Interview with Lisa Gaglioti, SPED teacher from Hillcrest Elementary School (2019)

Lisa Gaglioti:
I think it is helpful if I describe my students from last year. I had 10 students with varying disabilities including autism, intellectual disability, ADHD, emotional disturbance, and specific learning disability. Most of them had compounded disabilities. Although I have third through fifth graders, I group them on their abilities. I had two groups and some outliers. In my first group, I had 2 students working on one to one correspondence and counting most of the year so I used pieces of K Japan math. In my second group, there were 2 students who had counting and one to one correspondence down but were learning how to add and subtract within 20. These 2 students in particular had pretty intense behaviors so they did assignments sporadically and always one to one with an adult. It was very much teacher directed. My third group had 6 students. The first half of the year, I worked with the 2nd grade team planning TTP units surrounding addition and subtraction. The second half of the year, I worked with the 3rd grade team planning TTP units involving addition/subtraction within 1000, multiplication, division, and fractions. With my third group, I tried to cover the major operations.

Interviewer: Has the TTP method of teaching helped your SPED students, and if so, how?

Lisa Gaglioti:
TTP has supported my students in multiple ways. First, TTP helped my students gain a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts. I was able to push more of my students into the general education class this year based on the skills they learned last year more than I have in the past. Although I had to have "practice days" in between TTP lessons, I had far less practice days than I have had in the past. I considered days "practice" when there wasn't any new learning.

Secondly, it has increased engagement. My students loved math and were excited to learn and share their ideas. I had the least behavior issues in math. Some days there were crisis that prevented me from teaching. I had to give them worksheets and they would get upset and complain. I think my students loved math because through TTP they gained confidence. They were eager to come up to the board and explain their thinking.

Lastly, since TTP is so thoughtful and flexible, I was able to adjust the unit plans to fit my students' needs. If the students didn't demonstrate understanding of the summary that was intended, I can make little adjustments and teach a new lesson that was in their realm of understanding. TTP really allows us to adjust in order to teach in the students' zone of proximal development. Everyday, I took a picture of the board work and reflected to plan the next day's lesson.

Interviewer: What is challenging about using TTP with SPED students? Have you found any strategies to overcome these challenges?

Lisa Gaglioti:

For most of my students, TTP is not the challenging part. The grade level standards are the most difficult part of math. They are so far below grade level, even with TTP, their grade level standards are too high for most of them. For example, a 4th grade student working on addition within 20 would not be able to access the fourth grade standard of solving multistep multiple digit addition word problems in one year. One way I have worked through this is by assessing student's mathematical understanding and putting them in groups according to their understanding and abilities. Last year, had one group coming in with the math understanding of a first grader. For the first half of the year, I planned with the 2nd grade team and implemented TTP lesson. For the second half of the year, I taught 3rd grade TTP lessons. This enabled my students to gain a deeper understanding of 2nd/3rd grade mathematical concepts as a foundation for 4th and 5th grade. Even while teaching 2nd and 3rd grade standards, I had to supplement with extra first grade computation practice and math games to fill in gaps. However, I do not think my students would have had a deep enough understanding of math to be ready for 4th and 5th grade without teaching through problem solving.

Another challenge for this group is the size of the group. Since I break my class into different groups, my groups are all small. Therefore, I have less student ideas to pull from. With a larger group, you have more variance in ideas.

For another group of students, the biggest challenge of TTP is facilitating meaningful conversations. They are functioning at a preschool level and do not have the verbal abilities to communicate nor do they have the writing skills. They are still working on identifying and writing numbers and letters. For these students, I have been using the kindergarten Japan Math. However, it is definitely more teacher directed and not TTP. I need more support for them and I have not figured out how to create more TTP lessons that are accessible.

Interviewer: Have you adapted the structure of TTP in any way, and if so, how? For example, do you use journals differently? Do you do anything different with your boardwork? Please include any specific examples you have photos of.

Lisa Gaglioti:

My largest adaptation is using 2nd and 3rd grade TTP unit plans. My boardwork is not very different from the 2nd and 3rd grade teams. I focus on addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and fractions. I do not teach all the 2nd/3rd grade standards but I teach the major domains. Therefore, for those units, my boardwork does not vary any more than two different 2nd grade teachers' boardwork varies because of their individual classes. For my boardwork, I might have only two student ideas instead of three because of my group size. I align my journals with the second grade team the whole year. Journals are only for new learning and they include: date, problem, my idea, friend's idea, summary and reflection. Because writing is a challenge for my students sometimes we would verbally share our reflections. I might have more visuals than the other teachers. However, most of our students at our school are ELLs so many teachers use similar visuals.

Interviewer: Any other insights you think are important?

Lisa Gaglioti:
Another challenge that I have been working through is that there are not many SPED educators teaching through problem solving. I do not have other SPED teachers to problem solve with in math, especially using TTP. Also, there are not any trainings available that are specific to TTP with students with disabilities. The only way I am able to study TTP is planning and researching with the general education teachers.