

KEYS TO SETTING UP A SPECIALIZED CLASSROOM

Jackie Mills-Fernald

Director of Access Ministry, McLean Bible Church

703-770-2942

Jackie.millsfernalf@mcleanbible.org

<http://www.facebook.com/accessministry>

www.theinclusivechurch.wordpress.com



OUTLINE

- Classroom considerations (physical and furnishings)
- Curriculum changes and adaptations
- Creating community
- Classroom challenges for students
- Curbing classroom behaviors
- Checklist for teachers

CLASSROOM CONSIDERATIONS (PHYSICAL)

Physical Space

- Large area (Average classroom 750-900 sq. feet; an additional 100 sq. feet)
- Fully accessible- convenient to elevator, handicapped parking, curbside drop off
- People movement and flow of traffic
- Lever- type hardware
- Switch controls
- Water fountains
- Wider doors and entry ways
- Restrooms and sinks in rooms
- Family bathrooms nearby
- Washers/ dryers close by

CLASSROOM CONSIDERATIONS (FURNISHINGS)

- Lighting concerns
- Furniture
 - Wheel chair accessible
 - Horseshoe shaped tables
 - Therapy mats
 - Therapy balls
 - Beanbag chairs
 - Mini trampolines
- Activity stations or centers
- Sensory/ tactile walls
- Posted schedules and classroom expectations
- Visual timers/ clocks

CURRICULUM CHANGES AND ADAPTATIONS

- Size – adapt group sizes or items to be completed
- Time – adapt times for learning or task completions
- Level of Support – increase the number of personal assistants (assign peer buddies, teaching assistants, or cross-age tutors)
- Input – adapt the way instruction is delivered... vary modalities; design lessons to be more interactive
- Difficulty – adapt skill levels, simplify instructions, or change rules
- Output – adapt how students can respond other than verbally (eye gazes, pointing, augmented communication devices)
- Participation – adapt the extent to which the learner is involved; assign tasks of responsibilities and duties
- Alternate – adapt the goals or outcome expectations while using the same materials
- Substitute – provide different instructions and materials to meet students' goals

CREATING CLASSROOM COMMUNITY

- Students need to feel connected to a caring, loving community in which they are valued as a member and participant.
- Foster warm, supportive relationships: student to teacher, student to student
- Provide regular opportunities for students to collaborate with one another through team building or cooperative learning experiences
- Provide opportunities for students to exercise voice and choice
- Articulate and discuss core values and ideas of community
- Communicate that every student is unique and capable
- Give opportunities for children to shine and share their God-given gifts and talents

CHALLENGES FOR STUDENTS

- Easily frustrated could be sensory issues, communication challenges, boredom, etc.
- Often insecure or poor self image
- Attention spans short and wander from what is being taught
- Poor organization skills and frequently lose or misplace things
- May need more than one prompt for reminders to stay on task
- Impulsivity is high
- Transitions may be taught
- Trouble socializing or interacting with people
- Restless and move frequently; kinesthetic learners
- Possibly one area of academic weakness

CURBING CLASSROOM BEHAVIORS

- Clear instruction- fewer words; misconception that more words clarify
- Clear expectations- in order for a student to do what you want, they must first know what is expected of them
- Meaningful learners- actively engage students; make sure what you are teaching is relevant to their personal experiences; make the tie in
- Momentum- transitions minimize down time; plan ahead; if not, the following could happen to students:
 - May remain interested and attentive
 - Become bored or fatigued
 - Distraction
 - Misbehavior
- Schedule- set a routine; children do better in a predictable environment

CHECKLIST FOR TEACHERS

- Praise progress; no matter how small
- Learn to judge ability levels of students, and then adapt accordingly
- Focus on students' strengths, not their weaknesses
- Be loving; firm, but flexible
- Be yourself; your students need genuine, authentic people
- Be understanding: express EMPATHY, not sympathy
- People first, disabilities second
- People with disabilities are as different as typical people; stay away from statements like “ all people with this disability...”
- Believe all students can succeed
- Create independence, not dependence