

Introduction

Who is this book for?

I have more and more children with special educational needs in my class and I feel worried about it. I really want to help them, but I'm not sure if I'm doing the right thing. I haven't got proper training in this area, and neither have my colleagues. We all feel a bit lost and confused.

VERA, PRIMARY TEACHER, PORTUGAL

Are you a primary or secondary teacher of English? Do you feel like Vera? At the moment, in many countries across the world, governments are introducing policies of social and educational inclusion. Teachers are being asked to support these policies by teaching students with all types of **special educational needs (SEN)** in their mainstream classrooms. There are many teachers like Vera, who are trying to include these students in their lessons but are worried because they haven't had any specialist training.

A word of reassurance

There isn't a magic formula for teaching students with SEN. Most strategies which help students with SEN are simply good teaching strategies, and you probably know many of them already. You don't need to develop a whole new way of teaching, but you might need to apply your strategies more consistently and consciously to help these students. This book explains the needs of students with SEN and suggests practical classroom strategies to help you to build your confidence in teaching them.

Organization

The book is organized into three parts:

- 1 Part 1 is an overview of SEN, providing general teaching principles for teaching students with SEN in the mainstream English classroom.
- 2 Part 2 addresses the general needs of students with SEN, discussing techniques which promote inclusion and dealing with common areas of difficulty.
- 3 Part 3 provides specific information on individual types of SEN.

The first two parts will give you a general understanding of SEN and successful teaching approaches, while Part 3 can be dipped into according to the type of SEN that interests you.

Scope

The book covers a range of SEN likely to appear in mainstream English language classrooms and does not cover more severe disabilities. The suggested classroom activities can be used for primary and secondary students. There may be techniques which you believe are only suited to younger learners, such as the use of pictures and visuals. This is not the case. All the activities have been tried out with a wide age range of students. You may need to introduce them in a slightly different way for different age groups, but be prepared to take the risk and try them out. Where appropriate, variations are suggested for younger or older learners.

I believe that all students have a right to learn in safe, motivating, inclusive classrooms where differences are acknowledged and celebrated. Above all, teacher attitude is vital in making all students feel that they belong and are capable of learning. Students always remember how a teacher made them feel and a teacher who tried hard to understand them. This is more important than any technical knowledge you might feel you don't have.

I hope this book supports and inspires you in your teaching of students with SEN.

same applies to students with SEN. Make sure you see students with SEN as individuals, and get to know them, their interests and their strengths, as you would other students.

It is important to consider the language you use. Schools nowadays tend to use the terms special educational needs or **additional educational needs (AEN)**. In the past, a number of other terms were used to describe students with SEN, and you may have encountered some of them. They include:

- *mentally retarded, *defective, *handicapped
- *educationally subnormal.

However, in English these are now considered unacceptable and even offensive.

Ask yourself

What terminology is used in your L1 and that of your students? Does it matter which terms we use?

Dealing with bullying

Students with SEN can be vulnerable to bullying, particularly by students who don't know them personally. Systems need to be implemented to teach students to be aware of different needs and abilities. For example, you can introduce a 'buddy' system by asking a supportive peer to accompany students during break times if needed. Most importantly, you need to create a class ethos which values mutual support and understanding.

✓ Getting it right

Emphasize values

Introduce class rules which reinforce empathy and kindness to all students. Don't allow any laughing at other students. For example, say: *In this class we are kind and don't laugh at other people.* Praise students who demonstrate these values. For example, say: *I noticed Michael was really kind today.*

The inclusive classroom

Teaching and learning style

Do you teach in the same way as you like to learn? You will have students in your class who have very different learning styles from your own. Be curious, and learn from your students. You may find that some students are **visual learners**, so the use of visual aids would be appropriate to support their learning. Using games can work for many students with SEN as well as for those with no special needs. Many benefit from a multisensory approach.

Try this

See, hear, do

Demonstrate grammar points physically and visually. Ask two students to hold a piece of string between them. Read out a sentence, for example: *She was eating her dinner, when the phone rang.* Get another student to touch the string in the middle to demonstrate the continuous aspect of the sentence. Finally draw the timeline in colour on the board.

✓ **Getting it right**

What works for them

Your students often know what helps them to learn more effectively. Don't be afraid to ask a student with SEN what works for them, and ask their parents/carers and other professionals too. Be prepared to try out a variety of activities which appeal to students with different learning styles (see Chapters 4, 6, and 7).

A supportive ethos

Teachers need to create a supportive, cooperative classroom atmosphere where all students feel noticed and valued. Inclusive classrooms are those where students help each other and celebrate their differences. You should set a good example when interacting with students with SEN and show that you respect the uniqueness of all your students. You can, for example, plan activities which encourage empathy, where students try to understand what life is like for someone else in the class.

Try this 

Similarities and differences

Ask students to work in pairs to find three things that they have in common and three things which are different. Ask them in feedback if anything surprised them. Encourage them to see that differences are also interesting.

Try this 

Guess about me

Ask students to work in pairs. Then ask four personal information questions. Students guess their partner's answers and write them down. Here's a sample question you could use: *What's your favourite colour/food/type of holiday?* Adapt the questions to your students' language levels and ages. Students show their guesses to their partner to see if they are correct.

Try this 

Make a presentation

Ask students if they would like to make a presentation to their classmates about their SEN and allow time in class for this. It can be in English or L1 depending on the age and level of your class. Check with their parents/carers that they are happy for this to happen.

Why this works 

Developing empathy

Students often make judgements about each other which are wrong and lead to poor future interaction. Activities focusing on empathy allow students to gain insight into each other's worlds, developing their emotional skills and learning how easy it is to misjudge people. (See 'Self-esteem' in Chapter 3 and 'Social and emotional' in Chapter 10.)

Differentiation of work

Do you adapt or differentiate the tasks you assign to students so that they are achievable for everyone? Differentiation means adapting your plan and your teaching to take account of different student needs and abilities. All students will make progress in their learning, but in different ways. Work

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Differentiated teaching

I know about the need to differentiate in class, but to be honest it takes a long time to adapt worksheets for different students and I don't know how to do it more effectively.

JORGE, SECONDARY TEACHER, BRAZIL

Differentiated teaching is when we plan and structure lessons to take account of all students in the class, whatever their individual level and abilities. The goal is for all students to make progress in their learning, whatever their starting point. Some activities can be done in the same way by all students. But other activities will need to be adapted, and you may need to provide parallel activities in order to include everyone.

Like Jorge, as teachers you are probably aware of the need to differentiate work for students so that they can work at their own pace and learn successfully. There are many ways you might already differentiate; for example, moving a child who has problems copying words down to be seated near the front of the class, or giving an early finisher an extra task. Differentiation simply means acknowledging that students are individuals who learn in different ways and at different rates.

Ask yourself

How do you currently differentiate work in your classes? Do you find that differentiation is very time-consuming?

Know your students


Differentiation starts with getting to know your students as individuals. You need to know their preferred learning environment. Do they need to sit away from distractions? Do they need to work with a peer? What is their preferred learning style (visual, auditory, **kinaesthetic**)? What are their areas of interest (e.g. art, football, music)?

You can get to know your students through simple language activities.

Try this

Register game

Build opportunities to get to know your students into your normal class routines. When you call the register, ask students to answer with their favourite colour, food, or favourite word from the week.

Try this  **'Me' posters**

Ask students to make a 'Me' poster including information about their family, interests, holidays, and likes or dislikes. Students talk about their posters together in small groups. Give students opportunities to add to the posters over the course of the year as they get to know each other better.

Ways to differentiate work

Most classrooms are mixed-ability, and teachers are used to dealing with this in various ways, such as deciding how to pace a lesson so students don't get bored or overwhelmed – or by ensuring that instructions to the class are clear and simple so that everyone understands. But there are also some key ways we can differentiate by:


- task
- content
- student response
- self-access materials
- extra one-to-one support from a teaching assistant (see page 44 for more on this)
- assessment.

Differentiate by task


Differentiation by task means setting different tasks to match the abilities of your students. You don't, therefore, need to prepare different content for different groups. You could, for example, either produce two or more worksheets at different levels, or one worksheet where the questions become progressively more challenging.

Try this  **Dictation**

Dictate a short text to the whole class, but vary the task for different groups. The first group listens and writes down the whole text. The second group completes a gapped text. The third group completes the same gapped text, but chooses answers from multiple-choice options.

Try this  **Vocabulary**

Give the whole class the same word search, but give different instructions to different groups. Tell some students how many words to find. Support others by giving pictures for each word. For more support, provide a full list of the target words for some students.

Try this  **Storytelling**

Tell the students a story. Ask some students to retell the story from picture prompts and others to retell the story by putting key sentences from the story in the right order.