

# Making Inclusion Work

As an eighth-grade English language arts teacher with over a decade of teaching experience, I find teaching to be a new adventure every day.

I strive to enhance the learning opportunities for all of my students. Many of my current students are struggling writers, as identified by teachers from previous years. Keeping these students involved, interested, and yearning to learn, but at the same time making sure that every child is challenged and thriving, can sometimes be a difficult task. But I have asked for this setting because I want to rise to the occasion and see my students succeed.

## Inclusive Education Experience

Working in an inclusive classroom takes careful planning. First, I make sure that I know my students' abilities and needs. I make the classroom inclusive of all learners, which builds a positive community. I have had students in my regular English classes who are visually impaired, students who are in wheelchairs, and students who are self-contained in another teacher's room except for reading class. I have come to understand the importance of community and peer support. The teacher in any classroom, but especially the inclusive classroom, becomes the coach or facilitator of learning. Since the children come to school at multiple levels of learning, the teacher must meet the student where he or she is in the learning process and build from that point.

The challenge lies in assisting each child at his or her level and moving him or her along in the learning process. With one teacher and a class of twenty-five learners, moving around the class to help every child is difficult. The student-teacher ratio is high in the regular education class. Another challenge is keeping up with the paperwork that informs the teacher of the accommodations or modifications in the child's IEP. Third, a child who is too challenged or is not challenged enough can become frustrated, which may lead to other disruptive classroom issues. Finally, having all of the students involved in learning at the same time with material that everyone can understand is a challenge. Some students may feel comfortable reading lower-level books while others need more advanced materials. As their teacher, I am responsible for teaching them all.

I am constantly working on resolutions for my dilemmas, however, and I come closer to my answers every day. I rely on my colleagues for ideas that work in their classes. We have an idea exchange at team meetings as we discuss pedagogy and students. I learn from reading professional articles and books. I have always individualized my instruction, but I have learned to do it more effectively.

## Strategies for Inclusive Classrooms

Collaboration with special education teachers is a must. They have teaching tips that work well with all students.

- Accommodate instruction and assignments as needed to ensure success for all students, not just those with IEPs; however, only modify assignments for those students who have IEPs. Simple accommodations include providing a word bank for vocabulary quizzes, a study guide before a test, rubrics before a project, a copy of class notes, a book on audiotape, and the use of a computer. Testing or quizzing accommodations include reading a quiz or test aloud to a student, allowing the student to read the quiz or test aloud, explaining directions or language, reducing the number of choices but covering the same objectives, extending the time permitted, allowing the student to dictate his or her answers, allowing mistakes to be corrected for extra points, or allowing a test to be retaken for an average of both scores.
- Understand the importance of presentation. Type assignment directions, activity sheets, quizzes, and tests in a larger font size such as 14 point to make the print easier to read. Be sure the print is clear and legible for the student. Allow students to use a note card to read line-by-line multiple-choice answers separately. Allow for white space around directions so the students will not confuse the directions with the actual test or quiz questions.
- Teach students that organization is pertinent to learning success. Allow a peer to help a student organize his or her notebook. Often a student has difficulty studying because he or she lacks the organizational skills needed to prepare for tests or quizzes.