Unit 4: Understanding the U.S. School System

Teachers' Guide

LESSON 3: Understanding ESL and Special Education

FOR MORE INFORMATION TO HELP YOU ANSWER QUESTIONS THAT MAY COME UP DURING THIS LESSON, REFER TO THE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS SHEET "LEGAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM" AT THE END OF THIS LESSON.

Time: 2 hours

Content Objectives

- Students understand the placement processes for English as a Second Language (ESL) and Special Education in U.S. schools.
- Students analyze ESL and Special Education programs.

Rights Objectives

- Students become familiar with the right to an equitable education for U.S. school students with limited English proficiency and special needs.
- Students discuss how to support ESL and Special Education students.

Language Objectives

- Students continue to build their language skills around rights
- Students practice reading, writing, and speaking in English.

Materials Needed:

- Student lesson plan
- Paper and pen/pencil to prepare for presentation.

KEY VOCABULARY:

Nouns	**Verbs**	**Adjectives**
English Language Learner	To read	Special
Special Education	To receive (a service)	Extra
Disability	To take (a test)	
Service	To recommend	
Signature	To sign (a paper)	
Test	To write	

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Help	To meet	
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	To need	

LESSON ACTIVITIES:

PART A) A Critical Look at ESL and Special Education Services

Students will need to break into two groups for the activity. One group will learn about ESL, and the other will learn about Special Education. The teacher should allow students to choose which group they want to participate in but should make sure there are students in both groups. All students will interact with both ESL and Special Education content at the end of the lesson. You could introduce the difference this way:

"Choose whether to look closely at ESL, which stands for English as Second Language, or Special Education. English as a Second Language is a special class in school for children who do not speak English as well as a child who has spoken it most of his or her life. It is a class about learning how to speak, read, and write English better. Special Education is for students who have trouble learning the same way as other children because they have a physical or mental difference or disability."

As the groups work on the activity, make sure to check in with them about whether they comprehend the details of the student narratives.

Divide into two groups. One group will report back to the class about English as a Second Language and the other about Special Education. Each group should complete the activity that corresponds to their group topic.

ESL Group

Read the following story together and then respond to the questions listed below:

My name is Dekah. I am 14 years old. I moved to the United States from Somalia 3 years ago. When I went to school for the first time, I took a test to see whether I was ready to learn at school in English. The test said that I could receive a special service called English as a Second Language, or ESL, to help me learn English. The school sent a paper home for my father to sign to let me be in ESL. He decided to sign it, and now I am in ESL.

Source: http://www.slideshare.net/naroseo/thesis-

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In your group, discuss the following questions.

- How did the school decide to recommend that Dekah receive ESL services?
- Who gets to decide whether a student will be in ESL?
- If you were Dekah's father, what would you want to know about the ESL program before signing the paper?

Continue reading the story, and respond to the questions listed below:

Because my dad signed the paper, I am in ESL at my school. I have a special class that I go to each day called ESL. Everyone in the class speaks a different language at home and is trying to learn English better. In my ESL class, the teacher has special training to work with English Language Learners (ELLs) like me. Some of my classes, like math and science, are a mix of ELLs and students who already speak English well. These classes are hard for me because I have to learn the math and science in English, which I still do not know very well.

Source: https://www.minnpost.com/sites/default/files/MiriamAdamNABAD640.jpg

In your group, discuss the following questions.

- How is Dekah's school helping her learn English?
- What makes school hard for Dekah?
- If your group could change something about Dekah's ESL program, what would you change?

Prepare to explain ESL to the other group. Pick two spokespersons for your group. The first spokesperson should explain who Dekah is and how she got into the ESL program at her school. The second spokesperson should explain what school is like for Dekah and what your group decided they would change about Dekah's ESL program.

Special Education Group

Read the following story together and then respond to the questions listed below:

My name is Imran. I am 9 years old. I moved to the United States from Pakistan 1 year ago. When I went to school in the United States for the first time, I had trouble learning to read. When I looked at a word, it seemed like the letters would move around on the page. At first I thought that it was just because I was learning to read in English and English is a hard language to learn. My teacher thought that I might be having trouble learning to read for a different reason, so he had me take some tests with other staff at the school. The staff told me after the test that they thought I had a learning disability and could be put in Special Education. Special Education is not for people who are not smart or do not work hard. It is for people like me who learn differently than other people and need extra help.

Source: http://asdmagazinefall2010.wikispaces.

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In your group, discuss the following questions:

- How did the school decide to recommend that Imran receive special education services?

The school sent a paper home for my grandmother to sign to let me be in special education. She decided to sign it, and now I am in special education. My teachers met with my grandmother and me to write my IEP (Individualized Education Program). It's a plan for how teachers will help me learn. It is a legal document, which means that my teachers have to follow the plan.

Source: http://pakistanpaindabad.blogspot.com/2007/06/bapsi-sidhwa-i-wrote-naturally-about.html

- Who gets to decide whether a student will be in special education?
- What is an IEP?
- If you were Imran's grandmother, what would you want to know about the special education program before signing the paper?

Continue reading the story, and respond to the questions listed below:

Because my grandmother signed the paper, I am in special education at my school. I have a class that I go to each day that is only for people in special education. There are all kinds of students in my class. Some people have physical disabilities, like John who cannot see very well. Other people have other disabilities, like Raul, who has trouble paying attention and sitting down for a long time. In my special education class, the teacher has special training to work with people who learn differently.

Some of my other classes, like math and science, are called inclusion classes. They are mixed of special education students and regular students. The teachers in these classes have special training to help me by making changes in the class and following my IEP.

In your group, discuss the following questions.

- How is Imran's school helping him to learn?
- What other kinds of help do you think Imran needs at school?

Pick two spokespersons for your group. The first spokesperson should get ready to explain who Imran is and how and why he got into the Special Education program at his school. The second spokesperson should explain what school is like for Imran and what other kinds of help your group thinks he needs.

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Part B) Group Discussion

Invite the spokespeople from each group to share with the class what their groups discussed. After the spokespeople present, pose the following final reflection questions to the class and facilitate discussion, recording students' ideas on the board.

If you are a spokesperson, share with the class what your group discussed. All members of the class should feel free to ask questions after the presentation. If enough time remains, the class may also choose to discuss the following questions:

- What challenges do immigrant children who are receiving ESL or Special Education services face that non-immigrant children would not face?
- How can we, as members of our communities, support students who are in ESL or Special Education and their parents?

PART C) Reflections

The instructor should invite students to share questions and concerns the lesson raised for them that they may want to explore with their children, teachers, school staff members, or other adults they know. Record students' ideas on the board. Then, invite students to brainstorm how parents initiate conversation with their children, teachers, school staff members, or other helpful figures about their questions and concerns regarding ESL and special education, using the questions below as a guide.

As a class, discuss your answers to the following questions, considering your experiences and the lesson activities:

- What is the most interesting or important thing you learned about ESL and special education during the lesson?
- What questions or concerns about U.S. schools would you like to raise with your children, a teacher, a school staff member, or another adult, such as a fellow parent, in light of the lesson?
- How would you bring up a question or concern you have about ESL or special education to your child? A teacher? Another adult you trust?

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END OF LESSON REFLECTIONS: **The teacher asks students at the end of each lesson what they learned and how they felt doing these activities. The teacher may want to take notes based on what students share to help in preparing the lesson for the following week. Guiding questions for instructors to pose to students include the following:**

- **What new ideas/content did you learn?**
- **What new vocabulary did you learn?**
- **What new rights did you learn?**
- **What was difficult? What was easy?**
- **How did you feel?**
- **What would you change?**
- **How would you use this information?**
- **How does this content connect to human rights?**
- **What situations can you think of when you may want to assert your rights?**

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FAQ: LEGAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM January 2016

❖ **What does it mean if my child is an ELL student?**

ELL is an acronym for English Language Learners. Youth whose first language is not English or who speak a language other than English in their homes qualify for ELL services. ESL is an acronym for English as a Second Language. LEP is an acronym for Limited English Proficiency. These terms are often used interchangeably for students who speak a language other than English in the home.

Schools want to ensure that all children can succeed in the classroom, and so they offer additional services to students who are not yet fully fluent in English. These services can include sheltered instruction, where students learn English and content areas simultaneously. They can also include pull-out instruction where students have time with an ESL teacher during their school day. There can also be push-in instruction, where an ESL teacher comes into a classroom and co-teaches with the classroom teacher to ensure all students have access to the material being taught and that their English skills are developing. The stories included in this lesson describe pull-out instruction.

In Massachusetts, and 35 other states, ELL students take an annual assessment, the WIDA ACCESS, to measure their language growth. The ACCESS tests students' proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The students will get a numerical score 1-6 for each of the areas of evaluation and a composite score. These scores let teachers and parents know what the child has successfully mastered and what additional instruction is needed for the child to gain full English proficiency. To learn more about WIDA visit http://wida.us. Even if your state is not a member of the WIDA consortium, it will have a similar assessment tool to ensure students are developing in their English language proficiency. The goal of ELL services is to have students become fully fluent in academic English.

States indicate a growth goal for ELL students each year. Students who meet and exceed these goals are on their way to full English proficiency. Students who do not meet the growth goal may need additional support on their path toward developing English language proficiency.

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❖ What is a Special Education?

Special Education refers to an area of education that provides educational services to neuro-diverse students. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a child may need special-education or related services because of (1) an intellectual or learning disability, (2) a hearing, language, or visual impairment, (3) a serious emotional disturbance, or (4) another health impairment.

Classroom teachers should carefully observe and document the educational development of their students. Teachers may notice that a student is struggling with certain areas and begin interventions to help the student improve. If the student does not make progress for a set period of time after other interventions, the teacher may ask that the student be evaluated for special education services. Parents will be contacted by the school, and if the student is found to qualify for special education services, an Individualized Education Program will be written.

Some children with IEPs will stay in their general education classroom and have set times where they meet with their Special Education teacher, speech pathologist, or occupational therapist. Some Special Education teachers may come to the student's regular classroom. Some children, whose needs warrant it, will be in special education classrooms that are best able to meet their needs.

❖ What is an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?

An IEP is a specially designed plan of educational instruction for a child with disabilities. The individualized education program is a written plan that details the particular child's abilities, the child's educational goals, and the services to be provided. The plan will be written by a team that includes: the child's parents or guardian; a representative of the local education agency who is knowledgeable about the school district's resources; the child's teacher; other individuals at the discretion of the agency or the parent; and, where appropriate, the child. The goal of the IEP is to set reachable goals for the student and to ensure the student has appropriate educational modifications that will best help the student succeed. Students are evaluated annually to see if they are reaching their IEP goals. IEPs can also be modified or re-written to ensure the student is progressing. A school is required to follow the IEP because it is a legally binding document. Parents may want, but are not required, to seek the advice of a lawyer for their child's IEP.

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