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Teachers' Guides
to Inclusive Practices

Modifying Schoolwork

Third Edition

by

Rachel Janney, Ph.D.

and

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Voices from the Classroom

Amy Brehl is a third-grade teacher with 15 years of experience teaching in inclusion-oriented schools. When asked "What is the very first thing you want to know about a student with a disability who is going to be in your class?" Amy responded, "Even before I start planning, I want to get to know the student. At first, it's not so much about their current ability level and *where* they are, it's more *who* they are. Where are they socially and emotionally? What are their likes and dislikes?

"Then I want to know their ability, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. Because they need time in both—they need time improving weaknesses and time building on strengths. For example, a struggling reader shouldn't have to struggle with reading all day; I want to build in success and spend some time working with that child's strengths. Or, if whole-class instruction is hard for the child, then I will build in more small groups, so they can have success with that environment."

Amy explained how she acquires this information about her students: "I talk with previous teachers; I read the student's files. I meet with the parents before school begins and meet the student ahead of time. I'll do—or the special education teacher will do—little criterion-referenced or curriculum-based assessments. We always get a Program-at-a-Glance for each student with an IEP [individualized education program], but again, I want to know who students are, and to start developing a relationship with them."

According to Amy, including a student with extensive needs begins with making that student a member of the class. Then comes figuring out the supports for learning and achievement. "It's not about planning one lesson or one unit. It's about overall ways to approach inclusion and meeting the child's learning needs. *I start with the premise that the student is a member of the class—that's the starting point.* The child's disability is not the starting point. Once we've established that belonging, then we fiddle with the fit."

Amy explained that decisions about how to involve a student in a particular lesson or activity are based on the student's goals. "If we're doing a social studies lesson, I need to know if the student is learning social studies content or if the focus is on following directions or if we are targeting reading and writing skills across the curriculum, within social studies as well as within scheduled reading instruction. Even if some of the student's adaptations are pretty individualized and made by the special education teacher, the student should always be with us for key parts of that lesson or unit.

"When it comes to inclusion, it all has to start with shared experience. Everything we do in our class begins with those shared experiences."

Figure 2.10. Including all students: It begins with belonging. (Contributed by Amy Brehl.)

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Voices from the Classroom

Amy Brehl and Kristyn McDaniel Cabler are third- and fourth-grade teachers, respectively, whose classes always include students with a wide range of abilities and disabilities. In addition to employing teaching methods that accommodate their diverse groups of students, these teachers use differentiated organizational and management strategies to help their students to better manage their time, materials, behavior, and learning. Amy and Kristyn begin with universal strategies that are good for all students and then provide additional supports and adaptations for groups or individual students who need them. A few of these dynamic teachers' organizational and management strategies follow.

- When students arrive in the morning, a "morning message" with the day's agenda and reminders about the day's special events or due dates is posted on the interactive whiteboard (see Figure 2.15); some students are given a printed copy to keep at their desk.
- Students use color-coded folders or notebooks for each subject: blue is for writing and language, yellow is for science, green is for social studies.
- Students are provided with a homework folder with the school name, mascot, school pledge, and contact information; the pocket on the left-hand side is for materials that stay at home (e.g., school newsletter, returned assignments), and the pocket on the right-hand side is for materials that return to school (e.g., tests that parents review and sign, permission forms for school activities).
- Each student has a "desk folder" in which work in progress is kept until it is turned in to the "finished work basket."
- All students are provided with a weekly planner in which they record homework assignments, due dates, special events, and so forth; the teacher writes the day's assignments on a large, laminated poster (see Figure 2.16) that replicates a page in the students' planner; each morning, students copy that information into their own planner. Most students complete their planner while sitting at their desks. Some students move their chairs closer to the wall poster, and any students who need it are provided with a model page from which to copy at their desks. If more support is needed, a student's planner might be partially completed by an adult or peer so that the student then fills in the blanks, and highlighters or markers might be used to call attention to certain activities (e.g., red for music day, green for physical education).
- Each student has a note card taped to his or her desk with the CLASS acronym for getting organized for the day: Chair on the floor and unpack, Lunch choice, Ask to use restroom, Sharpen two to three pencils, Start morning work. Individualized adaptations and supports might include providing a student with a larger version of the CLASS cue card, adding pictures or symbols, and/or having the student check off steps as they are completed.
- Steps of the writing process are listed on a large poster and also in each student's writing notebook and the teacher's model writing notebook.
- Students draw "maps" of the inside of their desks to help them keep their materials organized.
- Students are encouraged, in numerous ways, to make good choices about how they use their time. When they finish a task early, or when the entire class has "independent work time," students are expected to chose from the following options, in order of priority: 1) complete missing work and make corrections to earlier work, 2) use a computer to take a quiz about a library book they have read (students must complete a certain number of quizzes each reporting period), and 3) chose an activity from this week's differentiated menu (refer to Figure 2.4).
- Class meetings are held to proactively discuss "the way we want our class to be" and also to do group problem solving about social and behavioral difficulties that arise.
- Schoolwide and classroom behavioral expectations are taught through ongoing explanation, demonstration, prompting, and reinforcement.

Figure 2.14. Organization and management strategies that include all students. (Contributed by Amy Brehl and Kristyn McDaniel Cabler.)

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