

# Welcome to Your Professional World!

*Get ready to dive in! You have been training for your first teaching job for years. Most likely, something in your life inspired you to work with exceptional students, and you want to help others (Fish & Stephens, 2010). You will encounter many different types of students. Some will challenge your patience. Others will inspire you. Inside every child is a gift, waiting to be acknowledged and nurtured. As a teacher, you will learn your students' gifts and can help them find their "genius" within.*

"Every child deserves a champion ... an adult who will never give up with them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be."

– Rita Pierson

## Education Settings

Special education teachers instruct students in a variety of environments. Some teachers have their own classrooms. Other teachers are itinerant, moving from classroom to classroom with a cart. Still others have varying responsibilities in a variety of classrooms, or work among schools as itinerant specialists or consultants. Regardless of where you teach, being able to organize your work and materials is critical. As a new special educator, you may feel overwhelmed by the variety of potential teaching environments and settings. Remember to breathe, and know that you can design each space to meet your students' needs (and take a look at Chapter 3, which discusses ways to organize your materials and environment in ways that facilitate student learning).

With the increased inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings, many special educators co-teach in inclusive classrooms with general education teachers. Some special education teachers "pull out" students for specialized instruction in resource rooms or "push in" services at different times of the day. Still others instruct students in self-contained

## REFLECTION

*Why did you make special education your career? What prompted you to begin this journey? Your passion is an important driving force that will help you get through your first year and empower you in the future. What are your inspirations and aspirations? Reflect on the work that brought you to this point.*

“My co-teacher loves the challenge of teaching exceptional learners, and we partner to teach all students. My co-teacher’s patience, tenacity, and willingness to incorporate multiple modalities of teaching is awesome. When we collaborate, we create engaging lessons that enhance the learning of all students. Students in our class have no idea that I am a special education teacher! We are true partners.”

—Third-year special education teacher, middle school History

classrooms or in virtual classrooms. You may have several of these roles throughout your career, and some special educators even serve in multiple positions in a single day. Review your school’s expectations for your role. The reality is that, as a special educator, you need to be flexible and ready to respond to the needs of your students, in whatever way best fits their needs.

### **Co-Teaching in a General Education Classroom**

Most students with disabilities are educated in the general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). In 2011, approximately 61% of students with disabilities were educated in the general education classroom for 80% or more of the school day. Consequently, it’s very likely that at some point in your career you will co-teach with general education teachers in inclusive classrooms.

*Co-teaching* is a collaborative partnership between special and general education teachers to plan, instruct, and assess students with and without disabilities in the general education classroom (Friend & Bursuck, 2009). You will need to plan lessons collaboratively with your general education teachers in such a way that instruction meets the unique learning needs of students on your caseload. Many students require classroom or testing accommodations. It is important to communicate their accommodations and learning needs to your co-teachers. Figure 1.1 lists common testing accommodations and their classroom correspondence; you can use this form to organize this information for the students on your caseload and as a checklist to ensure you’ve shared the information with relevant teaching staff and testing administrators—it’s included in Appendix A, along with other templates and checklists intended to support you in managing your work as a new special educator.

### **Self-Contained and Resource Rooms**

If you are assigned to a *self-contained setting*, you will instruct students in small groups. Individualized education program (IEP) teams place students in self-contained classrooms by examining students’ learning needs. When IEP teams determine that students need specialized and individualized instruction specifically

**FIGURE 1.1. Testing and Classroom Accommodations**

Testing and Classroom Accommodations		Students					
Teacher/Classroom	Accommodations						
Flexible schedule	Extended time						
	Frequent breaks/Flash Pass						
Group size	Small group						
	Individual						
Environmental accommodations	Preferential seating						
	Adaptive or special furniture						
	Visual organization						
Visual aids	Place keeper						
	Graphic organizer						
	Assistive technology						
	Visual schedules						
Amplification	Assistive listening device						
Large print	Large print						
Assistance with directions	Shortened instructions						
	Simplifying/clarity directions						
	Reading directions aloud						
Reading in English	Directions						
	Assignments						
Audio	Access to audio materials						
Dictionary	Bilingual dictionary						
Alternate means of response	Opportunity to respond orally						
	Mark in assignment document						
	Record answers on tape						
Math aids	Number line						
	Fraction bar or circle						
	Calculator						
Writing utensil	Large diameter or special pencil						
	Pencil grip						
Alternate written response	Word processor						
	Integrated technology						
	Assistive technology						
Spelling aids	Spell checker						
	Spelling dictionary						
Dictation	In English to scribe						
	Integrated technology						
Simplified language	Reduced language/reading level						
Other	Organizers						
	Shortened assignment						
	Clearly defined limits/expectations						
	Positive reinforcement system						
	Behavior intervention plan						

Note. Adapted from Curriculum/Classroom Accommodations and Modifications, Fairfax County Public Schools (Virginia) Department of Special Services. Retrieved from <http://www.fcps.edu/it/forms/iep308.pdf>

“I loved teaching self-contained classes. My students were so excited to be together and away from the large group. I was able to go in depth and offer additional supports that the larger classrooms couldn’t manage. We built a strong classroom with high expectations and lifelong study skills.”

**—Seventh-year special education teacher, middle school English**

designed to meet their learning needs in a small, flexible environment, they may recommend resource room or self-contained learning environments. Students with more significant learning and behavior needs are usually placed in self-contained classes. You may be assisted by a paraprofessional in your self-contained classes.

*Resource room teachers* also work with small groups, whether they are push-in or pull-out resources for student support. Resource room teachers who use pull-out may have their own small room or office in which they meet with students in small groups to remediate and support classroom instruction. Push-in refers to coming into a general education classroom to offer