing.

Therefore, I will break it down by the common mistakes most writers make on the essay by clarifying common areas of confusion.

What is the difference between an academic need and a study skill need?

It's important to understand the difference between an **academic strategy** and a **study skill strategy**. Later in this chapter there will be a list of different kinds of strategies but be careful not to try to insert a “big” idea into an issue that requires a simple strategy. For example, an “online newsletter” is a strategy, but if a student is having difficulty decoding the phonics in words, that would not be an appropriate strategy. The proper strategy for specific reading issues is explicit instruction.

The key to understanding how to write the essay is to first read through all the information provided on the student. While you are doing this be sure to document the PAGED details. Pay careful attention to areas of strength and learning needs when looking at scores or performance evaluations. And make sure you read the entire description of the student. Many times important details are mentioned in the very last sentences.

Remember that this book is a test prep guide. This book isn't designed to be a pedagogical resource. Although many teachers tell me that BEC's study guides are very useful in their career, our goal is just to get you to **pass a test**. So I'm going to simplify the difference between Academic Strategies and Study Skills Strategies so that you can easily come up with ideas on the day of your exam. You may know more sophisticated examples or your college professors may suggest that these ideas are not specific enough, however my goal is just to get you to separate the two ideas in your mind.

I remember years ago when I first heard the term “strategy” being completely confused because I thought a “strategy” was a specific thing. Really it is anything that you use to teach students. Try to think of it this way: how am I going to teach this learning goal and what am I going to use to help the student to meet that learning goal?

Academic Strategies

Think of academic skills as related to the learning itself. For example if I have a student who is struggling to understand algebra, the academic skills needed would include numeric awareness, reading comprehension skills, understanding the vocabulary related to algebra and understanding mathematical concepts. A good way of thinking about Academic Skills would be “what can I teach them to help them understand.” Academic skills and strategies are related to direct instruction.

Consider a student who has issues with reading comprehension. You could teach students how to decode phonics sounds, definitions of words, how to use context clues to decode meaning. You could teach background information about the subject of the passage being read for better understanding.

Academic strategies will relate to the subject being taught and the issues the student is having in learning about the subject. Academic strategies can also relate to collaborating with another specialist to help achieve the goal. For example, if you are working in a hands-on activity with a student who has issues with fine motor skills, collaborating with the Occupational Therapist would be considered an academic strategy. If you are working with a student who is an ELL student, collaborating with the ESOL teacher would be considered an academic strategy. Academic strategies are ways we help the student learn.

Study Skills

Study Skills would relate to the student developing good study habits. Think of them more along the lines of “organizational” and self-management skills. Study skills could include graphic organizers, color coded folders, outlines, flash cards, vocabulary lists and assistive technology. Time management skills and behavior management skills are also important to consider. When a student is frustrated they can often shut down during learning and so it is important to carefully read the background information on the student to see how they are emotionally reacting to their difficulties in learning. The goal of using study skills is to encourage the student to take ownership in their learning and to be able to learn independently.

However, this is why the academic skills must be addressed first. If a student is struggling to learn something they will need guidance from the teacher. The Academic strategies should relate to guided instruction and the Study Skill strategies should related to self-directed learning.

Behavior Management Skills

Sometimes instead of asking you about a Study Skill they ask you about a behavior management skill. These are usually used to help create a BIP. If a student already has a Behavior Intervention Plan in place, you should consult the BIP and use it as resource for planning instruction. Be sure to read all the exhibits to see if the BIP is already in place. If so, you should refer to the guidelines being used to help create a strategy for the student.

If there is not a BIP in place and they are asking you to come up with a Behavior Management Strategy the most important consideration is the age of the student. Remember, we discussed this earlier in the section on the EAS. The age of the student will usually indicate the

type of intervention that is needed. The younger the student, the more the teacher would need to be on-hand to provide support. However as the student gets older we want the student to develop self-management skills and not just rely on the teacher. Often when a teacher stops trying to be the one to control the student's behavior, the negative behaviors escalate. This is to be expected because the student is not yet used to managing their own behavior and so it may get worse initially.

It is also important to pay attention to the placement of the student. Inclusive settings can range from a general education setting to small classes with one on one instruction. The general education setting usually has one teacher working with about 20 students. In this setting there are often paraprofessionals helping support the students with IEPs. In a CCT class or what used to be referred to an ICT class, there is a collaboration between a General Education Teacher and a Special Education Teacher who is in always in the classroom. The class is usually divided in a 60/40 ratio with 40% of the class being Special Education students with IEPs. This will obviously be different from school to school.

The reason this is an important detail is that if a student has emotional or behavioral issues and they are placed in a General Education setting, the teacher will have to be mindful of providing more support to the student. Frequent feedback is essential as well as paying attention to any difficulties that students may have with social cues and working in cooperative learning groups.

It is important for Behavior Management skills to give students the support needed prior to the behavior issues. Setting boundaries and discussing clear consequences with students prior to the lesson are valuable ways to help empower the students to self-advocate and to develop self-awareness.

What does “research-based or evidence-based” mean?

Don't let these phrases intimidate you. The reason they are in the prompt is that they want you to **keep it simple**. Remember, “a strategy” can be anything you do to help the student learn. But sometimes you come up with your own creative ways to do this in the classroom. For example, years ago I took a college Psychology class and on the first day of class, the professor did an experiment. The professor hid himself by pretending he was a student and sitting in the middle of the room. He sat back and watched how we all reacted to the idea of our instructor not showing up for the class.

When he revealed himself after about fifteen minutes he said that was able to learn a lot about us as a group by the way the dynamics played out as we tried to figure out what was going on. Some students just sat by themselves. Others jumped up and started talking to others. Two students called down to the office to figure out what was going on. A few people were really happy because they didn't have to sit through a class. Some people were angry about the lack of professionalism. Wow! What a clever strategy right? It taught us about group dynamics and ownership and problem solving.

What a cool strategy, right?

Nope.

This might work in real life but it's not the kind of thing they are looking for on the test. They just want it to simply and clearly answer the prompt. Remember, the essay evaluators are not looking for you to write a really creative sophisticated essay. They just want to make sure they can trust you as a new teacher to **begin** working in the classroom.

Research based or evidence based simply means it's accepted as a strategy to use in schools. When test takers try to impress the

evaluators by coming up with a unique idea, they can often make choices that could be problematic. Let's look an example that a teacher wrote about a student who had a hearing impairment and was struggling to understand a Science lesson on Salt Marshes. Tony is a fifth grade student who has a hearing impairment and he is not participating in class discussions during the cooperative learning parts of the Science lab.

One academic strategy I would use would be a field trip to the Salt Marsh. Because Tony has a hearing impairment it is important to use kinesthetic learning which is a researched based form of instruction according to the Grasha-Reichmann Learning Style Scale. Students will bring along their cell phones and use them to take pictures. During the field trip students will be given a checklist of specific elements in nature that we will discuss in class. After students return to the classroom they will share the pictures on their phones and use the checklist to compare the similarities and differences in their choices. This will encourage Tony by allowing him to use kinesthetic learning to explore the subject. Photographs will accommodate his issues with hearing and allow him to participate more fully in the discussion because all students will be using visual prompts and the checklist during the discussion.

Nope.

What's wrong with this excerpt? There are many problems with this academic strategy. First of all it's just *too much*. It's a field trip and then photographs and then discussion. It's all over the place and it's not addressing the real issue. The real issue is that Tony is not participating in the group discussion. You can see that the teacher is trying to "come up with a creative way to solve the problem." But she's also made a few careless mistakes.

Number one, taking photographs requires that students own a cell phone and also that they know how to use a cell phone to take pictures. If Tony doesn't use a cell phone, the teacher has made the

strategy something that would first require the student to learn how to take pictures on the phone. This actually is a discriminatory lesson if it isn't handled carefully. Remember before when we discussed socioeconomic bias? Assuming that all students have access to technology and are informed about how to use technologies is a careless mistake.

Number two, they are “name dropping” an “expert” but they used the wrong names. Do you see how they are caught up in the idea that they must verify that this strategy is researched based? You are not expected to cite the researchers or the studies done to validate the effectiveness of the strategy. That's not why the words “research-based or evidence-based” are mentioned in the prompt. They are mentioned in the prompt to make sure you pick something that is regularly used in schools, not something you think is clever and creative.

This essay is like a driver's license road test. “Let's see you in action!” When you go down to take the road test with the evaluator at the DMV you don't try to impress them with your “mad driving skills” do you? You don't jump ramps and pop wheelies and zoom down the road and zip around the corner like a race car driver do you? If you did you'd fail the road test. What do you do? You drive carefully and within the speed limit and follow the rules of the road. That's what you need to do here. Keep it simple.

The third problem with this academic strategy is that the teacher seems to have overlooked the age of the student. The teacher who wrote this excerpt was a high school teacher who was used to working with teenagers. She wrote her essay based on her ideas of working with her *own* students instead of paying attention to the actual age of the student. Tony is ten years old. The reality is that going on a field trip can be overwhelming if you have a hearing impairment. (Trust me; I know!) It can be difficult to follow directions on the trip and on top of this she's given this ten year old student the responsibility

for carrying a cell phone and taking pictures with it. It's not a good strategy.

Do not try to come up with unique a creative ideas when you are writing your essay. Write very basic simple strategies. The key to picking a good strategy to use is to consider the PAGED points and ask yourself, "What is the actual problem? How does the disability contribute to the problem? How can I solve that problem?" And most importantly, "How will this strategy impact future learning?"

In Tony's case, the problem is that he's not participating in class discussions. Since we use cooperative learning groups as part of the Standardized Education System, we can easily see how a student who starts to become reluctant to join in class discussions will not be able to participate fully in the learning system we use for our classrooms. So we want to be mindful of addressing that need early on and creating strategies that will help empower the student.

Example

One academic strategy that would benefit Tony during the small group discussion about Salt Marshes, would be to provide an outline with bulleted points of the main ideas of the discussion. Tony's paraprofessional should work with him prior to the class discussion to go over key points of conversation and encourage him to think about the topic and come up with his own ideas. It is also important to make sure that the seating arrangements are in a circular pattern so that Tommy can see each of his peers during the discussion. An additional accommodation would be the use of a talking stick. As each student takes a turn participating in the discussion the talking stick will be passed around. This will help to provide a visual cue to Tony by allowing him to see who is speaking. In addition, the talking stick will prompt Tony to take his turn and to contribute to the conversation. A paraprofessional will be on-hand with the group to help provide guided instruction and to encourage Tommy to fully participate in the activity.

As we can see this is a very simple strategy that makes sense and addresses the issue. And notice how the paraprofessional is working like the coach in the kickball game. The accommodations are provided to all students not just Tony, and they are designed to help him participate in the class discussion. But Tony is “playing the kickball game just like everyone else.”

Pitfalls in justifying your strategy

After you explain your choice of strategy you are expected to justify why you believe this is a good strategy to use. Many teachers make the mistake of insisting that it’s a good strategy and writing phrases that sound arrogant or inflexible. This is a very common mistake in the essays. The way you word your justification must match the Best Practice standards of a teacher. And good teachers should be flexible and open to trying new methods if their strategy doesn’t work. When you write sentences that sound rigid it can come across the wrong way. The wording of the sentences should sound supportive and flexible. Let’s look at some examples justifying the academic strategy for Tony:

Wrong examples:

- *This academic strategy is a good approach because Tony **will be able to complete** the assignment.*
- *Using this strategy will ensure that Tony is receiving the proper accommodations and ensure that **he will complete** his work.*
- *This is a good strategy to use because Tony **will improve** his participation in class discussion since he is able to use visual cues as an accommodation.*
- *Tony **will successfully participate** in the class discussion because the accommodations provided will ensure his ability to do the work.*

Can you see how the wording in the above examples comes across as “This is what I’m doing and it’s going to work! End of story.” They justify their choice of strategy by saying “it will work.” *He will be able to do it.* In my previous study guide, I referred to this as “Santa Clausing.” What is “Santa Clausing?”

I encourage teachers to think about the idea of a parent who is taking their child to take a picture with Santa Claus. Imagine a parent who has picked out a really expensive outfit for their child to wear. They go down and stand in line and when it’s their child’s turn to take a picture on Santa’s lap, what happens? A lot of times small children are terrified of Santa Claus, so they start crying and squirming off Santa’s lap. And does the parent say, “Wait this isn’t working, it’s not what I expected and my child is being traumatized.” NOPE!

The parent keeps pushing ahead and trying to take the picture. They have their plan and they are sticking to it. It doesn’t matter to them that their child is upset by the experience. This parent is thinking, “I spent a lot of money and time planning this and I want a nice Christmas picture.” Just like a bad teacher will say, “*I spent a lot of time coming up with a really good strategy that’s supposed to work and I’m going to just keep doing it.*” Imagine what it is like to be a Santa Claus that has parent after parent forcing small screaming children to sit on your lap over and over again. Underneath his costume, this Santa Claus probably looks a lot like the Pearson essay evaluator: exhausted and frustrated.

When you write your justification you should word it in a way that sounds both helpful and open for adjustment. You can’t **know** that this strategy will work. You are trying a strategy and it depends on the student, not you, to see if it will work. As teachers, we try different strategies but if the learning goal isn’t being met, then we need to be open to changing our approach. Let’s look at some good examples:

- It is important for Tony to be able to participate in class discussions because it will foster an appreciation of different perspectives and encourage self-directed learning.
- This academic strategy will help support Tony in his class participation by giving him visual cues that will help facilitate independent participation in the discussion.
- Using the talking stick during the discussion will support Tony as a hearing impaired student and give him the opportunity to participate as part of a collaborative learning discussion.

Notice the key words: foster, encourage, facilitate, help, support. These words come across as flexible foundational ideas. Not rigid ideas insisting that the strategy “will work” and that Tony “will be able to do it.” Can you see the difference? The phrases below are helpful to use in your justification paragraph.

Fosters an appreciation of different perspectives

Encourages active engagement in learning

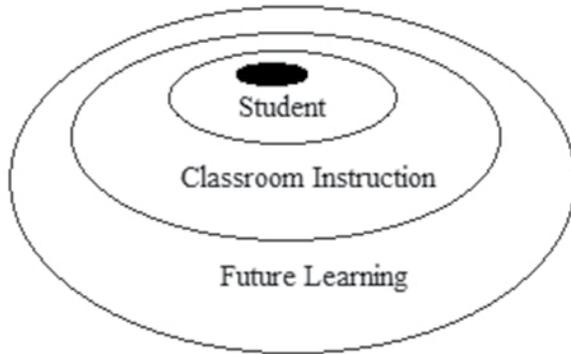
Promotes an appreciation of diversity and different learning styles.

Encourages a sense of ownership and self-directed learning

Encourages mastery through self-analysis and evaluation

Promotes leadership and team building skills.

Coming up with six sentences of justification is harder than it might seem. But you can break it down into 3 sets of 2 sentences. You can also use fewer sentences in these paragraphs if you use more in the paragraphs explaining your strategy. A good way to organize your ideas is to think of throwing a rock in a pond. The rock hits the water and then ripples out from the center. Think of how the strategy helps students specific to their learning needs; how it improves classroom instruction and how it sets a foundation in future learning.

**Example:**

It is important for Tony to be able to participate in class discussions because it will foster an appreciation of different perspectives and encourage self-directed learning. In addition, this academic strategy will help support Tony in his class participation by giving him visual cues that will help facilitated independent participation in the discussion. Visual cues are important for hearing impaired students because they help to identify who is speaking in a discussion. This strategy benefits all students in the class by reinforcing turn taking and being respectful when listening to others. Setting this foundation early in learning will promote life-long learning strategies for group work and team building skills. By accommodating his learning needs in this area it will enable Tony to take ownership in his learning.

When you sum up your essay in your **last** paragraph, you also want to include a sentence or two that clarifies that you will “monitor this strategy for effectiveness and adjust it accordingly.” They want to see at the end that you are going to try this strategy and then, like the swim coach, observe, monitor and evaluate if it is a successful strategy.

It is also important to use phrases that are directly related to the instruction itself. This is where you should cite from the exhibits. When you are justifying why you believe this is an appropriate strategy to use with the student, it should be **specific** to the strengths and learning needs of the student. These are documented in the exhibits. This is extremely important because of discrimination.

Avoiding Bias by Reading the Exhibits

A few months ago I had a teacher in one of my workshops who kept failing her essay on SWD. She came to me at the end of one of the classes and said this, "I know that my problem on this test is that I do not have a strong background in Disabilities. Do you have any resources that I could use to look up the different types of Disabilities so I can understand how to pick a strategy to work with this student?"

Hmmm. It is obviously important to understand the characteristics of a disability and the appropriate accommodations. However, her mindset is why she was failing the essay.

I asked her this, "What is your ethnic background?" She said, "I'm from Haiti." So I asked her this: "If I wanted to get to know you as a person, would you recommend that I go find a bunch of resources about Haiti and the culture of Haiti and look up all sorts of experiences of people from Haiti and use that to form my opinion of you as a person?" I pointed out that I could just assume that she spoke French since most people from Haiti speak French. She said, "Oh no I moved here when I was three years old and stayed with relatives. I never learned French."

Then I said, "Well I assume based on my research that you also grew up in the middle of political strife and there was a lot of poverty around you because that's what I've read online about Haitian immigrants. I'll also assume you came here on refugee status. How

true is that?” She became flustered, “None of that’s true, my uncle was an engineer and we moved to San Francisco. I wasn’t a refugee.”

So then I asked her, “What is the best way for me to get to know you as a person?” And she of course said, “You should talk to me about my own life. Not stereotypes.” Hasn’t this happened to most of us as people? People just make assumptions about us based on our gender or ethnic background. How do you feel when people make comments about you based on stereotypes rather than who you are as person? Remember, this happens to people with disabilities all the time. Obviously we want to know the characteristics and accommodations that are generally used with each type of disability. But we want to focus more on the description of the student in the exhibits.

The exhibits are specific to the Student with the Disability. The description of the student will often have *atypical* issues even though they are diagnosed by an IDEA category. One of the reasons that they are asking you to read the exhibits is that they want to make sure that they can trust you to begin teaching in the classroom. When a new teacher starts working in a classroom, it is extremely important that the teacher takes the time to read the IEP. If a teacher just makes assumptions about a student’s abilities based on their diagnosis, they are not adhering to the Individualized Education Program. Instead they are pushing ahead with bias and not meeting the student’s *actual needs*.

What if you don’t know how to handle the disability?

When in doubt, use the IEP as an academic strategy. Don’t try to fake your way through an essay. Remember, they are testing you as a new teacher and making sure you know how to follow the rules. As a new teacher there are likely to be times in the class where you are confronted with a disability with which you don’t have a lot of experience. So how would you handle this situation? The worst thing

you could to would be to “fake your way through it” and pretend you know what you are doing when you don’t. The evaluators know the proper way to handle the disability because they read thousands of essays that explain the correct strategy. When you use the wrong strategy it stands out. Remember to take it back to the Doctor and a Nurse.

Let’s say a new Doctor is working in an emergency room and a patient comes in with an injury with which he is not familiar. If he is not sure what to do, he should consult with other professionals. Many years ago I remember reading a story about a little girl who had inhaled a sunflower seed in her mother’s garden. The Doctor who saw her in the ER had not worked with children before. And so he used an extractor that was sized for adults to try to remove the sunflower seed. But because it wasn’t the right size for the child’s esophagus, he pushed the seed further into her lungs and she died.

This is a fatal example but you want to take your work as a Special Education teacher just as seriously. If you are unsure about the best way to handle a disability that’s ok. But you still need to follow the rules. And the number one rule with students with disabilities is that you use the IEP as a guide to make all decisions in instruction. In fact I always encourage my teachers to mention the IEP in the essay.

Let’s look at an example:

Jennifer is a 6th grade student with mild expressive aphasia related to a traumatic brain injury (TBI). During a Social Studies lesson on Geography she is struggling to read aloud and to understand new vocabulary words during a reading activity using informational texts.

One academic strategy I would use with Jennifer would be assistive technology. Using a touch to speech software would allow Jennifer to communicate more effectively and enable her to participate more fully in class. I would set aside time work with her to train her to use the

assistive technology by teaching her how to use an application on an iPhone. It is important to make sure she receives proper instruction so that she will be able to use the device independently. By using task analysis to go through the steps specifically I will make sure she is given the opportunity to ask questions. I will model the device for Jennifer and then give her the chance to repeat the steps to show me that she understands. The assistive technology will be used with all lessons to help encourage her to develop her skills.

Wait, what? This essay excerpt makes no sense. First of all, the student has expressive aphasia and this means she has difficulty speaking. But it doesn't say she is unable to speak. Expressive aphasia is characterized by struggling to speak by omitting or confusing words. For example, if I ask the student to say "I used the spoon," they might say "I use spun." A person with mild expressive aphasia will still be able to speak and to be understood but their sentences will not necessarily be grammatically correct. The purpose of intervention with a student with expressive aphasia is to get them to **practice speaking again** in order to work on their expressive language skills. What in the world is this teacher doing? She's essentially getting the student to *stop speaking* and using a touch to speak software instead. It is the wrong strategy and actually is harmful to the student. Remember the kickball coach, we get the student to *practice their learning needs*. She's also using task analysis in the wrong way. This excerpt is a mess and you can see that the teacher is out of her league and doesn't know what the heck she's talking about.

Let's look at a different example:

One academic strategy that I would use with Jennifer would be to review her IEP. An IEP is a valuable tool for teachers to help plan instruction because it gives background information on the student's strengths and learning needs. Jennifer struggles with expressive language skills and this is interfering with her ability to read and comprehend information in the Social Studies unit. It is important that Jennifer receives the

support she needs in order to fully participate in the class. I would consult with the Speech Pathologist prior to the lesson and throughout the lesson in order to make sure Jennifer is receiving the appropriate accommodations. Working collaboratively with the Speech Pathologist will give me insights to my instructional approach and allow me to modify my approach if the learning goals are not being met.

This isn't the best paragraph, but it's not wrong. Obviously we want to brush up on the different types of disabilities to understand the characteristics of the disability and the instructional approach that is appropriate for each disability. But ask yourself this question, if you were the parent of this student, which teacher would you want to work with your child?

Collaboration with a specialist is an appropriate strategy if you are unsure how to deal with the specific needs of the student.

Remember your role in the CSE

Collaboration is very important on these exams because they want to make sure that you know your role in the CSE. Remember that we talked about teachers with a background in Special Education failing the EAS because they were answering the question like a Special Education teacher instead of a General Education teacher. This is very important to keep in mind on the essay. Try to think of how you would help the General Education teacher by offering advice about how to modify the lesson to accommodate the student.

Remember, when they give you the exhibits they want you to identify the needs in the first paragraph, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you are expected to solve all of them. They just need to be kept in mind as you are choosing your strategies. It is important that you identify these needs, but you aren't expected to solve issues that are beyond your role as a Special Education teacher.

Let's look at another example:

Scott is a 16 year old student with a learning disability in reading who likes using computer technology and graphic design. However, he has difficulty in his ELA class especially when he is confronted with new vocabulary words. Scott struggles to use context clues to decode meaning and when he gets frustrated he will get up and walk out of the room. Scott is an emotionally reactive student who is struggling with drug addiction.

One of my teachers read this excerpt and wrote this:

It is important that Scott receive immediate help for his drug addiction because it is preventing him from being able to participate in school. I would consult with Scott's parents or caregivers and ask everyone to meet after school to stage an intervention. Prior to the meeting I will have researched appropriate drug treatment facilities and ask a representative to attend the meeting as well. During the meeting I will ask Scott to consider how his addiction is impacting his ability to learn and encourage him to receive the help being offered to him. It is important that his family be part of this discussion because it will show him that he has the support needed to recover. After the meeting I will document the notes and data and submit them to the CSE to help incorporate this into his IEP. This will ensure that Scott is being given the best opportunity to address his issues within the confines of the Special Education program.

Ummmmm.....what???

When I read this essay I actually gasped aloud and started saying "No, no, no!" You are a Special Education teacher. You are not a Social Worker, Guidance Counselor or Substance Abuse Counselor. It is not your place to make such a decision. Not to mention that the teacher totally violated confidentiality by contacting a drug treatment facility without the permission of Scott, his parents or the school.

This is an egregious violation of confidentiality and it's completely outside the boundaries of what the teacher is supposed to be doing. The exhibit doesn't mention his addiction because they want you to solve the addiction issue, they just want you to keep it in mind as you are writing your strategies.

Many times in the exhibits they will include behavioral or emotional issues related to the student so that you can develop a better picture of what the student is going through in their learning. They want you to **identify them** because it shows them that you read the exhibit. But the essay should be focused on developing strategies for learning and the lesson at hand. Do not try to solve every problem you see, instead keep them in mind as you consider the students strengths and learning needs. We want to build on the strength to address the learning needs.

So what's the problem? Let's take a look again:

Scott is a 16 year old student with a learning disability in reading who likes using computer technology and graphic design. However, he has difficulty in his ELA class especially when he is confronted with new vocabulary words. Scott struggles to use context clues to decode meaning and when he gets frustrated he will get up and walk out of the room. Scott is an emotionally reactive student who is struggling with drug addiction.

First let's use PAGED:

Problem: difficulty with new vocabulary words (Remember! The Disability is NOT THE PROBLEM!)

Age: 16 years old

Goal: supporting the student in reading new vocabulary words.

ELL: N/A

Disability or Diversity: Learning disability in reading, diversity includes emotional issues and substance abuse issues.

Now we'll look at a full essay and figure out the mistakes. Right away this essay is an INSTANT FAIL. Why? The directions ask the teacher to write an essay between 400-600 words. This essay is 823 words. So guess what? The evaluator doesn't even need to read the essay. But let's go ahead and read it. You will see that the writer has good writing skills, but she'll fail anyway because she didn't follow the directions.

Scott is a 16th year old student that is currently in the tenth-grade. Scott's academic need is the area of reading and listening comprehension, when Scott reads a passage he has difficulties making connections between his prior knowledge and the content of the reading passage. Furthermore, Scott is not able to understand vocabulary words when used in a sentence; this could be as result of Scott's learning disability in reading, which in turn affects his comprehension skills. Scott has a history of substance -related issues, although he has been sober for three months, a history of substance used could contribute to social-emotional stress when encountered with a difficult classroom situations.

In order to address Scott's academic need in reading comprehension and increase his listening comprehension skills, I would incorporate a reading checklist study guide with guided open-ended questions (what, when, why, where), the study guide will provide Scott with a format of important information that he should obtained from the passage. Since Scott's strength is the area of graphic design, I will used assistive technology to increase his reading and listening skills, for example Scott will listen to a short passage on the computer and answer two questions that are related to the topic. Furthermore, in order to help Scott understand vocabulary words, I will provide Scott with a list of key phrase and highlight words prior to the reading assignment. I will use vocabulary word in a sentence and will provide visual cues for support. To ensure that Scott understands the vocabulary word Scott

will use the word in proper context and will state a sentence that is related to his personal experience.

The academic strategy demonstrated will be helpful to increase Scott's reading and listening comprehension skills. Students that have a learning disability have impairment in their working memory, therefore information in long-term memory may be comprised making it difficult for students to understand a reading passage or make connections to prior knowledge. Thus providing a study guide with guided questions will provide Scott specific explicit instruction that will help Scott understand the passage. Furthermore, allowing for Scott to listen to a short passage on a computer and answer two questions will keep Scott interested and focus since he enjoys to works with technology. Research states that in order to keep students motivated information that has to be interesting and meaningful to the students, so that in turn students can stay engaged throughout the learning process.

Based on the Teacher's notes and FBA document Scott is requires support for reading assignments and sometimes refuses assistances to complete task. However, based on the teacher's notes Scott was able to complete projects when he was provided with different choices to present what he learned from a book. Research shows that In order to help students improved their weakness one must build on student's strengths. As a result, I will use an interdisciplinary approach during reading assignments. Scott's reading assignments will be divided into folder sections into a Microsoft application and numbered by date: For example, in order to help Scott make connections between prior knowledge and new learning, Scott will have provided with visuals and will answer questions that related to his own personal experience (this sections will be titled prior knowledge information) next section (day 2) Scott will be provided with one vocabulary word and a concrete material to associate the vocabulary word with the item. When Scott is able to master recalling an experience and connecting new terms with prior knowledge, Scott will move to the next section and will read a small passage and answer simple questions that are related

to the passage. Scott will be able to reference back and forth through his folder for as a reference and support for future class assignments. Providing Scott with a study system guide will allow for him to become independent and feel ownership of his learning.

Be honest....aren't you "over" reading this at this point? Isn't it starting to sound like Charlie Brown's teacher? "Mwahababa..... bwaba bwaba bwaba...." (If you are too young to understand what this means just go to Youtube and look up "Charlie Brown's teacher.")

Remember how exhausted the essay evaluator looked? Imagine having to read essays like this all day long, and we're not even done yet!

Students that have a reading learning disability in conjunction with history of substance related issues may experience anxiety and get overwhelmed when presented with difficult tasks, therefore it is essential to break information down into simple steps and to format questions in different ways so that the student is able to understand and present their learning through visuals, writing, pictures, graphs etc.

The strategies stated above may help Scott in several ways, since Scott has reading learning disability visuals and concrete items will allow for Scott to make deeper connection to information presented. Furthermore, Student's with a learning disability require a systemic storage reference guide such as the folder on Microsoft application, as a result of working memory and executive functioning impairment.

Scott's Academic strategy will be monitored every 6 weeks to observe if there has been improvement in Scott's reading and listening comprehension. Furthermore, Scott's Study strategy will be evaluated every two weeks and will be modified as needed to ensure that he is able to complete reading assignments and make connections between prior knowledge and new content.

As we can see the writer is a very capable writer, however this essay isn't precisely answering the essay prompt. It's going on and on and on with all these ideas about what to do but not really addressing ONE Academic Strategy and ONE Study Skill strategy. So right off the bat this an example of a good writer failing simply because they did not follow the directions. The two most glaring mistakes are simple mistakes: the word count is too high and it doesn't answer the prompt. I explained these two issues and then I gave the teacher the following feedback.

Please address the above issues. Now on to the format. You ramble on and on and on switching from strategy to strategy with Scott. Instead of picking ONE strategy and explaining what it is and how you would use it with Scott, you throw idea after idea at the student. There is absolutely no engagement with Scott. Instead this essay reads like you are treating him like a lab rat in your teaching experiment. Engage him in the learning more. Explain ONE strategy all the way through.

Remember the prompt is

- recommend **one** research-based or evidence-based strategy/intervention that you would use to address the academic need that you have described, and **explain why** this strategy/intervention would be appropriate;

Let's deconstruct this to count how many different strategies she's using in just the second paragraph.

*In order to address Scott's academic need in reading comprehension and increase his listening comprehension skills, **I would** incorporate a reading checklist study guide with guided open-ended questions (what, when, why, where), the study guide will provide Scott with a format of important information that he should obtained from the passage.*

STRATEGY 1

Since Scott's strength is the area of graphic design, **I will** used assistive technology to increase his reading and listening skills, for example Scott will listen to a short passage on the computer and answer two questions that are related to the topic. **STRATEGY 2**

Furthermore, in order to help Scott understand vocabulary words, **I will** provide Scott with a list of key phrase and highlight words prior **STRATEGY 3** to the reading assignment. **I will** use vocabulary word in a sentence and will provide visual cues for support.

To ensure that Scott understands the vocabulary word Scott will use the word in proper context and will state a sentence that is related to his personal experience. **STRATEGY 4**

I then gave her this feedback:

Do you see what I mean? You explain none of these. You don't relate them to the lesson. You just say you are going to do all these things and you don't explain what the strategy is. For example what IS a reading checklist study guide? Explain it. What IS a vocabulary list? What words would you put on the list?

The other issue is the I, I, I, I. You are writing all the things that **you** would do. But your job is to facilitate learning. We need to see what the student is doing, not all these great ideas that you are going to do.

Pick ONE strategy and write it all the way out explaining what you would do and what you would ask Scott to do.

The writer cut it down and focused on just the 3rd and 4th strategies, she clarified exactly what Scott would be doing and used examples from the exhibits. After she practiced following directions she received 4 pluses on her essay. She had the writing part down, she just needed to streamline it and follow the directions.

Let's look at a different simple essay and see the difference:

Scott is a 16 year old student who has a specific learning disability in reading. In evaluating Scott's student profile we see that he does better in the mathematical problem solving and oral presentation. He also demonstrated confidence and competency when using computer technology and graphic design. It is important for Scott to receive the support needed to help improve in his areas of weakness, namely encouraging him to be aware and to understand his own struggles with reading comprehension. He has difficulty relating new information with the previously read material. In addition he has reactive behavior when trying to come up with strategies to meet his learning goals. Because Scott has struggled with addiction in the past and is working on his sobriety, it is important to give him self-management skills to help him cope with anxiety and stress.

One academic strategy that should be implemented to help Scott improve his reading comprehension is to use explicit instruction. Although Scott is a high school student, he is behind his peers in basic comprehension skills, especially in understanding relationships in new materials. It is important to consistently guide Scott through even the basic steps of reading comprehension to help reconcile any previously missed steps of development. Using instructional material such as scaffolding and concept webs can help Scott track and self-evaluate his own understanding. In addition it is important for the educational team to find appropriate reading material that incorporates Scott's ability and interests. Scott is an obviously talented student who has potential. By using materials that are of interest to Scott the educational team will be able to track for understanding through conversations. This will help set a foundation in self-directed learning and allow teachers to informally assess throughout the year.

It is important for Scott to develop self-advocacy skills. It is understandable that he is frustrated when he doesn't understand what he is reading. Scott is 16 years old and at this developmental

stage he is able to understand his own meta-cognitive awareness. By understanding his own strengths and weaknesses in his learning, Scott can become an empowered learner rather than a reactive learner. One strategy that can be used to develop this skill would be journaling as he reads. Incorporating journaling into the classroom instruction gives educators the opportunity to assess for vocabulary and reading comprehension. Scott, like his classmates, will be asked to list the vocabulary words with which he struggles and then to write a paragraph about what he understands from the passage. The journal is a form of portfolio assessment that will allow Scott to review his progress throughout the lesson and the year and to see areas of improvement as well as areas of difficulty.

It is also important for educators to clarify Scott's learning disability with him. Many times students who have learning disabilities don't quite understand their own struggle. By encouraging Scott to understand that a learning disability is a valid diagnosis, he can avoid the shame and embarrassment that often accompanies a lack of self-awareness. The educational team will work together collaboratively with Scott to continue to work on his reading comprehension. Modifications will be used when necessary to adjust towards Scott's learning goals. It is important that the Special Education Teacher, English Teacher and Reading Specialist monitor Scott's progress and modify the strategies if his learning goals are not being met. It is most important for Scott to learn to value his way of learning and to realize that he can achieve his goals with support.

The above essay isn't a perfect essay. There's still a little bit of using too many different ideas and there needs to be more citation from the actual exhibits. But this is much clearer, it follows directions and answers the prompt. It's within the word count at 588 words and it's much more focused on Scott. This writer passed the essay.

Below are a list of strategies that are often used in the classroom.

Strategy

What is a strategy? Many teachers get confused by this question. The term “strategies” sounds like an important terminology that you don’t remember from your college days. A strategy is just something you would do in the classroom. It can be very simple or very complicated. It can be something you do once or something you do throughout the school year.

Below is a list of simple strategies you can use in classroom instruction and when you read the exhibits you should pay attention to how the teacher is using them in their lesson plan. Many times the strategy you would use would be a simple modification of one of the strategies the teacher in the exhibit is already using. Think of your strategies as suggestions to help improve the instructional strategy that the teacher is using in the exhibit.

For example, if the teacher is using a Journal as a strategy and the student has writer’s block and is sitting there not writing anything, a simple modification would be to give the students prompts to answer when writing in their journal. Do you see how that helps support the student’s difficulty while using the strategy? And do you see how we don’t need to “single out that one student” but instead it can be something that is used with all students and benefits all students in the classroom?

Explicit Instruction

Explicit Instruction is step by step guided instruction. This is generally the most research based approach with any issues related to reading comprehension. Explicit instruction is often used along with Implicit instruction. Explicit instruction is very specific with clear

outlines, whereas Implicit instruction encourages the students to explore learning. For example if I asked a student to underline all the adjectives in a paragraph, that would be Explicit instruction. If asked the students to then replace those adjectives with their own choice of adjective, that would be extending it into Implicit instruction.

Collaborative learning/Cooperative Grouping: Make sure you mention that it you will be using Mixed Ability groups. Use the following phrases to explain WHY it is important:

- ✓ Engages the students as knowers.
 - ✓ Fosters an appreciation of diversity and different perspectives.
 - ✓ Encourages active learning and discussion.
 - ✓ Promotes ownership and self-directed learning.
- **Portfolio:** a folder that keeps track of a work or tests a student has completed over a period of time. The purpose of a portfolio is so that a student can evaluate their progress and identify his strengths and weaknesses. The teacher can also use the portfolio to guide and encourage the student in his learning.
 - **Journal:** a notebook where students write feedback and ideas about topics they are learning in class. Most Journals are used as a response to reading. Students can use the journal to document their emotional and intellectual response to the reading. They can use the journal to make predictions and analyze the text. They can also use the journal to try writing in a style similar to the works and genres they might be covering in class. This is a useful tool for the students because they can track progress and use the journal for self-reflection.
 - **Field Trip:** a field trip is a good strategy to use because students are relating what they are learning in the classroom to real life experiences. A field trip with specific goals can help students honor different learning styles and engage in active learning. This is an excellent strategy for students in the Preoperational Stage.

- **Online Newsletter:** For the purposes of writing the essay this is a good strategy because you can make the topic of the newsletter relate to the goal very specifically. For example if the goal is about Jobs, it can be a World of Work Newsletter. Other examples can include: Maps and Geography Newsletter, Math Newsletter, Community Newsletter, Sports Newsletter, Healthy Newsletter, Poetry Newsletter etc. This is also a good strategy because it is active and hands on. It encourages the use of technology. Fosters an appreciation of different learning styles and perspectives. Encourages active involvement with the publication of the Newsletter. Promotes ownership and self-directed learning.

More Strategies:

Anecdotal Records - Anecdotal records are a form of ongoing assessment of observations of student(s) in the classroom. These jot-notes provide the teacher with information as to how the student is processing information, collaborating with students as well as general observations on learning styles, attitudes and behavior. These records are a valuable form on ongoing assessment.

Literature Circles - Literature circles are small, temporary discussion groups who have chosen to read the same story, poem, article or book.

Peer Assessment - Assessment in which one learner, groups of learners or the whole class gives written or verbal feedback to another learner. Peers can use checklists, rubrics or give a written response to peer work.

Portfolios - A portfolio is a representative collection of an individual student's work. A student portfolio is generally composed of best work to date and a few "works in progress" that demonstrate the process. Students show their knowledge, skills and abilities in a variety of

different ways that are not dependent upon traditional media such as exams and essays.

Reflective Journals - Journals can be used to allow students to reflect on their own learning. They can be open-ended or the teacher can provide guiding, reflective questions for the students to respond to. These provide insight on how the students are synthesizing their learning but it also helps the students to make connections and better understand how they learn.

Rubrics - A rubric is “a road map, telling students and teachers where to begin, where they’re going, and how to get there.” Dr. Kay Burke. Rubrics are scoring guides or sets of expectations used to assess student level of understanding and allow students to know the expectations and what they need to do in order to be learning at a higher level.

Self-assessment - Assessment in which a learner reflects on their own learning and evaluates specific criteria in order to assess their learning. Teachers may provide checklists, rubrics or provide open-ended questions to guide the student in their self-assessment.

Some final tips for the essay:

When you write your essay you want to use phrases like the ones below:

Fosters an appreciation of different perspectives

Encourages active engagement in learning

Honors students as knowers and engages schema

Promotes an appreciation of diversity and different learning styles.

Encourages a sense of ownership and self-directed learning

Encourages mastery through self-analysis and evaluation

Promotes leadership and team building skills.

One of the easiest ways to explain why the strategy is a good strategy to use is to think of why it is IMPORTANT for the student to learn this skill.

Phrases to use to outline your ideas:

- ❖ One of the areas in which (student) has difficulty is in _____ during (*reading, transitions, physical education, sitting on the rug, independent reading, cooperative learning, math, art class, science, etc.*)
- ❖ It is important for (Student) to master _____ because it will contribute positively to (Student's) learning by: (*choose one*)
 - setting a foundation in _____
 - developing his or her social skills for collaborative learning
 - encouraging a sense of ownership in learning
- ❖ *The special education teacher will collaborate with the _____ in order to create a plan of support.*
- ❖ Additionally the _____ teacher will monitor (Student's) progress in order to give observable feedback.
- ❖ Together the _____ teacher, Special Education teacher and (Student) will work together to assess progress and to modify the plan as necessary.

Please note that if you are on a deadline and don't have a lot of time to study, the following two chapters are less important than rereading the previous chapters in the book. Most Special Education teachers are already familiar with the steps of the IEP because this is taught as part of your Graduate level education. However, I thought it would be helpful to include this in the book.

Chapter 10

The Steps for the IEP under IDEA

“The term ‘individualized education program’ or ‘IEP’ means a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with section 614(d).” [Section 602(11)]

Who Participates in IEP Team Meetings?

1. The parents of the student.
2. The student, as appropriate.
3. At least one regular education teacher of the child, if the student is (or might be) participating in the general education environment.
4. At least one special education teacher or provider.
5. A representative of the local public agency (i.e. School Principle, School Administrator) who:
 1. is knowledgeable about specially designed instruction for students with disabilities,
 2. the general curriculum,
 3. the availability of local public agency resources.
6. Someone who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results (i.e. School Psychologist, Special Educator

Teacher, Speech and Language Pathologist, etc.) who may be another team member.

7. Other people whom the parents or the school have chosen to invite, who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related service.

Collectively, the IEP team members should be knowledgeable about:

1. The student, available services
2. External and internal sources of assistance
3. The IEP process

IDEA LAW Section 614(d)(1)(B)

Section 614(d)(3)

“(3) Development of IEP.--

“(A) In General. -- In developing each child’s IEP, the IEP Team, subject to subparagraph (C), shall consider --

“(i) the strengths of the child and the concerns of the parents for enhancing the education of their child; and

“(ii) the results of the initial evaluation or most recent evaluation of the child.

“(B) Consideration of Special Factors. -- The IEP Team shall--

“(i) in the case of a child whose behavior impeded his or her learning or that of others, consider, when appropriate, strategies, including positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports to address that behavior;

“(ii) in the case of a child with limited English proficiency, consider the language needs of the child such as needs relate to the child’s IEP;

“(iii) in the case of a child who is blind or visually impaired, provide for instruction Braille and the use of Braille unless the IEP Team determines, after an evaluation of the child’s reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media (including an evaluation of the child’s future needs for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille), that instruction in Braille or the use of Braille is not appropriate for the child;

“(iv) consider the communication needs of the child, and in the case of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, consider the child’s language and communication needs, opportunities for direct communications with peers and professional personnel in the child’s language and communication mode, academic level, and full range of needs, including opportunities for direct instruction in the child’s language and communication mode; and

“(v) consider whether the child requires assistive technology devices and services.

“(C) **Requirement with respect to regular education teacher** -- The regular education teacher of the child, as a member of the IEP Team, shall, to the extent appropriate, participate in the development of the IEP of the child, including the determination of appropriate positive behavioral interventions and strategies and the determination of supplementary aids and services, program modifications, and support for school personnel consistent with paragraph (1)(A)(iii).”

At the end of the chapter on the CST-SWD the legal breakdown of the IEP process will be given. Let’s keep it simple for now:

Steps for the IEP

The steps to creating an IEP are done in a specific order. Each step is essential to creating a carefully constructed plan that is created specially for each student with disabilities.

The steps are as follows:

1. **Pre-referral:** The first step in the entire IEP is to observe the student. This is where modifications are made to the regular learning strategy to see if the student can learn with a different approach.
2. **Referral:** In this stage, if the modifications in the previous stage are ineffective, the School Psychologist will create a documentation of student history and difficulties. In addition, referrals and testing strategies will be arranged.
3. **Identification Evaluations:** In this stage the different professionals will work together to assess the needs of the student. Special focus is placed upon the individual strengths and weaknesses of the student.
4. **Eligibility:** In this stage the IEP team decides what services and accommodations will be considered for the student.
5. **Development of the IEP:** In this state the IEP team outlines the actual learning plan for the student.
6. **Implementation of the IEP:** In this stage the IEP is begun with members of the team who offer support and expertise.
7. **Evaluation and reviews:** This is a very important part of the IEP. The IDEA law requires constant assessment to see if the IEP is working. Is learning proceeding as expected? Educators should be willing to modify the plan as needed.

The CST SWD will ask you questions about the steps and the protocols that are followed in these stages. This is part of Subarea 3 which discusses Working in a Collaborative Professional Environment and is worth 21% of the score. In this section you will also be asked questions about testing and IDEA LAW. Specific questions are not asked about the dates or history of the law. Rather you are expected to understand the **procedure** and the **rules**.

Parents Rights According to IDEA LAW Include:

- Prior notice of meetings and proposed decisions;
- Reviewing student records;
- The functions of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team;
- Assessment and Independent Evaluations;
- Parent Participation in IEP team meetings and parent consent;
- Filing formal complaints, mediation, due process hearings, and appeals;
- Interim alternative educational settings;
- Discipline;
- Parent placement of their children in private schools;
- Civil court actions;
- Development of IEPs;
- Placement decisions and least restrictive environment; and
- Specially Designed Instruction and related services.

Hint! If you see any answer on the exam that says “Explain the Rights to the Parents or Caregivers.” I would generally assume that this is the correct answer. CST SWD will always have one question about the rights of the parents. Anything to do with liability would point to making sure the family or caregivers know their rights. Also be careful not to just say “Parents” because many students are not raised by their parents. If you do not acknowledge this, it can come across as discriminatory. And remember that Parents and Caregivers have the right to appeal any decision made by the CSE.

Other important terms on the CST-SWD:

Criterion Referenced Tests are created with known standards. Students know what is expected of them in order to pass. The assessment of the test is noncompetitive. The student is being evaluated only for his or her own strengths and weaknesses.

Norm Referenced Tests are generally used with students for placement among other students. These tests are often graded with a curve or a percentile.

Least Restrictive Environment:

The simplest way to think of this part of the IDEA law is to remember that the Constructivist Approach is all about Inclusion. LRE ensures that students with disabilities are not isolated and taught separately from non-disabled students. The goal is have students learn with peers. The non-disabled peers also learn from the disabled student. It is a way of keeping the disabled student in a general education classroom as much as possible. CTT classes can be used as well. Self Contained classrooms should only be used if the disability makes it impossible for the student to remain with the general population without causing a disruption in the learning process.

Zero Reject:

The State has a legal obligation to educate all students with disabilities. The Child Find system is a requirement for the state to locate, identify and evaluate all students within the state that are eligible for education.

Non-discriminatory Identification and Evaluation:

Students should not be discriminated because of race, language, or culture. Students should not be assessed by only one form of evaluation.

Free Appropriate Public Education:

Disabled students have a right to free public education. If the student cannot be accommodated in the public school system the schools must provide alternative accommodations for learning. IEPs are covered under the FAPE principle.

Chapter 11

Test Taking Pitfalls

Overthinking

Although it is important to know the information in the previous chapters and it is also important to know the characteristics of disabilities and other learning needs, my experience in working with teachers for so many years is that most of you are more familiar with these issues than you realize.

What generally causes people to fail the tests is not being able to discern between a good answer and the best answer in the questions about a teacher working with a student in the classroom. This is often because as teachers in real life you are expected to multi task and

to take on numerous responsibilities for your students in the classroom.

Overthinking is the number one problem teachers have on timed exams. On a timed multiple choice exam, the fast and easiest way to go through your options is to focus on eliminating the wrong answers. Most of you already do this with the first two options that you eliminate. However, when you get it down to the final two, many of you will shift from determining which one is wrong to the mistake of trying to figure out which one is right.

Here's an example of this kind of question:

Chefs prepare

- A. food
- B. dishes
- C. tables
- D. bricks

Choose your answer. Are you sure you have the right answer? Take your time.

Now, when I do this activity in class I'll go around the room and I'll ask teachers, "How many of you chose A? B? C? D?" and I'll write the number of people who picked each option on the board. Then I'll say, "Are you sure? Final answer? Does anyone want to change their answer?" I'll go around the room and do a second tally.

Every time I do this, several teachers, seeing that some others picked *B. dishes*, change their answers from food to dishes. And of course the answer is food not dishes. Did you pick dishes? If you picked dishes this is an example of overthinking and not using process of elimination all the way through. You started off doing the right thing: everyone eliminates tables and bricks because they are the wrong answer.

But, instead of continuing to say, "Which one is wrong?" you flip with the final two options and start saying "Ok, now which one is right?" Since it seems like they both could be right, people start overthinking why one is

more right instead of focusing on which one is more *wrong*.

In the example above nearly every one of the people in my classes immediately pick food as their first option but then they start overthinking about it like this: “*Well, it says, chefs not just cooks. Chefs work in nicer restaurants. They prepare food but they call it a dish!*” People start visualizing the fancy dish with parsley and a lemon garnish and they decide that dishes is the better answer. Is that what you did? If so, stop overthinking!

If we stay focused on which one is wrong instead of which one is right, we can see how simple it is to find the right answer.

Is there any way food can be wrong? No, all chefs use food.

But is there any way dishes can be wrong? Yes, if the word dish means plates, bowls, cups, then it’s not the same meaning of dish.

So obviously the answer is food. Let’s look at what they were really asking us:

Who makes food? A chef

Who makes dishes? A potter

Who makes tables? A carpenter

Who makes bricks? A mason

The reason the Trap Words are so effective on the tests is that test takers start to focus on eliminating the wrong answers all the way through, not flipping in their mind to finding the right answer. First, use PAGED to set up the framework in your mind of the purpose of the question. Then you need to eliminate all the wrong answers and the one you will be left with will be the right answer.

Remember! Multiple choice questions are the easiest type of test questions because they **give you** the answer. All you have to do is eliminate all the wrong answers.

And, notice in the previous example, several people changed their answers from the right answer to the wrong answer. It has been ***statistically proven*** that you are more likely to change a right answer to a wrong answer than a wrong answer to a right answer when

you do this. Unless you are 100% sure that you have chosen the wrong answer, *never change your answers on a test.*

Specific Wording

Watch out for extreme language on a test. This is something that test makers do to make a good answer wrong. Extreme language will be words like: always, never, must, only. This wording will only be correct in very few cases. For example: Parents always have the right to appeal a decision made by the Committee of Special Education. **This is true.** But this is a legal type of question. And if you see answers talking about “all students” this is not extreme because you are responsible for all students in your classroom.

However, when these are used in other situations it will usually not be the best answer because it is too extreme. For example if you saw an option that said “*Only* allow the student to participate in the discussion if she behaves appropriately.” Or

“The student *must* complete the entire assignment accurately.” These answers are too extreme.

Another area where this will show up is when they are asking you to deal with diversity. I always tell my teachers to remember, “You are not the United Nations!” In other words, you can only be responsible for the diversity that you have *in your classroom*. It is not possible for you to translate newsletters going home to parents into “all languages.” It is not possible for you to teach students about the cultural diversity in the entire world is it? But, it *is* possible for you to reflect the cultural diversity of *all students in your classroom*.

First....G.I.V.E.R

It is interesting to me that the word first is often italicized on tests and yet teachers tend not to notice it. If you see “*first*” you will find that more than one of the options is a good option, you would just do one of them first. This is especially important on the CST

SWD because they will often have questions where you are working through the stages of a Behavior Intervention Plan. BIPs might not always be clearly identified as such, but usually these types of questions will have a teacher working one on one with a student and trying to solve a problem in either learning or behavior management. For example: appropriate social skills like working in collaborative grouping.

Students who constantly interrupt their peers, are emotionally reactive or cannot stay focused will need some one on one intervention from the teacher. Students who have difficulty staying on task during activities in the classroom will need a structured goal. Students who may need help working with technology will need explicit instruction. We want to give all these students the tools to be able to manage their own behavior and learning goals, however, we also want to provide boundaries and guidance. This is the purpose of these types of questions. If you don't have a clear

focused plan of action, how can you guide your student?

In order to clearly understand these questions, you need to pay attention to what has already been done and what the next step would be. For example if a teacher has already implemented a BIP strategy for several weeks and it's not working, the first thing a teacher should do is look at their own approach and see if they are being consistent. It depends on where you are in the steps of the plan.

If you don't have a plan yet you should first create one. And so at that point you want to meet with the student and collaborate with specialists to create the plan. Once you have created a plan you want to make sure the student understands by modeling or role playing.

Next you want to make sure that everyone who is working with the student understands and uses the plan consistently. The BIP won't work properly if only some of those working with the student are using it, will it? After that you want to let the student use the

strategy and observe them to see if it is working.

If it isn't working you should first evaluate if there's a problem with the plan. Are the goals too hard? For example, if a student is expected to stay on task for 20 minutes and they aren't able to do this for more than a few days in several weeks, perhaps you made the time goal too long and you should reduce the amount of time. And you also want to reflect on your own practice to make sure you as a teacher are using the plan consistently.

When a question involving a BIP asks what the teacher should do *first*, this type of question is just making sure you know how to create and implement a strategy and how to monitor if the plan is working. The key to answering the question is to carefully read the question and to ask yourself, "What steps have already been taken? What would be the next step?"

Let's look at an example:

Thomas is a very social student who often doesn't complete his assignments because he is talking to his friends in the classroom. In order for his teacher to address this issue she should do which of the following *first*?

- A. Meeting with Thomas and developing a strategy for completing his work.*
- B. Allowing Thomas to complete his work in the resource room rather than the inclusion classroom.*
- C. Having Thomas work in a quiet part of the room so as not to disturb the other students.*
- D. Establishing clear consequences for work refusal.*

Both A and D are possibilities here. But which one would she do *first*? Based on the question it doesn't seem like Thomas is refusing to do the work, it just seems like he's not focusing and he's socializing. So the first thing we'd want to do is to meet with Thomas and give him the opportunity to manage his behavior in a simple way. The answer is A.

If A didn't work then we would do D. But we would do A *first*. Also notice that in answer C we are separating the student. That's a Trap! What about B? We'll come back to B in the next section. But let's use a mnemonic device to try to keep the steps of working with a student with a plan in order.

Remember **G.I.V.E.R.** When you read a question that asks what you should do *first* try to think of it as "What should you do next?" Read through the description of the student and what the teacher has done already to determine where you are in the steps of G.I.V.E.R. Then figure out what the next step would be. That is what you would do *first*.

G.I.V.E.R.

Gather information. If the teacher has not already implemented a plan, first she should gather information. Meet with the student to discuss the problem. Talk to the Special Education teacher and ask her to observe the student. Read the IEP.

Implement a strategy or plan. Decide on a goal for the student based on the issues the student is having with either behavior or learning.

Verify that the student understands the strategy or the plan by role playing, modeling and practice.

Evaluate if the plan is working by monitoring the student. Collaborate with others working with the student to properly assess progress.

Reflect on your own practice as a teacher. If you have used a plan for several weeks and it is not working you may need to change your approach. Analyze if you are being consistent and modify the approach if needed.

Rather than X do Y

Now let's go back and look at the option B in the previous question.

B. Allowing Thomas to complete his work in the resource room rather than the inclusion classroom.

Notice B says "rather than." This is another test maker's strategy because it creates a psychological response in the test taker. You feel like they are being flexible and giving you an option when they really aren't. This is called "the choice of two." It's a sales technique that encourages a person to quickly pick one of the two options. If you have ever gone to a catered party like a wedding you have probably experienced "the choice of two."

Think of the difference between going to a restaurant and going to a catered party. In a restaurant the waiter stands there while you look at the menu and take your time making your choice. But in large events like

weddings it would take too much time for them to let every single person do this. So this is why weddings will have “the choice of two.” Do you want a salad or soup? Do you want coffee or tea? Do you want steak or chicken?

Can you see how this is done to encourage people to pick quickly? So when you see “rather than X do Y” it’s the same type of trick to get you to pick quickly. Watch out for “rather than.” It is usually not the answer.

Runs of the same letter choice:

This is another psychological trick. It doesn’t affect people as much on the new computerized versions of the test because you can’t really see your previous answers. But on the old tests when you would see all your answers, people would often panic and go change answers if they felt there were too many of the same letter in a row.

Example

18. A

19. A

20. A (three in a row? Now you are getting nervous!)

21 A (OMG this can't be right!)

22 A (Full on panic, no way could it be five in a row!)

What usually happens is that the test taker will just assume that one of their previous answers must be wrong. Have you ever done this? Then you go back and try to change one of your answers just in case. Do not worry if you are picking the same letter in a row over and over again. Number 1: you are overthinking. Stop overthinking! Number 2: you should never ever change your answer unless you are 100% sure it is wrong.

I've often joked in class that if I wanted to make a test that no one would pass, I'd make all the answers B. How would you psychologically react to all the answers being B? You would probably feel that this is

impossible and go randomly change the answers and sit there completely confused.

Obviously they won't make all of the answers the same but if you get a series of questions in a row that are all the same answer it's perfectly fine. Do not panic and do not waste time revisiting the questions and changing your answers. Test makers will often insert runs of the same letter answers in the middle of the test to get you to stop and reread the questions that you have already answered. Don't fall for it!

Jargon

In order to facilitate the express consult of the regulation of student learning it is important to evaluate for the proximate understanding of terminology within the English language lexicon.

Are you confused? Do you understand what the above sentence is saying? Guess what? It's not saying anything. It's a bunch of important sounding words with no meaning. This is a test maker's trick. Notice that

throughout this book you have probably easily understood what I have explained. On a test, if you have to reread the answer option several times, it is probably not the answer. Many times test makers will use “jargon” or industry specific terminology in a really confusing way to do exactly that: confuse you.

The number one problem with test anxiety on a test is a fear that you don’t understand the answers. Many times people will assume that very sophisticated words are more important than clear answers. This is not true. You should be able to easily understand the answer options or the test would be unfair. This relates to “content validity.”

Content validity means, “Does the test evaluate what it is supposed to test for?” If test takers cannot understand the test then it defeats the purpose of the test. If you do not understand an answer option, it is probably not the answer.

Now let’s do a Practice Quiz!

Chapter 12

Practice Quiz for both the EAS and CST SWD

This Practice Quiz will deconstruct the wrong answers and show you strategies for staying focused on the purpose of the questions you are being asked. These kinds of questions show up on both the EAS and the CST SWD. They are the kind of questions that most teachers get wrong. I have written original questions that mirror the mistakes I see teachers make on the Constructivist

Learning type questions on the test. The letter of the answer will be bolded in the explanation. For the purpose of clarity I will only include two of the parts of the background information about the class and the students. I will not include the full lesson plan.

Please also note that I have adjusted the formatting of the layout so that you can read each question and all the options on the same page. Because of this there will be extra white space at the bottom of some of the pages.

Class Description:

Mrs. Rodriguez is a General Education teacher who teaches a 6th grade English Language Arts class. The class includes Jerome, who receives Special Education Services for ADHD; Emily, who receives Special Education Services for ODD; and Carmen who receives Tier 2 Response to Intervention for fluency and comprehension. Carmen also has a visual impairment and wears glasses. Omar struggles with reading comprehension and is an ELL

student. All the students have IEPs. English is the primary language of Carmen, Jerome and Emily.

Jerome performs on grade level in all subjects except Math and receives intervention in a resource room for one hour each day to work on his Math Skills. He struggles during activities where students must remain focused for more than 15 minutes. When Jerome is actively engaged in discussions he contributes analytical ideas to the conversation and it is clear that he is motivated. However, when Jerome loses focus he will often shut down and not do any of his work. This in turn impacts his social skills and ability to work cooperatively with others.

Emily is repeating the 6th grade and is 12 years old. She generally does well in her assignments and has strong reading comprehension skills. However, when Emily becomes confused she will often act out and refuse to cooperate with her classmates. When Mrs. Rodriguez attempts to offer support to Emily, she becomes argumentative and will refuse to listen and not continue working.

Omar is an ELL learner who has attended school in his home country of Egypt and achieved average proficiency in his primary language literacy skills. He can speak conversational English but often struggles with understanding what he is reading in English.

Carmen has a visual impairment due to her home situation which involved ongoing neglect and abuse. She is currently placed in foster care and receives support services through a social worker. Although she generally participates in class, at times she can become emotionally overwhelmed.

Recent Observations of Jerome Participating in a Group Discussion

Student Being Observed: Jerome

Observer: Ms. Chen, Special Education Teacher

**Lesson Topic: Whole Class Discussion on
Nothing Gold Can Stay by Robert Frost**

Nothing Gold Can Stay
Nature's first green is gold
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

During the activity Mrs. Rodriguez asked students to silently read the poem and then to use their journals to write down ideas they have about the poem. She then asks the students to share their ideas about what they have read and the comments they have written in their journal.

Throughout the class discussion Jerome sits slumped down in his chair and begins drawing in his notebook. When Mrs. Rodriguez calls on him for his contributions he says he didn't read the poem because it was too confusing. He doesn't want to participate in the discussion.

Now let's stop here and consider what's going on in the situation above. The first thing we want to do is to evaluate Jerome using PAGED.

Problem: Jerome has difficulty staying focused for more than 15 minutes

Age: Jerome is in the 6th grade, (6+5) is 11 years old. Jerome is at the end of the Concrete Operational stage so we want to encourage him to work independently.

Goal: The goal is for Jerome to read the poem and write a reflection in his journal

ELL: N/A

Disability: ADHD

Now that we have these details in mind let's consider that the problem is partly Jerome's issues with ADHD but it's also the way the teacher set up the lesson. If she knows that Jerome has difficulty staying focused, her decision to ask the students to silently read the poem and take notes is one that will be very difficult for Jerome to do independently.

The observations in the PAGED strategy give us insight into both what issues Jerome struggles with and also how the teacher could improve her lesson plan. Since we want Jerome to develop his skills in working independently, we do want him to take notes in his journal. And the teacher chose a short poem for the activity that doesn't require a lot of time to read.

However, if we think about a student with ADHD, we know that impulse control and focus are challenging for them. Consider how the lesson would have worked if the teacher had chosen to read the poem aloud before asking the students to read it silently? What is the problem here? Is it Jerome? Or is it how the teacher chose to set up her lesson?

So now let's look at some sample questions.

1. Which of the following would be appropriate for Mrs. Rodrigues to do first in addressing Jerome's needs in participating in the lesson?

- A. Pairing Jerome with a partner during the reading activity in the class so that his partner can read the poem aloud for Jerome in order to make sure he completes this part of the lesson.
- B. Allowing Jerome to choose a different poem to read that relates to his interests so that he will be more likely to read the poem.
- C. Requesting that Jerome do additional work in the resource room with Ms. Chen to make sure he actually reads the poem and completes the activity.
- D. Observing Jerome as he reads the poem and helping him with difficulties in comprehension and staying on task.

Let's look at the TRAP Words.

- A. Can you see how pairing is being used to sort of dump Jerome on another student instead of guiding Jerome in independent learning?
- B. Can you see how although it's important to choose reading material that is of interest to the students, this is like giving him a different role in the

kickball game? He should be doing the same thing as everyone else.

C. Resource room activity is a valuable tool but we can see how this is basically asking the Special Education teacher to fix the problem after the fact.

D. Being on hand to guide the student through their difficulty is the role of the teacher. I encourage teachers to remember the swimming coach. What does a swimming coach do when the student is halfway down the pool lane and wants to stop swimming? They observe them and guide them to complete the lap. This is the best answer.

Let's look at another question.

2. Before beginning another lesson in her class, Mrs. Rodriguez consults with the Special Education teacher, Ms. Chen, about ways she could improve her instruction. Which of the following would be the best way for Mrs. Rodriguez to modify her lesson to accommodate Jerome's learning needs?

- A. Speaking to Jerome prior to the lesson and reminding him of the importance of reading the poem in order to complete the activity and expressing confidence in his ability to do so.
- B. Offering a reinforcer for Jerome if he reads the poem within the allocated amount of time.
- C. Giving Jerome the poem to read before the lesson so that he will be properly prepared.
- D. Modifying the lesson by reading the poem aloud with the students before asking them to read it silently.

Again we can see the Trap Words that sometimes sound nice but are not the best answer. Remember they are looking for the best answer, not just a good strategy.

- A. Encouraging students and expressing confidence in their ability is something all teachers should do, but it doesn't really address the problem here.

ADHD is a neurological disorder, it's not a behavior choice. Consider the doctor and the nurse: would a nurse go into a patient that is experiencing pain and "encourage them" and "express confidence" in their ability to get better? Or would they treat the issue?

B. Promising rewards also doesn't really solve the problem. How would you feel if your doctor told you that they would give you a prize if you recovered from a heart attack? You'd probably think, "I need to get a more professional doctor!"

C. Giving Jerome the poem to read ahead of time seems like it would solve a problem but we have to ask ourselves which problem it's really solving here? Is it helping Jerome or is it making it easier for the teacher to teach her lesson?

D. Modifying the lesson is the right way to approach your instruction as a teacher. This is the best answer.

Let's look at another question.

3. Midway through the school year, Richard joins Mrs. Rodriguez's class. Richard has recently moved to NY and receives Special Education services for a learning disability in reading. He is an enthusiastic learner who does well in his classes and is eager to participate. Richard struggles using context clues in reading to infer meaning and this impacts his reading comprehension. What is the best approach for Mrs. Rodriguez to take to ensure that Richard's learning needs are being met?

- A. Requesting that Richard's parents write a detailed letter explaining his issues in the past and their observations of his strengths and needs as a student in order to get a better picture of Richard's abilities and to open the lines of communication with the parents.
- B. Pairing Richard with a friendly student who will help him acclimate more smoothly into the class as a new student.
- C. Reading Richard's IEP to determine which of his language objectives should be incorporated into her lesson plans.
- D. Giving Richard less challenging reading assignments until he can catch up with the rest of the class in order to help him feel empowered as a student.

Are the Trap Word patterns starting to “jump out” at you? If so this is a good thing. Keep in mind that these Trap Words will frequently show up in the section about the teacher teaching the student during a lesson.

What’s wrong with A?

Think of the Doctor and the Nurse and how they would be treating their patient and you’ll get a better idea of how to distinguish the parent involvement questions. At the end of the test there will be several questions about School Home Relationships. And in these questions we want to encourage the parents to be involved in their child’s learning. However, it’s not the best answer during the sections regarding working with the student during the lesson in a classroom.

Option A is wrong for several reasons. One is that you don’t know if your students’ parents are aware enough about their child’s learning issues to write such a letter. Another point to consider is if parents are able to write such a letter in the first place. What if the parents are not fluent in English? This is not the best answer for this type of question. Again, there will be questions later in your test about working with parents and caregivers.

I call these the THREE Cs: Communication, Cooperation and Collaboration. But during the

section *in the classroom*, these are not the answers they are looking for. This is not the best option.

B. Pairing, again, is not the best option.

C. Reading the IEP is a fundamental part of working with Students with Disabilities. Think of a nurse in a hospital when a new patient comes in. What is the first thing the nurse does when she walks in the room? She reads their chart to gather the information she needs to know about her patient before she begins trying to care for the patient. Think of an IEP as a patient's chart and you will understand why this is the best answer.

D. Can you see how once again this is doing something different with the student? Remember, the purpose of an accommodation is to make it equal, not easier.

Let's look at another question.

4. Ms. Chen is working with Jerome's Math teacher, Mr. Houston, and wants to accommodate Jerome's learning needs in completing his Math lesson. Students will be answering a set of 20 questions on division. In the past, Jerome often loses his place during the lesson and becomes overwhelmed by the number of equations he sees on the worksheet. What would be the best way for Mr. Houston to accommodate Jerome's learning needs.

- A. Giving Jerome 10 questions instead of 20 so that he will be able to complete the assignment in the same amount of time as his peers.
- B. Allowing Jerome to work in a study carrel in a quiet part of the room so that he will not be distracted by the other students.
- C. Rewarding Jerome with time on the computer for every question he answers in the allocated amount of time and then allowing him to complete the rest of the questions for homework.
- D. Giving Jerome a piece of paper with a window cut out so that he can lay the paper over one question at a time in order to stay focused.

Let's deconstruct the answers.

A. The purpose of an accommodation is to make it equal, not easier. Can we see how this could be used in some cases but it is not the best answer for the question.

B. Separating the student is wrong.

C. Rewarding the student is not the best answer and giving it for homework is essentially dumping the responsibility on Jerome's parents or caregivers.

D. What about this answer? Some teachers will ask, "But isn't this giving him something different to do?" No it is not. He is doing the same activity as the other students but he is using the worksheet with the window cut out to help him stay focused. His learning need is a difficulty in staying focused, so by providing this accommodation he will be able to do the same activity as the other students in the class.

This is the kind of accommodation that makes it equal not easier. Think of the swimming pool again. If I have a swimmer that has weak arm muscles and I give them inflatable arm band swim trainers to wear, the purpose of doing so is to make sure they can swim the length of the pool but also to accommodate their needs. They still swim the length of the pool like the other swimmers, but the armbands are there because if they didn't have them they could drown.

We want to treat accommodations as things that allow the students to complete the activity just like

everyone else, but we also don't want the students to "drown" in the lesson. So this is the appropriate type of accommodation that allows Jerome to focus and to do the activity independently. This is the correct answer.

Let's look at another question.



5. Mrs. Rodriguez has noticed that Emily has had difficulty working successfully in literacy circles during the activities in class. She has become increasingly disruptive and regularly will interrupt her peers during the conversation. At one time she tore up her own paper and threw it on the floor stating that her ideas were stupid. Mrs. Rodriguez immediately intervenes and also consults with Ms. Chen the Special Education teacher to find a way to deal with Emily's needs. What would be the best way for Mrs. Rodriguez to first approach this situation?

- A. Contacting Emily's parents immediately and clarifying that this kind of behavior will not be tolerated and asking them to speak with her at home.
- B. Giving Emily a worksheet with teacher created questions to fill in rather than allowing her to participate in group discussions and then allowing her to rejoin the group when she is able to control her behavior.
- C. After giving Emily a cool down period, sitting with Emily and establishing consequences for breaking classroom rules prior to the next class.
- D. Giving Emily a list of classroom rules, documenting the issue and reporting it to the principal.

To properly deconstruct the answer options we need to go back to PAGED and use it to get a better picture of Emily as a student.

Problem: Emily is not controlling her behavior

Age: Emily is 12 years old and is in the Formal Operational stage of development

Goal: Participating in cooperative learning groups

ELL: N/A

Disability: ODD

First, we want to understand the issues with ODD. ODD stands for Oppositional Defiant Disorder. It is characterized by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) as a mental health disorder characterized by anger, lack of impulse control, and refusal to comply with rules/requests from authority figures.

This is important to keep in mind because many times people don't understand emotional disabilities and only regard them as behavior problems. I'm sure that in your personal lives, when you discuss ADHD and ODD and other issues with friends and family who do not work in the field of education you will often see people roll their eyes and suggest that these are not real issues. Often people believe that it is a result of lax parenting styles and suggest that the kid

is just a “spoiled brat.” This is a daunting and shaming and stigmatizing way of viewing such disabilities and mental health issues.

We want to be mindful as educators to treat these type of issues properly. One of the things I will ask my teachers in class is to think about a time that you lost your temper. How did you feel about yourself as a person afterward? Most of us felt ashamed of ourselves and some of us even were frightened by our own behavior. We wondered if we were “crazy” or “violent.” It’s a very overwhelming feeling not to be able to control rages in ourselves. Imagine what it must feel like to struggle with this every day? Stop and really think about it. It would be completely terrifying.

The problem and goal with Emily in this situation is based on her age. The informational background on Emily lets us know that she is 12 years old. If she was 5 or 6 years old, our approach would be more about managing Emily’s outbursts with time outs and positive reinforcement. But as an adolescent she will need to learn strategies for self-control rather than relying on others around her to manage her behavior. And *keep in mind* that often when students are starting to manage their own behavior the behavior issue may first escalate or get worse because they are not yet used to self-management.

When we consider this we can see why answer A is not the best option. We are deferring to her parents to help her. Again, many teachers assume this is the right answer because they are often told to contact student's parents when situations like this happen in school. We do want to contact her parents but this is **not** the *best option*.

B. Can you see how this option is not meeting the learning goal and it is separating the student. This can have the effect of shaming the student. Also please note that the option uses "rather than."

C. After a cool down period the teacher would sit with Emily and discuss what happened and come up with clear consequences that must be followed. This is the best option because we are including Emily in the process. Many times teachers view this answer as a "punishment." But one of the ways that we need to deal with behavior issues with adolescents is to establish clear boundaries and follow through on consequences.

D. This is also something that we might consider a good option but it's not the best answer. And notice how the wording is as if you are "throwing a list" at the student. This would be a better option if the teacher had taken time to sit with Emily and gone over the list with her. Guiding students through rules and materials is a good strategy. But just

handing them a piece of paper or a book and telling them to read it is a Trap.

Let's do PAGED for Omar:

Problem: reading comprehension

Age: 11 Concrete Operational stage

Goal: understanding the poem

ELL: Omar is an ELL learner whose primary language is Arabic

Disability: learning disability in reading.

Let's look at another question.

6. Omar has been having difficulty understanding the creative and figurative language of the poem. When assessing how to approach this situation, Mrs. Rodriguez should keep in mind which of the following with regard to his English literacy development.

- A. Mrs. Rodriguez should ask Omar’s parents to read to him only in English rather than his primary language so that he will not be confused when reading English.
- B. Omar should be given extra time in the resource room to make sure he understands the lesson.
- C. Omar will need continued support to develop his literacy skills in both his primary language and English.
- D. Omar should be given vocabulary worksheets to develop his phonics skills.

Now let’s deconstruct the answers.

A. This is a very bad option. Notice that it has “only” and “rather than.” But beyond this, ELL students are encouraged to speak and read in **both** their primary language and English. The purpose of ELL instruction is not to replace the student’s primary language.

- B. While it's true that Omar will likely need Resource Room support, this is not the best option for the question.
- C. This is the best answer. We want to encourage and support literacy skills in both languages.
- D. Can you see how this is just "throwing a paper" at the student and not guiding them in their learning.

Let's look at another question.

7. When assessing Omar to determine how to approach his learning needs with regard to his reading comprehension issues, it is important for Mrs. Rodriguez to keep which of the following in mind.

- A. How Omar's test scores compare to that of his peers.
- B. Whether his reading comprehension issues are based on his language issues or his learning disability.
- C. How successfully Omar completes his homework assignments.
- D. Omar's current status on the manifold evaluation of the State requirements of the Tier 2 portfolio literacy instruction requisition.

Now let's deconstruct the answers.

A. Comparing students' performance on tests should only be done if it is a *norm referenced test*. It is not the best answer here.

B. This is the best answer. When we deal with ELL students who also have other disabilities, it is important to be mindful of how each may contribute to the student's difficulties in learning.

C. Trap Word, again, about homework. Obviously we want to pay attention to homework but it's not the best answer.

D. How did you react when you read this option? Did you get nervous? Did you panic and feel like you were unaware of very important regulations related to teaching? It may surprise you to know that I just made up this entire sentence and filled it with important sounding jargon. Remember, if you do not know what the option is saying, it is probably not the answer.

Let's look at another question.

8. Mrs. Rodriguez plans to do a lesson comparing two different poems and wants to be sure to properly prepare students in her class to be able to organize their ideas. Which of the following approaches would be most effective in achieving this goal?

- A. Giving the students the poems to read for homework before the lesson and asking them to answer a list of teacher made questions about the two different poems so that they will be prepared.
- B. Teaching students how to use a graphic organizer in order to be able to outline their ideas and then allowing them to practice this skill.
- C. Having a whole class discussion about the poets and the history of the writers prior to beginning the lesson.
- D. Determining which questions she should choose for the class discussion that will prompt students for the greatest amount of accuracy so that students will be encouraged to participate.

Let's deconstruct the answers.

A. If we look at this option we see that she is choosing to send the work home for homework. This is not the best option. Notice in each of the wrong answers that there seems to be the sense that the teacher is more worried about her lesson working smoothly than the students learning.

B. This is the best option. Notice that the teacher is like a swim coach. She's teaching the students and then allowing them to practice.

C. Again, whole class discussions are not necessarily wrong to do in the classroom, but if we know that several of our students have difficulty with large group discussions, we want to be mindful of this. She's also veered off from the learning goal which is to facilitate students' ability to compare two poems. While it is important to also know the background of the poets, this is not the best option.

D. If we look how this option is worded, we can see that the teacher seems to be focused on accuracy but her motives for this are to encourage participation. This may seem like a nice thing to do but it's not guiding students in their learning if we try to make it easier for them. Remember, the purpose of an accommodation is to make it equal not easier.

Now let's do PAGED for Carmen.

Problem: emotional issues

Age: 11 Concrete Operational Stage

Goal: to encourage Carmen to participate fully in class

ELL: N/A

Disability: Visual Impairment

Let's look at another question.

9. Although Carmen began the school year positively, Mrs. Rodriguez is concerned about creating a safe and inclusive environment for Carmen. She wants to be sure that she is aware of Carmen's emotional needs when planning instruction. What is the best way for Mrs. Rodriguez to address this issue?

- A. Assigning Carmen a special seat in the front of the classroom so that she can be close to the teacher for support.
- B. Encouraging the rest of the students in the class to be supportive of Carmen and to alert the teacher if Carmen seems to be having emotional issues.

C. Collaborating with Carmen’s social worker, guidance counselor and foster parents and using the IEP as a resource to plan her lessons.

D. Regularly rewarding Carmen with stickers to help boost her self-esteem.

Let’s deconstruct the answers.

A. This is not the best option. Many times teachers will use this strategy in real life because classrooms are overcrowded and teachers want to be on-hand to provide support to their students. However, this isn’t the best approach for planning instruction.

B. Does this option just sound “icky” to you? If so, good. This option serves to isolate Carmen by giving the other students in the class the idea that “Something is wrong with Carmen and we need to watch out for her.” And at the very least, it is not the job of students in the classroom to assess their peer’s emotional stability.

C. This is the best option. Notice the difference in how we are using parents in this answer. We’re not asking the parents what **to do**, we are communicating with them to help understand the student’s emotional needs.

To begin it is important to realize that most teachers are not licensed nor are they professionally experienced enough to properly handle emotional issues in students. Think of the doctor and the nurse in the hospital. Obviously they are going to work with the patient with emotional issues but they would always consult with a professional who is experienced with emotional issues. In a hospital it would be a Psychologist.

However, do not make the mistake of confusing a School Psychologist with a Guidance Counselor. As mentioned in the previous chapters, a School Psychologist has a specific role in the CSE. In a school you would work with a Guidance Counselor and the student's social worker. And you would use the IEP.

D. This kind of positive reinforcement is not wrong but doesn't solve the problem. It's a nice thing to do but it is not the best approach.

Let's look at another question.

10. During the lesson on poetry Carmen finds it difficult to read the poems line by line because of her visual impairment. She keeps losing her place and having to start over. This impacts her on an emotional level and causes her to give up and not continue reading. What would be the best way for Mrs. Rodriguez to accommodate this issue?

- A. Encouraging Carmen to keep reading and telling her that she can take as much time as she needs to read the poems.
- B. Giving Carmen the poems printed out in a large print version.
- C. Highlighting certain phonics words in the poem to make it easier to read.
- D. Giving Carmen an index card to place under each line as she is reading and asking the paraprofessional to be on-hand to provide support when needed.

Let's deconstruct the answers.

- A. This is the kind of “no boundaries” answer that I mentioned in the chapter on Trap Words. We can't just allow students to take as much time as they need. Students need boundaries because boundaries create a sense of support and guided instruction in the

classroom. This is the kind of answer that seems nice and supportive but ultimately *abandons* the student in their difficulties. This is not the best option.

B. Many teachers will pick this option because it appears like it is a typical accommodation used for students with visual impairments. But can you see how this is just another example of “throwing the paper at the student.” There is no support or guidance in this answer. It is not the best option.

C. Again this is trying to make it “easier.” Remember, the purpose of an accommodation is to make it equal not easier. This is not the best option.

D. This is the best option. Notice that we are encouraging Carmen to be able to work independently but we are also asking the paraprofessional to be on-hand to provide support.

Dear Teacher,

I hope that you have enjoyed reading this study guide. When I wrote my previous study guide, many teachers told me that they kept it as a valuable resource for their approach to teaching. I hope teachers will have the same response to this one.

If you are taking the CST Students with Disabilities be sure to brush up on your understanding of the characteristics of different disabilities. I have tried to cover most of them in some way in this book.

Remember, we offer ongoing classes for these tests every other weekend in New York City. Feel free to contact us at brooklynedu@gmail.com if you need additional support. And I do hope that you will leave a review on Amazon about your opinion of this study guide. We are constantly revising our materials and all feedback helps.

Above all, don't let your test anxiety get the best of you. Remember, it's just a test! Good luck on your exams. And once again, thank you for letting me be your coach. Now, go take your test!

Cheers

Bridgette

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