

M.Ed. in Severe Disabilities Comprehensive Exam

EXAMPLE 2

Acceptable

Comprehensive Examination in Severe Disabilities

1.) a. Severe disabilities is a term that describes an individual who requires support to participate in one or more functional areas of life (school, home, etc.). The Individuals with Disabilities Act ensures that these individuals receive education by stating that “all individuals with a disability have the right to a free and appropriate public education in their least restrictive environment”. There are 13 categories under the term severe disabilities: autism, mental retardation, speech and language impairment, other health impairment, deafness, hearing impairment, visual impairment, traumatic brain injury, multiple disabilities, emotional disturbance, specific learning disability, orthopedic impairment, and deaf-blindness.—**under special education**

b. I would expect Asela to be a “tactile” learner who benefits from a lot of “hands-on” activities. I would also expect that she enjoys movement, so incorporating that into her learning would help keep her engaged and focused. Asela would benefit from having a consistent routine that is predictable for her and can be followed through the use of a schedule. This routine would allow her to be more independent in the classroom. Asela most likely has a slower pace of learning and would require a great deal of repetition and consistency. Abstract concepts may also be difficult for her and would need to be broken down in smaller, easier to understand concepts. She may also learn best if academics and new skills are presented in a variety of different ways (visual, auditory, tactile, etc.) and throughout a variety of different setting so that these new skills are more generalizable for her. Communication may be difficult for her because she has two languages being spoken at home, so she may require an augmentative communication system that is based on her individual preferences and culture. A system that incorporates both home and school languages would be the best. Her culture may also make certain academics difficult to understand, so the teacher should work to eliminate any cultural biases in the curriculum. Asela would benefit from having minimal distractions in her learning environment and would probably respond very well to positive reinforcement.

c. By the time Asela reaches the age of 20, I would expect her education to have grown and changed a great deal. At the age of 20, I see Asela attending a public high school in an inclusive classroom. I also see her receiving vocational training and taking life skills classes to prepare her for entering into the community within the next year. I believe she would be in a work study program of her choice in which she would be working part time as a paid-employee in a job setting that coincides with both her preferences and strengths. I believe she would have grown academically, as well as socially, and would have an effective communication system in place that she uses daily. I also believe Asela would be an active member of the community and would be spending part of her days participating in recreational activities. By age 20, I would like to see that Asela has grown as an individual and is preparing to become a successful and independent member of the community.

2.) Evaluation is extremely important and essential for students of all abilities. Evaluations can be used for a

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variety of different purposes, including screening to see where a student is at compared to peers in their class or grade level, to help with diagnosis and program development, and to evaluate student progress, quality of life, and program effectiveness. Evaluations of students with severe disabilities should be based on the student's individual strengths and needs, as well as their learning characteristics. Students with severe disabilities should be evaluated on both academics as well as social skills. As a teacher, I believe that when developing a program for a new student, using an ecological inventory is one of the most effective methods of evaluation. During an ecological inventory, the teacher first lists the different environments a typically developing student of that age would be learning in. Then, the teacher notes all the different skills that a typically developing student of that age would be learning in each listed environment. The teacher then evaluates which skills and environments are the most important and appropriate for their student and adapts the skills to fit their student's level, strengths, and needs. Another important type of evaluation is the alternate assessment. All students in each state are required to take statewide testing that is based on the academic standards of the state they reside in. Students with disabilities usually take part in an alternate assessment that is more appropriate to their academic level. Alternate assessment is a way for the teacher to individually assess a student with severe disabilities based on an adapted version of the academic standards. These standards are broken down into different areas and skills and assessed throughout the course of the year through data collection. Another effective type of evaluation for students with severe disabilities is informal assessments. One examples of an informal assessment is a task analysis. A task analysis is when a skill or task is broken down into steps and the teacher takes data on which steps the student was able to perform and with what level of assistance. Task analyses are good because they can be easily changed and adapted to fit a variety of different skills and areas. Another form of informal assessment is observation. Observation is one of the easiest and effective ways to assess a variety of different things, including program effectiveness, student progress, and etc. A good teacher is one who is constantly observing her students, as well as herself to see what is working and what is not working in the classroom. A good teacher is also one who effectively uses evaluation to aid in program development, student progress, identification of student strengths and needs, identification of student academic level, and identification of student learning styles and characteristics.

3.) An effective educational program for students with severe disabilities is one that includes a variety of

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different components. The first is making sure the program is student-centered and is based on the individual needs of each student in the classroom. Each student should have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that is the basis for their day to day learning and are based on the student's individual strengths and needs. Each student's learning styles and characteristics should be taken into consideration and each student should be provided with the appropriate supports, adaptations, and modifications to be successful in the learning environment. Another component of an effective education program is placing students in their least restrictive environment and making sure their environment is the most conducive for learning. Students with severe disabilities have the right to be educated in their least restrictive environment. The classroom environment should be set up in a way that encourages learning and motivates students. Teachers should always take a proactive approach to teaching and provide students with positive reinforcement and encouragement. Classrooms should provide students with all the necessary materials for learning, but have minimal distractions. Another component for an effective educational program is consistency. Students with severe disabilities benefit from having a consistent, predictable routine that can be followed by the use of a schedule. This enhances their day to day independence in the classroom and reduces the anxiety of "not knowing what is going to happen next". Another component for an effective education program is collaboration. Regular education teachers, special education teachers, teacher assistants, therapists, social workers, etc. should all communicate and work together to provide each individual student with opportunities to grow and learn, and the supports they require to do that. An effective program is one that not only focuses on academics, but also focuses on social skills and life skills. Students should have individual communication systems that are used on a daily basis and that fit each student. Students should also have behavior plans (if needed) that guide and promote appropriate and acceptable behaviors in and out of the classroom. Students should be provided with and encouraged to participate in numerous social opportunities and activities with both peers and adults to help improve and increase their social skills in a variety of settings. Another important component of an effective education program is family involvement. It is essential for families to be involved in their child's education and learning. Teachers should encourage family involvement in school activities. Teachers should also stay in constant communication with the families of their students. This communication allows teachers to know and understand their student better, as well as bridge the gap between home and school. All these different components create a positive learning environment that will help create and foster an effective education program.

4.) a. To select and design a communication system for Davi, I would first observe him in the school setting and

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record data on if and how he interacts with the other people in the classroom. I would also record data on any non-formal communication, if any, that he uses to acquire something he wants, express pleasure or displeasure, gain attention, request something, etc. This data will give me a better understanding of Davi's preferences, strengths, and needs. After reading a little bit of information about Davi, I believe that he would benefit most from using the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

b. To determine the content that should be included in Davi's communication system, I would first do a preference assessment to give me more information on what's motivating to him. Motivation is a key component in teaching a new communication system and using a preference assessment will give me a better idea of where to start with Davi. I would then do some more observations and data recording to see what his day at school entails (activities he participates in, academics, social opportunities, lunch and snack, etc). I would also communicate with Davi's family members to discuss what they would like to see from him for communication, and what their preferences are. This information would allow me to determine what should be included in Davi's communication system and what the key content that I should start with is (i.e. what pictures Davi would use the most during school throughout the day, such as food, bathroom, ball, etc.)

c. To begin teaching Davi the PECS system, I would first start with using a familiar and motivating object, paired with a picture. I would work to get Davi to understand that by handing me the picture, he will then get the object in exchange. Once Davi gains a general understanding of this, I would gradually add in more pictures and work on increasing his independence level. The next step would be to begin using choice making and start building a communication book with all of the pictures that Davi has mastered. I believe that when teaching PECS, both repetition and reinforcement are extremely effective. I would make sure that Davi uses his communication book every day, and I would encourage him and provide him with opportunities for communication as much as possible. I believe that the more Davi uses the PECS system, the more his understanding and communication skills will grow.

d. Within two years of Davi starting to use the PECS system, I would expect that he would have a good number of pictures in his communication book that he has mastered. I would expect that he is using these pictures accurately and effectively. I would also expect that he is using the PECS system with a variety of communication partners in the classroom and at home. I would also expect Davi to be further along in the PECS process, and to possibly begin putting more than one picture together (i.e. "I want" "ball"). I would want Davi to have increased his communication skills and show a higher motivation to use them throughout his day to day activities.

5.) a. As a teacher, I am a firm believer in the inclusion of all students in a regular education setting. I believe

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that inclusion of students with severe disabilities in a regular education setting provides them with higher and broader expectations (that they are able to meet with the appropriate supports), access to the general education curriculum, access to and socialization with non-disabled peers, and placement in their least restrictive environment. Students of all abilities, and especially students with severe disabilities, learn best when placed in their least restrictive environment. Being included in a regular education setting provides them with peer role models that they can learn from, and more opportunities to increase their social skills. Inclusion allows students with severe disabilities to have access to the general education curriculum and gives them the opportunity to learn the same academics as other students in their grade level, with the appropriate supports, adaptations, and modifications for them to be successful. Having access to the general curriculum means having access to academics such as reading, writing, math, science, social studies, etc. I believe that students with severe disabilities have the full capability to learn the general curriculum as long as it is modified to fit their specific needs.

b. There are a variety of different strategies for effective inclusion of students with severe disabilities into a regular education setting. The first strategy is collaboration. In an inclusion setting, it is essential for the regular education teacher and the special education teacher to collaborate and communicate on a daily basis. It is also important for the team (special education teacher, regular education teacher, teacher assistants, therapists, etc.) to meet and discuss the progress, strengths, and needs of each student. Another strategy for effective inclusion is efficient planning and a routine based approach. The special education teacher should look at each individual student and work to set up a daily plan/schedule that is the most conducive for that student to learn. Another strategy is making sure that even in an inclusive setting, the teacher is working on each individual student's goals through the general education curriculum. The classroom environment should be set up in a practical and appropriate way that fits the needs of each of the students. Teachers should strive to accommodate the learning styles and characteristics of each student (i.e. place a visual learner in the front of the classroom, reduce distractions for students who have trouble focusing, and etc.). One of the most important strategies for inclusive education is making sure that each student has the appropriate adaptations, modifications, and supports to be successful in their learning.

c. I have been working for almost eight years in an inclusive setting with students with severe disabilities and believe that I have truly grown in this area. I have learned how to run an inclusion classroom, the importance of collaboration, how to foster appropriate interactions between students, and how to use effective planning to meet the needs of each student. I believe that there is still so much more for me to learn and improve on. As a professional, one area that I would like to work on for myself is incorporating and using more of the general education curriculum in the student's educational goals. I look forward to continuing to learn and grow as a professional in this field and would like to continue working in inclusive settings with students with severe

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disabilities.

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1. Description of Students with Severe/Profound Disabilities		Unacceptable	Acceptable	Exemplary
Definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description is vague and provides information from limited perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description is clearly presented Information is provided from a variety of perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description is clearly presented and detailed Information is provided from a variety of perspectives Description supported by legislation or research 	
Learning Style Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few learning style characteristics are described Key aspects of learning style are not found 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description is clearly presented Most aspects of learning style are described 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning style characteristics are described in detail. Key components include all of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slower pace of learning Difficulty with abstract concepts Multiple opportunities needed for learning Incorporation of communication and movement considerations if needed 	
Changes into Adulthood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change in program/student includes few aspects important for success in adulthood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change in program/student includes a clear discussion of most key aspects important for success in adulthood 	Change in program/student includes a clear and detailed discussion of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involvement in transition planning Discussion of experiences in work, academics, and social areas/recreation Expansion of learning and people Focus increasing on experiences important for success in adulthood 	
2. Meaningful Evaluation		Unacceptable	Acceptable	Exemplary
Components of Meaningful Evaluation for a Student with Severe/Profound Disabilities	Description is vague and provides information from limited perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation is clearly described Many aspects of evaluation are included 	Evaluation is clearly described according to the following components <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many purposes of evaluation Many examples are provided that are consistent with stated purpose and describe value of different evaluation procedures for students with severe/profound disabilities Ecological inventory Alternate Assessment 	

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3. Effective Educational Programs	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Exemplary
<p>Foundations for Effective Educational Programs for Students with Severe/Profound Disabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description is vague and provides information from limited perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description is clearly presented Description presents most key principles of effective educational programs 	<p>Principles of effective educational programs are clearly presented, justified, and examples provided. Principles include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflects curriculum that is based in general education Instruction is based on individual needs/strengths, guided by student progress, and involves the student in the process Predictable system that matches student’s level of understanding and is used on an ongoing basis Environment and behavioral supports match student nature and are implemented pro-actively Incorporates social skill development Families are involved and considered equal partners
4. Development of Communication	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Exemplary
<p>Select and Design Communication for Student</p>	<p>Description is vague and provides information from limited perspectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation is clearly described Many aspects of evaluation are included 	<p>Communication system development is clearly described and includes the following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of student’s current communication Identification of key partners in communication Team decision-making involving the student, parents, professionals and other key individuals Development of a system that is consistent with student’s preference, strengths, and culture Consideration of how the system may grow with the student through time (“next steps”)
5. Effective Inclusion	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Exemplary
<p>Inclusion</p>	<p>Description is vague and provides information from limited perspectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation is clearly described Many aspects of evaluation are included 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusion is defined for students with sev. disabilities A rationale for including students with severe disabilities in regular education settings is described fully with respect to many perspectives A rationale for using the general curriculum as a basis for education is described fully Practical strategies are described with examples that demonstrate reasonable, functional, and useful ways to implement inclusion.