

Voices from the Field: Anderson White



Q1: In your years of teaching in an inclusive classroom, what has been your experience in collaborating with specialists who serve children with disabilities?

Overall, I have had extremely positive experiences teaming and collaborating with other professionals in my classroom. I have benefited greatly in my professional growth from my work with the team of specialists that serves my children. At times, having specialists in the room can lead to an overwhelming number of adults. With three teachers in a small classroom and specialists coming in and out, it can feel crowded and can set off behaviors in some of the children that we are serving. It has been important for the specialists that we work with to find a place where they can work that does not interfere with the rest of the children's learning. With open communication from the beginning, this has never been a major challenge for us, but it is something to be aware of. It can also be hard working around multiple specialists' schedules to ensure that the children are working with specialists during a time of the day that is most beneficial to them and maximizes their learning. It is important to express this to specialists if they are new to your classroom schedule. It can also be difficult for some children to transition in or out of center time to be a part of their time with a specialist. This is when working with the specialists to embed the intervention within classroom routines and activities is so critical. For children who need some extra support with this, you may try different transition strategies such as using visual timers, stop signs and transition objects. I have found that picture schedules stating either the day's events or "first, then" events with a therapist's photo have helped children prepare for their transition. I have also found that having a peer or a small group of peers to go with a child to work with the specialist helps tremendously.

Q2: What are 2-3 tips for collaborating with specialists?

When collaborating with specialists, the most important thing is to have open communication from the beginning of your year together. I have gained knowledge from my work with different specialists throughout my time teaching. It is important to feel comfortable asking questions and learning from their expertise. I also offer my honest opinions about what has been successful or challenging with a child to see if they are experiencing the same outcomes or behaviors during their time together. We will also brainstorm to see how we can tweak a strategy to better support a child. Remember that the specialists are only seeing a snapshot of the children's learning and development and therefore it is helpful for teachers and other education staff to share our experiences since we spend a large portion of the day with the children. Another strategy that has been useful for me is to keep notes of what the specialists share and research their suggestions. We know that all children learn differently, and some may require more creative thinking on our part to help them grow and be successful in our classrooms. When we are flexible in our thinking and willing to collaborate with a team, our children will have more opportunities to thrive.