



# Making Inclusion Work

I am still somewhat of a rookie in the field of education. I taught eighth-grade language arts for three years. Although I loved that position and learned so much from it, I recently decided to take on a new challenge—the position of countywide gifted and talented teacher/

coordinator. Throughout my career, I have attended a wide variety of workshops related to teaching writing, reading across the curriculum, differentiated educational strategies, gender-based instruction, and gifted education. I have served as a model teacher for beginning teachers, and with my new position as gifted teacher/coordinator, I give workshops across the county about the selection process for children who are gifted and talented and strategies for differentiation and acceleration that can be used with all students. I work with four elementary schools and one high school, collaborating with teachers on service plans for students who are gifted and talented. Soon I will be teaching four days a week during which children in Grades 3–8 who are gifted and talented from across the county will come to my classroom and work in a resource room setting.

## Strategies for Inclusive Classrooms

Based on my teaching experience, I believe that the key to effective instruction centers on two ingredients—relationships with students and the belief that *every* child has strengths. I set high expectations for all my students. When I plan units, I try to begin with some sort of preassessment to find out what my students already know about the content that I am about to present. Based on the results, I can then adjust my activities to fit the needs of each of my students. Various preassessments that I have used include the following:

- Brainstorming: Students list questions that they have pertaining to the topic.
- KWLH Charts: Students chart what they already *know*, what they *want to know* about a topic, *how* they want to learn it, and what they *learned*.
- Anticipation Guides: Students are given a list of statements that relate to the concepts that will be

covered during the unit. They read each statement, put a check mark next to the ones with which they agree, engage in discussions about their answers, use the text and other materials for the chapter to either prove or disprove their answers, and finally review the statements and change them as necessary to make them true. The entire class debates the evidence that proves the statements and must come to consensus about each one.

- Most Difficult First: Students are presented with the most difficult vocabulary words from our list, and those who score 80 percent or better on a definition pretest are assigned another activity.

The beauty of these strategies is that each one can be used with any content area. Once I have diagnosed the situation, I can decide which activities my students should complete.

I have found that cluster grouping is a highly effective strategy with students of all ability levels. In my opinion, the most positive outcome of this strategy is that the students who are gifted can excel to their fullest potential when presented with problem-solving activities, yet they don't feel burdened by the lack of motivation sometimes evidenced by their classmates. Additionally, those students who may lack academic confidence gain confidence in their abilities because they find that without someone else to carry the load, they can do it—and they usually do! It's a win-win situation for everyone.

Obviously, based on the repeated success of the differentiated projects, I would highly recommend them to all teachers at any grade level and ability level. In planning for these types of projects, I first reflect on the particular learning styles that exist in my classroom, choose a project type to fit each one, and then develop scoring criteria for each project choice. For example, for visual learners, I might choose to include a poster option; for bodily-kinesthetic learners, I might choose a role-play; for those who are verbally gifted, I might choose a newspaper article; and for those who are more intrapersonal in nature, I might choose creation of a webpage that requires individual work. Of course, with each new unit, I adjust the project choices accordingly because I don't want my students to become bored or accustomed to the same types of choices. I have never had a student complain about doing the projects—honestly! They much prefer them to tests, and so do