

Making Inclusion Work

I recall seeing a cartoon once where a student with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) was portrayed as a tornado sitting in a desk (something a student with ADHD can possibly relate to). A tornado is something that gets a lot of attention, but all of it is negative. As I enter my tenth year of teaching, I reflect back on those students I worked with and the varying degrees of ADHD I encountered. I clearly remember one particular student and parent. This child was new to our school, but not new to special education. His mother finally admitted in December that she had no insurance but wanted desperately to fill her son's prescription because by this time he was constantly in trouble. After we helped her locate free medical insurance, she quickly took him to his pediatrician.

Medication helped him control his impulsiveness, and he made more than a year's progress in the few short months left in school that year. The child didn't return the following year, and I've always wondered how he was doing. Then there are the parents that I've known who have ADHD themselves. Despite facing the same issues, many of these parents still did not know how to help their child. I also recall interacting with my colleagues, wondering how some teachers can be so understanding while others are absolutely oblivious to the effects that this disability has on the educational performance of their pupils. I realized then that it was going to be my job, as a special educator, to educate my fellow teachers as well as the students.

Inclusive Education Experience

Including students with ADHD in the general education classroom is just the right thing to do. A pull-out or resource room setting typically does not benefit these students. Best practices, accommodations, and a great deal of patience are all that is usually required. Depending on the severity of the disorder, behavioral interventions may be necessary, but these too are best done in the least restrictive environment. At the same time, the least restrictive environment can become overly restrictive if traditional self-control, self-direction, and adherence to inflexible

classroom rules are required of the learner with ADHD. The extent to which the student's needs are matched to the teacher's expectations is important to success; and the extent to which home and school expectations mirror each other builds on that positive inclusive experience. Typically, you are not going to change the child to fit the learning environment; rather, the classroom needs to accommodate the learner's unique needs and learning style.

Strategies for the Inclusive Classroom

Most classroom strategies that can be used for pupils with ADHD are good for all students. Having an example of an organized notebook with all the required assignments in it, for instance, is a great way to give students a means of organizing themselves. Assigning a dependable peer to help with this activity will ensure that the student with ADHD stays organized while also giving him or her ownership of the task. That same notebook can help children who were absent be sure they get everything they missed.

Another classroom practice that may benefit all students is repeating instructions or assignments several times, simplifying instructions, or giving directions in multiple ways.

Most kids today love technology; therefore, teachers should incorporate what the children love. Today's technologies such as iPods, audiobooks, and computers that give constant/instant stimulation or feedback are great ways for teachers to supplement their instruction.

Successful Collaboration

To make collaboration a success, it is important to appreciate the challenges frequently encountered by the general educator who works with pupils with ADHD. Co-teaching is but one example of a collaborative activity that may provide the general education teacher with the opportunity to focus on the particular needs of the student with ADHD while the special educator instructs the