

Learning about Students (TPE 8) and Instructional Planning (TPE 9) are critical to building learning communities. In today's classroom, multilevel curricula are key to establishing harmonious learning groups. These lead to a genuinely inclusive environment, which is the goal of every teacher.

Studying this, I encountered a number of fascinating articles on Social Identity Theory (SIT) which addresses inclusive education, social justice (equity, access, and opportunity) and human dignity (*e.g.*, Rice, 2006). SIT still relates back to the question whether a student's needs can be addressed in a general education setting. The best way to facilitate this is with the use of *curriculum overlapping*. In an overlapped curriculum, all students cover the same subject, but some are responsible for internalizing more than other students.

Speech/Language Impairment (SLI) is a common cause for artificially creating social outcasts. The astute teacher must be able to structure the class so that SLI students do not perceive themselves of being in an 'out-group' (as opposed to an in-group). Since the student with the worst chance of impressing members of an in-group is the one that needs a sense of community the most, how does one lower the barrier of in-group acceptance?

There is no room for outcasts in a learning community. At-risk students must be made integral parts of learning groups, and their success must lead to the success of the entire group. This can be achieved by making cooperation and acceptance part of the assessment process or by setting up an external reward system. This is why differentiated instruction and overlapping curricula are so important for all the students' academic success.

My specific example of how a lesson can be structured for all students, including SLI students, involves a study of the word “militia” as it is used in the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. For grades eleven and twelve, there is a reading content standard requiring understanding of etymology and changes in usage over time.

In order to set up an overlapping curriculum for SLI students, it may be sufficient to be able to find the current meaning in a reference book and use the current version. For the English Language Learner, knowing the Latin roots may help that student understand how the word fits in their Primary and Secondary Languages. However, for the most advanced learners, finding usages from the late 1700’s in references like the *Oxford English Dictionary* and applying them to the Constitution is both challenging and thought-provoking.

In summary, working groups integrated with special needs and advanced students, utilizing differentiated instruction and overlapping curricula, can produce a stimulating learning environment for all.

Rice, N. Opportunities lost, possibilities found (2006) *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* 17, 2: 88-100. Article retrieved August 16, 2007 from EBSCOhost Academic Search Premier from the Southwestern College database

<http://www.swccd.edu/~library/Lv11/index.asp?L1=12>