



COLLABORATING TO SUPPORT SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION

Across Learning Environments



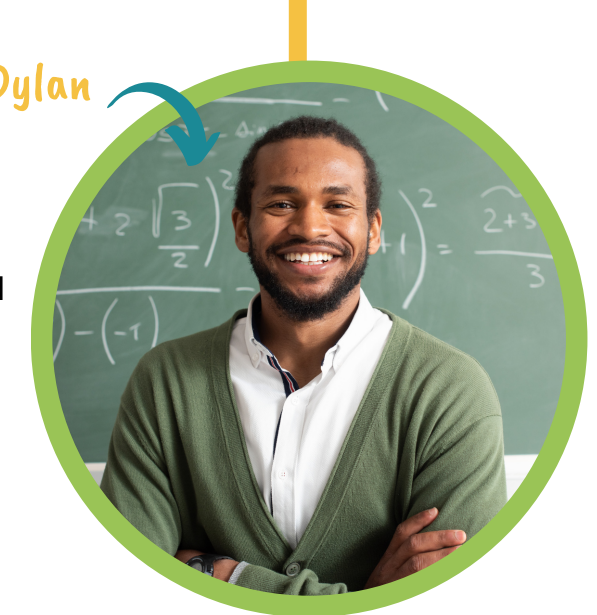
You do, I do, we do...?

Terri is a special education teacher who is new to the district. This school year, they will be working with Dylan, a general education teacher, providing integrated services in a co-taught inclusive environment. This will be the first experience for both teachers implementing this particular service delivery model within the continuum of services. Terri has provided primary instruction in a self-contained classroom setting and incorporates many high-leverage practices (HLPs) into their instructional methodology and delivery of instruction. Dylan is familiar with the term “specially designed instruction” (SDI). He assumes Terri will be a good resource for helping him understand how SDI will be used to help students with disabilities access the general education curriculum and work toward their IEP goals.



Terri

At their initial meeting, both teachers discuss how they approach teaching and what specific instructional practices they employ. Terri shares their work with HLPs and specially designed instruction (SDI). Dylan shares that he has just started to learn about universal design for learning (UDL). Both agree that it seems like a lot and are unsure how it all fits together when planning and delivering lessons. They agree to take some time to examine the components of each of these instructional practices and how they relate to one another and what it means for their lesson planning for both in-person and remote learning environments.



Dylan

Terri and Dylan’s story isn’t unique. As we pursue authentically inclusive classrooms, it is critical that general education and special education teachers learn how to work in collaboration. As [Barb Casey described in a May 2019 post on the ASCD website](#), “We must create time for special educators and general educators to get to know each other’s strengths and dispel the mysteries that lie behind their separate doors. Each discipline has strategies and practices that improve student learning.”

The TALE Academy’s core curriculum is designed primarily for the general education teacher who leads core instruction. Therefore, we have crafted this session with the general education teacher in mind (Dylan, in the scenario above), and we focus on helping the general education teacher understand specially designed instruction (SDI), which is led by the special education teacher. For more information on ensuring effective collaboration between general and special education teachers, see [Collaboration for Inclusion and Student Success](#) on page 6 of this document.

What is Specially Designed Instruction?

Let's start with the law. New York State, following IDEA regulations, defines specially designed instruction (SDI) as:



"adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible student, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs that result from the student's disability; and [ensuring] access of the student to the general curriculum, so that he or she can meet the education standards that apply to all students."

Moving beyond compliance and into the classroom, the New York State Education Department Office of Special Education Partnership provides the following parameters for the delivery of SDI:



Designed and monitored by a special education teacher and delivered directly or through co-teaching by a special education teacher



Offers individualized instruction to address the unique needs of each student with a disability and is more intensive than the instruction usually provided in general education



Provides instruction that is systematically, intentionally, and meaningfully planned and organized



Specified in each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP)



Provides adaptations to content, methodology, or delivery of instruction



Allows students with disabilities to participate in the general education curriculum as well as extracurricular school-related activities with peers both with and without disabilities

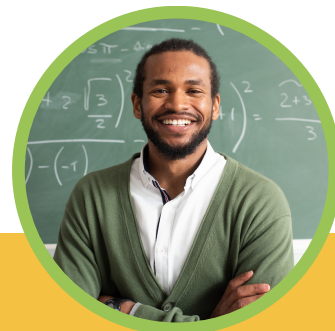
The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) also notes that SDI can address any area of individual need, including academic, behavioral, social, communication, health, and functional needs. It can be provided in any location, including multiple locations during the course of the school day, as long as the location is consistent with the student's IEP and the student's **least restrictive environment** and it is provided by educators with expertise in progress monitoring, data-based decision making, and individualizing and intensifying instruction. SDI does *not* lower standards or expectations for the student.

How Does SDI Relate to Core Instruction?

SDI happens in multiple forms, locations, and modalities, based on the student's IEP. In inclusive classrooms, you may hear the phrase "push-in services." What this means is that the special education teacher joins the general education classroom to provide individualized instruction and support to students in acquiring specific skills they do not have but need in order to access and progress in the general education curriculum. SDI is individualized, must be delivered by a qualified special education teacher or related service provider, and delivered in the least restrictive environment. Students who receive SDI need individualized instruction in order to maintain adequate rates of progress. They may also receive instructional and testing accommodations.



When a special education teacher "pushes in," the goal is that their instruction is aligned with the core instruction. If the inclusive classroom is using universal design for learning (UDL), then the special education teacher will work with the UDL strategies in order to individualize instruction for their student. The priority, however, is the needs of the students with disabilities.



The Value of TALE for Delivering SDI



Visual



Auditory



Kinesthetic



Tactile

Let's return to Terri and Dylan's collaboration.

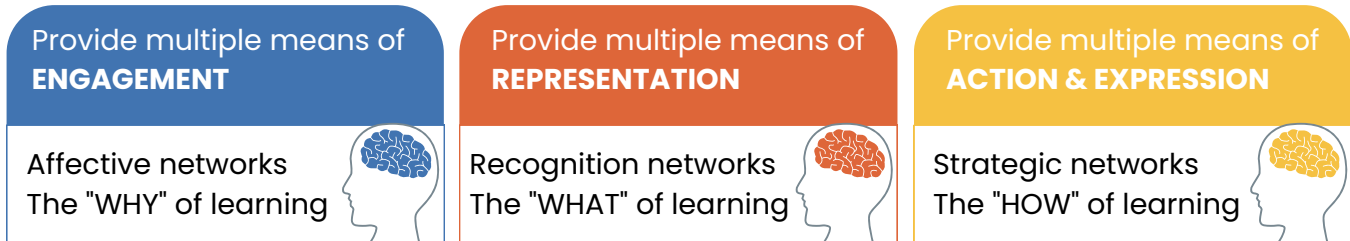
Here's one lesson they built together for 5th grade English language arts. First, students read a novel and then the teachers offer their students a choice board of activities. Students can choose from a list of activities for each of the following learning preferences: **visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile**. The activities include developing a PowerPoint, writing newspaper stories on the characters of the book, choosing different songs that represent the tone and theme of the book, and creating a storyboard. They also planned for remote learning by providing instruction for each of the platforms and text accommodations provided in the choice board. For example, if a student chooses to create a PowerPoint, they will be taught to share that remotely. If a student chooses to write a newspaper story, they can create a blog post on the characters of the book. If a student chooses songs that represent the characters, they can upload those into a shared music library for the class. If a student chooses to create a storyboard, an online version can be created in PowerPoint or another platform used by the class.

This approach helps **reduce stigma for all students**, particularly students receiving SDI, as everyone is engaging in a unique learning experience based on their choices. For the student receiving SDI, the special education teacher will ensure the student's choice works in conjunction with the requirements of the student's IEP.

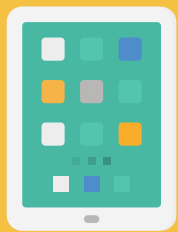
How Does SDI Relate to Universal Design for Learning?

Universal design for learning (UDL) guides the design, instructional goals, assessments, methods, and materials that can be customized and adjusted to make learning accessible to all students. UDL addresses multiple means of engagement (the why of learning), representation (the what of learning), and action and expression (the how of learning).

UDL Guidelines



UDL + SDI + TALE



UDL is a perfect compliment to SDI, especially when implementing from a TALE perspective. For example, Dylan and Terri can provide texts in multiple formats and reading levels, including print, digital, text-to-speech, and audiobooks. This supports differentiated instruction for students with disabilities. Moreover, these multiple modalities for "reading" provide options for all students to become engaged and invest in their learning. A finally, these modes and can be supplied for in-person, remote, and hybrid learning environments.



How Does SDI Relate to High-Leverage Practices (HLPs) for Students with Disabilities?

HLPs are research-based teaching practices in which special and general education teachers engage in a variety of settings. HLPs in special education include 22 research-based practices organized into four areas: **collaboration, social emotional behavior, assessment, and instruction**, all of which are inclusive to special education. We focused on three HLPs in the domain of instruction: flexible grouping, scaffolds, and explicit instruction. HLPs establish a strong foundation for inclusion; SDI is then more effectively delivered in an inclusive classroom.

Now add HLPs!

HLPs provide teachers with specific practices to implement SDI and UDL from a TALE perspective. Let's return to Terri and Dylan to look at how they can use HLPs. First, they assess the students to determine their skill levels in reading decoding and comprehension. When assessing remotely, they create chat rooms so either of them can assess students individually. This data will inform them of the type of text and reading level each student will be able to access. As both have used explicit instruction in their lessons before, they decide to continue that practice for whole-group reading instruction. When the students break into small reading groups, Terri will provide more intensive instruction to students with significant limitations in reading.



Collaboration for Inclusion and Student Success

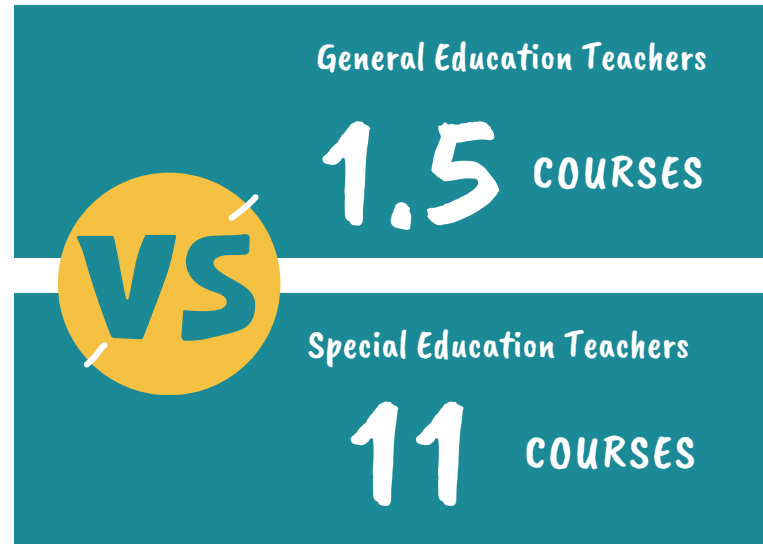
The success of SDI and the student receiving SDI is dependent upon many factors, one of which is effective collaboration between their general education and special education teachers. We know that the training for general education and special education is different, and teachers will arrive at the collaboration with different skill sets. **For example, a 2007 study found that in teacher-preparation programs, general education teachers took an average of just 1.5 courses that focused on inclusion or special education, whereas their special education peers took an average of 11 courses on inclusion and special education.** On the flip side, general education teachers take a broader range of courses and, therefore, teaching skills and strategies. Bringing these skill sets together for the benefit of our students is what collaboration is all about.

The [National Center for Learning Disabilities \(NCLD\)](#) affirms this integrative approach to collaboration:



No single educator should be responsible for holding the expertise in the infinite presentations of learner variability. Further, students work with multiple adults within a school building. Collaboration creates safe conditions for students and educators to share knowledge and collectively problem-solve ... Collaboration can bring together teachers with different perspectives and different knowledge to meet learner variability. For example, a general education teacher collaborating with a literacy specialist can efficiently identify strategies to support students with reading abilities that are above or below grade level.

COURSES TAKEN ON INCLUSION & SPECIAL EDUCATION IN TEACHER-PREPARATION PROGRAMS



Core Skills for Collaboration

The key to effective collaboration is to begin by building your skills and capacity for collaboration. Before you try to solve student challenges together, learn how to work together in general. NCLD provides a list of core skills that both general education and special education teachers can learn to ground their collaborations.

Preparedness



- Identify a facilitator. This person may be the team leader, or you may opt to rotate facilitation responsibilities.
- Set an agenda ahead of time and identify meeting goals.
- Communicate pre-work, ideally no more than 30 minutes' worth, to maximize collaboration.

Active Listening



- Be present. Silence cell phones, close laptops, and focus only on the meeting agenda and goals.
- Allows others to fully finish their thoughts.
- Follow up with questions.

Summarizing



- As the meeting goes on, summarize what you're hearing (or think you're hearing!) from your colleagues.
- As the meeting concludes, summarize next steps, ownership, and any deadlines for follow-through. Identify any unresolved topics for the next meeting. Don't forget to revisit these next steps during future meetings to ensure follow-through.

Questioning



- Approach colleagues with an inquiry mindset. Ask questions, particularly open-ended and clarifying ones.
- Check your own understanding of your colleagues' views by paraphrasing.

Delivering



- Deliver ideas and solutions with evidence.

Integrating



- Synthesize colleagues' ideas to arrive at an actionable solution.
- Use input and feedback to strengthen initial ideas.

Empathizing



- Assume positive intent of others.
- Ensure that everyone's voice is equally heard and that everyone is contributing.

Your Turn!

But before you can apply any of these skills to a collaboration with a special education teacher, it is essential to understand one another's jobs.

Up Next: The choice board and activities in this session will provide you with an opportunity to gain insight into the primary instructional work of special education teachers: specially designed instruction.

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About Us

The TALE Academy

The TALE Academy is a series of virtual learning experiences available to all New York State educators and offers a rich array of resources on topics related to teaching across learning environments (TALE). The TALE Academy is built upon the work New York State educators carried out during emergency remote teaching (ERT) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and extends it toward the future. TALE invites educators to think beyond online learning to consider a broader perspective on teaching and learning that encompasses teaching across multiple environments (in-person, remote, and hybrid).

The Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE) Project

The TALE Academy is part of a broader New York State Education Department (NYSED) initiative known as Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE). In July 2020, NYSED was awarded funding through the United States Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund-Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant to implement TRLE – a three-year project to build the capacity of teachers and educational leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. Launched in the depths of the pandemic, the first phase of the TRLE project focused on getting resources to the field through partnerships with Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and school districts across the state. The second phase, which began in February 2022, focused on aggregating lessons learned and emerging teaching and learning strategies to address a broader field of practice: teaching across learning environments.

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