Case Study: When General Education Teachers Take Charge of Students with Disabilities in an Inclusive Classroom: One Teacher's Story

Summary: On the first day of school, Heather Strong, a third grade general education teacher, was introduced to her new student, John, a boy with physical disabilities. Since his arrival was a surprise, she immediately sought out more information. After reading his Individual Education Plan (IEP), she was in a panic! His IEP called for testing accommodations that she had never used and assistive technology that was completely unfamiliar to her. When she consulted with the special education teacher in her school, Ms. Strong was told that assistive technology was strongly discouraged at Johnson School. The special education teacher was quick to remind Ms. Strong that this student had moved into the school from another district. The special educator suggested calling a meeting to rewrite the IEP, removing the assistive technology and adjusting the testing accommodations. Heather realized that she needed more information before making such drastic changes to an IEP, so she set up a consultation with the district's assistive technology specialist.

Characters and Roles:
- Heather Strong, third grade general education teacher
- John Russ, third grade student with cerebral palsy
- Ms. Blankenship, special education teacher
- Ms. Bell, assistive technology specialist

Tools:
- Setting Accommodations Assessment
- Response Accommodations Assessment

Artifacts:
- Example of a screen reader accommodation

Glossary Terms:
- Auditorally
- Scribe

Web Sites:
- http://seriweb.com
- http://www.ucp.org
Discussion Points:

- What are the responsibilities of the regular education teacher, the special education teacher, and the AT specialist in providing assistive technology accommodations for students?
- When a regular education teacher and the special education teacher do not agree on a student's accommodations as listed on an IEP, what should be done?
- What is the role of the principal in ensuring that students with disabilities receive appropriate accommodations?
- What can regular education teachers do to get assistance with clerical tasks that are time-consuming that relate to meeting the needs of students with disabilities?
- Whose responsibility is it to inform classroom teachers when they will have a student with special needs in their class?
- What should a regular education teacher do to prepare for having a student with a disability in his/her class?

Activities:

- Research local, state, and federal laws that relate to using assistive technology with students who have special needs.
- Invite individuals with knowledge of assistive technology to present a staff development session on the topic and demonstrate programs that would be useful in providing accommodations for students in your school.
- Write a proposal for your district or a state or federal grant to acquire programs and/or software that would assist you in providing accommodations for students in your school.
- Roleplay a discussion between a regular education teacher and a special education teacher who do not agree on the assistive technology accommodations listed on a student's IEP?
- Brainstorm a list of ways teachers can get assistance with clerical tasks that would enable them to focus their attention more on instruction.

Reflective Questions: Scene 1, Question 3 - What might have been different if Ms. Strong had been notified about receiving John as a new student?

If school personnel had known about John prior to the first day of school, Ms. Strong would likely have made an effort to be prepared for him. First of all, she probably would have researched cerebral palsy in an effort to learn as much as possible about John's disability. She then might have reviewed his IEP thoroughly so she knew about his individual education needs. Since assistive technology was an important part of his educational plan, she could have visited with the AT specialist in order to become familiar with the computer software and programs John had used previously. Ms. Strong could have also contacted the parents and arranged for a home visit, so she could meet them and John prior to the first day of school. Finally, she certainly would have had a desk or table so John's wheelchair would fit, and hopefully it would not be placed at the back of the room!
Connections:

- Topic Area: Instruction; Module: Reading Acquisition
- Topic Area: Instruction; Module: Reading Comprehension
- Topic Area: Instruction; Module: Mathematics
- Topic Area: Instruction; Module: Writing
- Topic Area: Cooperation; Module: Cooperative Teaching
- Topic Area: Cooperation; Module: Working Effectively with Paraeducators