

***Building Effective Classrooms:
Special Education Resource Teachers
Tips from 2nd Year Teachers & Mentors***



(1) Be Prepared and Proactive

BEFORE SCHOOL STARTS

- Introduce yourself to the secretary and the caretaker. If they are your best friends you will find life to be much easier.
- Find out when you are able to enter the school in August. This is an exciting time to set up your room. Bring your mom or a good friend to help you out. During this time go around and introduce yourself to other teachers, as they can be very helpful. Change the fadeless paper on your bulletin boards, set up seats and tables, and organize materials (paper, markers, etc.)
- Approach your principal and ask if you can have a mentor (this person will be your fundamental support system. It is often helpful to have someone who teaches the same grade as you, however; if you 'click' with someone else it will still work. It is most important to have a mentor you are comfortable with.
- Some teachers look through students' OSRs (Ontario Student Records) to learn about their students. You can find out whether or not they have an I.E.P. (individual Education Plan), past marks, behavioural patterns, etc. However, some teachers do not like to predetermine what their students will be like. Students grow throughout the summer and you may not want to make assumptions on their abilities or behaviours. Some teachers prefer to get to know their students for a month and then look at the OSRs.
- Learn your student's names - there is nothing sweeter than hearing your own name and students will react positively.
- Make sure you have all materials as far as teacher guides, curriculum documents, etc.
- Access TEL (similar to First Class) and make sure you get someone to teach you how to use it.
- Ask questions, all teachers have been in your position, they know how you feel.

VISUALIZE YOUR ROOM

- Allow/encourage students to “decorate” their classroom and therefore develop
 - ownership (avoid “hallmark classrooms”)
 - Backgrounds for bulletin boards to “warm up” the room could be prepared ahead

CREATING AN INVITING PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- Set up an inviting physical environment prior to the commencement of school (e.g., preparing colourful bulletin boards, setting up individual student bins, hanging reference charts for visual aids, etc..)
- Setting up the classroom may also involve the provision of:
 - establishing a daily timetable
 - set up bins to help keep children organized who are integrated into other classes
 - name tags
 - notebooks
 - pencils/pens
 - label areas for centres, writing supplies, etc...
- Nurture and promote self-image and self-esteem by providing a student display area(s) for the children in your class (e.g., “Our Amazing Successes”). The display areas can provide an opportunity for students to display their successes (e.g., awards, photographs of them in their classes, etc..)
- Create a positive classroom environment that appeals to all learning styles (e.g., auditory learners may respond favourably to a classroom that make use of low-playing classical music)



(2) Establishing Classroom Rules and Routines

TIPS ABOUT YOUR ROLE

- You do not need to service all of the students all of the time – manage student timetable
- Communication with classroom teachers is essential – when are you needed and what is your primary focus
- Flexibility - Your day-to-day routine can change at a moments notice and you need to be able to ‘go with the flow’.
- Express your concerns about your program and what will work within the culture of the school
- Set rules for classroom – Practice Tribes – Be consistent in your routines
- Explicitly discuss – explain – define – classroom rules (e.g. respect/active listening)

- Review transition times – what are the needs of the special education students
- Reminders to regular classroom teachers/support staff about the special education
- Give students choices
- Follow through with what you say you are going to do
- Be proactive
- Be aware that students have issues which affect performance – get information about these students
- Students need to feel safe and accepted
- Have fun – Give students time at end of period and end of week to participate in a fun activity
- Set positive consequences – Praise students
- Find students learning styles and use them – Differentiated/Multiple learning styles

FIRST MONTH OF SCHOOL

- Go over classroom routine/rules
- Begin team building (Tribes)
- Begin to develop IEP
- Contact classroom teachers and communicate special ed. Needs
- Begin to develop relationship with students – make a connection
- Review special education process within school – how does a student get to team
- Read OSR
- Develop individual strategies for each student

DEVELOP RULES & ROUTINES TOGETHER

- With All Due Respect, by Ron Morrison, is a good resource
- Invite students to develop a list of expectations for teachers
- Encourage students to express their expectations of teachers and teachers of students
- Present a short list of rules, and have the students come up with examples of how they can be met (The fewer the rules, the better!)
- Keep the rules as positives (ex. Be Safe, instead of No running)
- Modeling [if you want them to be on time and prepared, then you need to model that kind of behaviour yourself]
- Work at creating a positive class environment: i.e.: No put downs, and respond strongly to breaches
- Relate rules to work place skills for intermediate students
- Daily checklists at the end of the day, for how they did at following routines

TRIBES AGREEMENTS

- Go through Four Agreements of TRIBES as an overview in order to set the tone of the classroom. The Four Agreements include Mutual Respect, Attentive Listening, No Put Downs/Appreciations and Right To Pass/Right To Participate. Have a group discussion of each agreement. Each agreement can be further explored in more depth throughout September (see TRIBES book).



(3) Inclusion Building Activities (First Day/First Week/First Month)

CELEBRATING SIMILARITIES AND DIFERENCES

- Picture books that go with this theme include:
 - Leo the Late Bloomer, The Crayon Box that Talked, The Name Jar, Chrysanthemum
- Interview and write a biography about a partner in the class; present and thereby introducing them to the rest of the class
- Have students do a learning styles inventory or other self knowledge quizzes

COMMUNITY CIRCLE

- Class sits in a circle, go around the circle and take turns speaking, keeping in mind the Four Agreements. This provides opportunity for sharing and reflection. Topics to discuss should initially be non-threatening e.g., favourite food, favourite movie, first day jitters, how the first day went - making friends, what you learned, etc.

CLASS PUZZLE

- Before school, create a huge puzzle with enough pieces for each student (with some extra- just incase you get new students). You should create one yourself as an example and to introduce yourself to the class. While students are drawing and colouring you can take the time to memorize their names and they can talk quietly to each other. Let students finish this for homework and the next day give students tape to place on the back of their piece. As a class, students will try and put the puzzle together on a wall, if you don't have room in your class, do it in the hallway.

PICTORIAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

- In very simple pictures, draw the major events of your life on the blackboard. Have students read it back to you using the pictures then ask students in pairs to do the same thing, they could present to each other to the class time permitting.

PARTNER INTRODUCTION

- by sticker match-up, use an interview sheet with basic questions in order to focus activity, as students walk into the classroom they are given stickers on their hand that match with one other student in the classroom, when activity begins they are to find the sticker that matches them, they will present their partner to the rest of the class.

SNOWBALL

- students sit in a circle and write a getting to know you question on a piece of paper, crumple up paper, toss into the middle of the circle, students pick up a snowball and read question and answer it out loud going around the circle, can continue to play by throwing snowballs back in the circle

HUMAN BINGO

- give students a bingo sheet with a variety of categories, such as find someone who has two brothers and a sister and find someone who went to Wonderland this summer, students mingle throughout the classroom to find someone different for each of the categories, the students complete sheet wins Bingo

CELEBRITY GUESSING GAME

- students write the name of a celebrity on a post-it note and teacher sticks them on the back of students, students mingle and have to ask questions in order to find out who their celebrity is and then at the end can make a guess

PROFILE ART

- Profile Art #1, as a class students agree on a legend in order to complete profile, for example, if you are a boy you will have a square face, if you are from another country you will have a triangle nose, if you like hot dogs you will have wavy hair, etc.
- Profile Art #2, give students a template of their profile and have students decorate it with things that are important to them, for example, friends, family, subjects, hobbies, pets, etc.

ACROSTIC POEM

- have students use their name in order to make an acrostic poem, for example, JIM - Jokester, Independent, Magnificent ;)

