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INTRODUCTION TO UNDERSTANDING SPECIAL EDUCATION SO MY CHILD HAS WHAT?



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Title:

Introduction to Understanding
Special Education- “So, my child
has what?”

By the School Psychologist
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Dedication: To my daughter
Diana who I love with all my
heart

Author’s Biography:

Adriana San Millan is a Hispanic
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community. She possesses three California Credentials: School Psychologist, Special educator and Administrator. Adriana San Millan is also the author of the book: "So, my child has what? – Intro to Understanding Special Education". Her mission is to strengthen and support individuals, their families and schools by providing high quality services and relationships, improving lives in the community while demonstrating the values: caring and respect for all."

Chapter I - Introduction

As a mom one of my main priorities and motivators in life is my daughter. I understand how close to our hearts our children are. As a psychologist, I frequently arrive at meetings where the parents explain to me that they have not understood for many years what it means to have a child in special education. They have not heard of a disability or may be unsure about it. I have also encountered parents who say to me: “I don’t know what my son has, I could not understand or they did not explain it to me”. “You

are the first person who explains it”. That lead me to finding the importance of writing this book to help people in the process of understanding Special Education.

Chapter II - What is each criteria of disability and the characteristics associated with it?

Schools are ruled by the Education Code (Ed Code).

According to the California Code of Regulations (section 3030) a child “shall qualify as an individual with exceptional needs if the results of the

psychoeducational assessment show that the degree of the child's impairment requires special education.”

The Education code indicates that there are 13 areas of eligibility to consider which are:

1. Autism
2. Deaf-blindness
3. Deafness
4. Emotional Disturbance
5. Hearing impairment
6. Intellectual disability
7. Multiple disabilities
8. Orthopedic Impairment

9. Other Health Impairment
10. Specific Learning Disability
11. Language or Speech Disorder
12. Traumatic Brain Injury
13. Visual Impairment

The final eligibility decision of whether the child qualifies for special education or not is made by the IEP team, including the parents, teachers, administrator, school psychologist, and necessary specialists. The team has to consider all relevant information and material that is available on the child. The decision is not based on a single

score or product of scores used as a single criteria. Everything has to be taken into account for the decision of eligibility for special education. (California Education code section 3030).

Sometimes students can meet the eligibility for two or more Special Education criteria. For example, they could qualify for a Specific Learning Disability and a Speech and Language Impairment as long as the IEP team agrees.

Chapter III Characteristics associated with each area of eligibility-

1. Autism- The California Education code gives the following eligibility criteria for Autism:

“Autism means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, and adversely affecting a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in **repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or**

change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.” (California Education Code section 3030)

In the case of autism, one of the most important aspects is the weakness in the area of social interaction. In many cases the students need support with the social interaction area, so the social skills have to be taught directly because it is an area of weakness that may affect the educational performance and their lives. These areas may be supported with counseling services, behavior

services and speech services. Progress can be made if there is intervention.

Frequently, students may get in trouble due to the social interaction weaknesses. Also, as they grow up, this area may affect them due to not knowing how to interact with friends. Some examples of social interaction weaknesses are saying things that are inappropriate, not understanding the other person's perspective and not being able to know how to play certain games.

A clear example happened to one of my students when during a soccer game, the students picked up the ball and ran with it. The staff was going to give him a disciplinary consequence until they understood he suffered from autism, so he had to be directly taught that in soccer he had to kick the ball instead of running with it. No disciplinary consequence was given. Instead, the staff was trained on how to directly teach the social skills.

It is important to keep in mind that not all characteristics

have to be present. This means that some students may present hand flapping in front of their faces, while others may rock, others may present vocalizations (make sounds), while others may seek sensory stimuli like Velcro to regulate. Some examples of repetitive activities and stereotyped movements include rocking back and forth, vocalizations, or shaking their hands repetitively in front of their face (flapping). There is a variety of behaviors that may be present seeking sensory regulation such as touching hair, playing with Velcro,

spinning in circles, or having fascinations for spinning objects.

Both the students and the parents need support according to each case. These supports may include counseling, social skills groups, speech therapy, behavior support, academic support, or occupational therapy according to each individual education plan (IEP).

2. Deaf-blindness: The California Education code gives the following eligibility criteria for

Deaf-blindness: “Deaf-blindness means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.” (California Education code section 3030)

These students meet both sets of criteria for deafness and visual impairments. These students will need more support because not being able to see or hear will cause a lack of exposure to

information that other children would hear or see. It is possible that there may be weaknesses in the social skills areas as well.

3. Deafness: The California Education code gives the following eligibility criteria for Deafness. Deafness means a hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification that adversely affects a child's educational performance. (California Education code section 3030)

It is very important that we consider the use of technology

and its effects for these students. Technology has advanced and there are several alternative to amplify the sound including classroom speakers. Some of my deaf students have explained that with the hearing aid, all the sounds are amplified. For example, the sound of opening a door is louder than the voice of the teacher. In the same manner if the class is a chatty class, the background noise will sound as loud as the teacher's voice.

4. Emotional Disturbance: The California Education code gives

the following eligibility criteria for Emotional Disturbance:

“Emotional disturbance means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

(A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.

(B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.

(C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.

(D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.

(E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

(F) Emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance under subdivision (b)(4) of this section.”

(California Education code section 3030)

It is important to consider that some of these students do hear voices that others cannot hear. Therefore, it is difficult for them to follow directions when the teacher or the adult speaks. It is important for people to consider this in addition to all the counseling and services agreed at the IEP.

5. Hearing impairment: The California Education code gives the following eligibility criteria for Hearing Impairment:

“Hearing impairment means an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that

adversely affects a child's educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness in this section.” (California Education code section 3030)

It is important to realize that hearing impairments can affect both the educational performance and the social interactions. Due to the misunderstandings generated by the hearing impairment, frequently students misunderstand social cues. It is important to consider that the necessary technology is being consistently used to amplify sounds because without the sound amplification,

the meaning of words can be lost. When possible, closed captioning may be used to display under movies.

6. Intellectual disability: The California Education code gives the following eligibility criteria for Intellectual Disability:

“Intellectual disability means significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child's educational performance.”

(California Education code section 3030)

It is important to consider all the information available on the student including culture, language, nonverbal abilities, and adaptive skills. Sometimes, when students do not process language very well, they tend to score low on intelligence scores that have more verbal items. However, they tend to do better on nonverbal tests or tests in their native language. It is important to consider this before making decisions of eligibility.

7. Multiple disabilities: The California Education code gives

the following eligibility criteria for Multiple Disabilities:

“Multiple disabilities means concomitant impairments, such as intellectual disability-blindness or intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment, the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. “Multiple disabilities” does not include deaf-blindness.” (California Education code section 3030)
Frequently these students are medically fragile or have severe educational needs. When the students are medically fragile, it is

important to keep in mind that there needs to be strong communication with the parent as well as the doctor. In case of an emergency, contact 9 1 1. (Emergency service number in the US).

8. Orthopedic Impairment: The California Education code gives the following eligibility criteria for Orthopedic Impairment:

“Orthopedic impairment means a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by a congenital anomaly, impairments caused by disease

(e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures).” (California Education code section 3030)

Many times, students with cerebral palsy may be considered for this area. In these cases, it is important to consider evaluations from the occupational therapist and speech therapist as well as the school psychologist and special educator.

9. Other Health Impairment: The California Education code gives

the following eligibility criteria for Other Health Impairment:
“Other health impairment means having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment that:
(A) Is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome;
and(B) Adversely affects a child's

educational performance.”
(California Education code
section 3030)

It is important to note that many times the parents bring to the school the medical diagnosis and the school psychologist still has to conduct the psychoeducational evaluation. Once the evaluation is completed, it is presented at the IEP meeting according to the education code requirements including the information that the doctor gave and all the other information from the evaluation. If the IEP team finds that the condition adversely affects the child’s educational performance,

the school psychologist may recommend the criteria called: “Other Health Impairment”. In my experience, I frequently see it with students who have epilepsy, Tourette syndrome, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder when the medical conditions adversely affect educational performance.

10. Specific Learning Disability-
The California Education code gives the following eligibility criteria for a specific learning disability:

Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the

basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may have manifested itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The basic psychological processes include attention, visual processing, auditory processing, sensory-motor skills, cognitive abilities including association, conceptualization and expression. (A) Specific learning disabilities do not include learning problems

that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disability, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

A severe discrepancy shall not be primarily the result of limited school experience or poor school attendance.

(C) Whether or not a pupil exhibits a severe discrepancy as described in subdivision (b)(10)(B) above, a pupil may be determined to have a specific learning disability if:

1. The pupil does not achieve adequately for the pupil's age or to

meet State-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas, when provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the pupil's age or State-approved grade-level standards:

- (i) Oral expression.
- (ii) Listening comprehension.
- (iii) Written expression.
- (iv) Basic reading skill.
- (v) Reading fluency skills.
- (vi) Reading comprehension.
- (vii) Mathematics calculation.
- (viii) Mathematics problem solving, and

2.(i) The pupil does not make sufficient progress to meet age or State-approved grade-level

standards in one or more of the areas identified in subdivision (b)(10)(C)(1) of this section when using a process based on the pupil's response to scientific, research-based intervention; or

(ii) The pupil exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both, relative to age, State-approved grade-level standards, or intellectual development, that is determined by the group to be relevant to the identification of a specific learning disability, using appropriate assessments, consistent with 34 C.F.R. sections 300.304 and 300.305; and

3. The findings under subdivisions (b)(10)(C)(1) and (2) of this section are not primarily the result of:

- (i) A visual, hearing, or motor disability;
 - (ii) Intellectual disability;
 - (iii) Emotional disturbance;
 - (iv) Cultural factors;
 - (v) Environmental or economic disadvantage; or
 - (vi) Limited English proficiency.
- (California Education code section 3030)

In the state of California, it is important to also have a processing disorder in addition to the discrepancy between

intelligence and achievement or the pattern of weaknesses. One of the most common processing weaknesses is found in Auditory Processing. Therefore, it is important that when students are tested that it is offered in their native language to allow them to do their best.

11. Language or Speech Disorder:
The California Education code gives the following eligibility criteria for a Language or Speech Disorder:

A pupil has a language or speech disorder as defined in Education Code section 56333, and it is

determined that the pupil's disorder meets one or more of the following criteria:

(A) Articulation disorder.

1. The pupil displays reduced intelligibility or an inability to use the speech mechanism which significantly interferes with communication and attracts adverse attention. Significant interference in communication occurs when the pupil's production of single or multiple speech sounds on a developmental scale of articulation competency is below that expected for his or her chronological age or developmental level, and which

adversely affects educational performance.

2. A pupil does not meet the criteria for an articulation disorder if the sole assessed disability is an abnormal swallowing pattern.

(B) Abnormal Voice. A pupil has an abnormal voice which is characterized by persistent, defective voice quality, pitch, or loudness.

(C) Fluency Disorders. A pupil has a fluency disorder when the flow of verbal expression including rate and rhythm adversely affects communication between the pupil and listener.

(D) Language Disorder. The pupil has an expressive or receptive

language disorder when he or she meets one of the following criteria:

1. The pupil scores at least 1.5 standard deviations below the mean, or below the 7th percentile, for his or her chronological age or developmental level on two or more standardized tests in one or more of the following areas of language development:

morphology, syntax, semantics, or pragmatics. When standardized tests are considered to be invalid for the specific pupil, the expected language performance level shall be determined by alternative means as specified on the assessment plan, or

2. The pupil scores at least 1.5 standard deviations below the mean or the score is below the 7th percentile for his or her chronological age or developmental level on one or more standardized tests in one of the areas listed in subdivision (A) and displays inappropriate or inadequate usage of expressive or receptive language as measured by a representative spontaneous or elicited language sample of a minimum of 50 utterances. The language sample must be recorded or transcribed and analyzed, and the results included in the assessment report. If the pupil is unable to produce this sample, the

language, speech, and hearing specialist shall document why a fifty-utterance sample was not obtainable and the contexts in which attempts were made to elicit the sample. When standardized tests are considered to be invalid for the specific pupil, the expected language performance level shall be determined by alternative means as specified in the assessment plan.” (California Education code section 3030)

Sometimes, students may meet the criteria for both the language or speech disorder and another set of criteria such as specific learning

disability or autism. This means that they get services from both service providers according to their individual education plan.

12. Traumatic Brain Injury: The California Education code gives the following eligibility criteria for Traumatic Brain Injury:

“Traumatic brain injury means an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Traumatic brain injury applies to open or closed head injuries

resulting in impairments in one or more areas, such as cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech.

(A) Traumatic brain injury does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma.” (California Education code section 3030)

Students with Traumatic Brain Injury may have difficulty with the Executive functioning:

planning, organizing and turning in. Some of the students may require extended time. In some cases, the students need to sleep more in order for the brain to get strong again. It is important to have communication with the medical providers and the parents and adjust the work.

13. Visual Impairment: The California Education code gives the following eligibility criteria for Visual Impairment: “Visual impairment including blindness means an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The

term includes both partial sight and blindness.” (California Education code section 3030)

It is important to support students with visual impairments in many ways. Sometimes, they may need technology to help them to read. Nowadays, the technologies are very advanced to support students. There is text to speech software to help students read. The technology that may be necessary varies from case to case. However, it is important to know that the equipment is even available for rent and easily available. Additionally, some students with visual impairments

may need behavior support, social skills support, or in some cases counseling services according to their Individual Education Plan.

Chapter IV - Strategies to engage and support special education students

Positive reinforcement

One of the best ways to change behavior is Positive Reinforcement. This is based on Skinner's theory. First, find what motivates the student. Use it as the reinforcer. Reinforcers vary for everyone. This means that people have different motivators.

Find out which are the motivators for that student (ask or observe) so that the change in behavior can be produced. Positive reinforcers include smiles, eye contact, attention, presence, proximity, drawings of happy faces, star stickers, tangibles, providing breaks, or saying kind phrases such as “Good job”. (Schultz, D. P. , Schultz, S.E., 2017)

When they exhibit the behavior that you want, then provide the positive reinforcement. If an undesired behavior is present, Redirect to the replacement behavior that is desired. Positive

reinforcement must be immediate and fresh to remain powerful. Shape the behavior slowly towards approaching the desired outcome. If it feels like it is too much, then it is being done correctly. Contact a psychologist or specialist in behavior modification if a behavior support plan is needed. (Schultz, D. P. , Schultz, S.E., 2017)

Vicarious reinforcement- Another useful approach is called Vicarious reinforcement. This is based on Bandura's theory. This theory works when other students in the group are reinforced when

they exhibit the desired behavior. The person who is observing, sees what good behaviors received rewards and attempts to exhibit them. An example of this is when students who are looking at the teacher get a good point. Other students who want a good point will attempt it. At that point positively reinforce when they show the desired behavior. It is a good idea to combine positive reinforcement and vicarious reinforcement and still consider the disability and the state of mind. If the student is anxious, be supportive while you are positively reinforcing. If the

student needs to vent, allow the venting to listen away from others and reinforce with your attention. When the venting is finished, go over what could have been done differently next time. Then shape the behavior with positive reinforcement until it becomes a habit. For support contact a psychologist or behavior specialist at www.sanmillansped.com (Schultz, D. P. , Schultz, S.E. , 2017)

Chapter V: Solutions: What is an Individual Education Plan-IEP?

An IEP is an Individual Education Plan. The individual education plan is created at the meeting in which the psychologist presents the findings of the evaluation. If the child is found eligible for special education services by the team, then an individual education plan is written. The official individual education plan (IEP) team includes the parent, school psychologist, administrator, teachers, specialists as needed, and when possible the student.

The most important information on the first page is the name of the child date of birth, and the areas

of disability. It is also important to take a look at the goals. The findings drive the goals, and the goals guide describe the services. The goals must be attainable, measurable and include a timeline. Progress reports on the goals should be delivered to parents as frequently as the nondisabled peers received report cards. The individual education plan team should meet at least one time a year. Every three years, a reevaluation takes place.

Another important pages the service page. The services should be described indicating the

frequency and the number of minutes. Frequently, this page also describes the accommodations and modifications that the children will receive. Some examples are open book tests, modified length of assignments, preferential seating, or access to teacher notes. These vary according to each case.

Finally, the signature page has very important information. The first portion indicates that people participated in the meeting. The second portion has a section for the official consent indicating the

parents give consent for the services to take place.

The individual education plan is frequently a team approach that provides solutions to support students. It allows the documentation of the services to be provided to support the student. Some examples include counseling services, behavior support services, occupational therapy, speech therapy, adaptive physical education, vision services, orientation and mobility services, and specialized academic instruction services.

Useful acronyms in Special Education and what they mean

IEP - Individual Education Plan

Sped- Special Education

OT - Occupational Therapy

SAI- Specialized Academic Instruction

SLD-Specific Learning Disability

SLI-Speech and Language Impairment

AUT-Autism

BIP- Behavior Intervention Plan

Adaptive PE-Adaptive Physical Education

OHI-Other Health Impairment

OI- Orthopedic Impairment

ED- Emotional Disability

HOH-Hard of Hearing

D/HOH- Deaf/Hard of Hearing

VI- Visual Impairment

Annual- Annual IEP meeting

Tri- Triennial IEP meeting in
which a psychoeducational
evaluation takes place -done every
3 years

AP- Assessment Plan- Papers
signed to give consent to test the
students

(www.sanmillansped.com)

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Sections 56026, 56320, 56333 and
56337, Education Code; 20

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1414(a) and (b); and 34 C.F.R.

Sections 300.8, 300.300, 300.301,
300.304, 300.305, 300.306,
300.307, 300.308, 300.309 and
300.311.

1. New Article 3.1 (Sections 3030
and 3031) filed 1-31-83; effective
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83, No. 6).

2. Amendment filed 2-11-86;
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3. Amendment filed 3-21-88;
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No. 15).

4. Amendment of section and
Note filed 5-5-2014; operative 7-
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**“Crossing the bridge of
knowledge helps our youth.”
(Adriana San Millan, 2017.)**

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ADRIANA SAN MILLAN IS A HISPANIC BILINGUAL SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST AND SPECIAL EDUCATOR. SHE IS ALSO THE CEO OF OUR AGENCY WHICH PROVIDES SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES AND COUNSELING SERVICES TO THE COMMUNITY.

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