

Education for Disabled People

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This chapter attempts, on the basis of the experiences recorded here of teachers that teach in integrated or disabled-only classes, to present a qualification profile for teachers wishing to teach in integrated classes.

TIPs for teachers considering teaching in integrated classes

- Check your awareness of your attitude to disabled people.
- Think about what working with disabled people means to you.
- Are you convinced deep down that you want to teach in an integrated class?
- Can you encounter disabled people without pity?
- Are you willing to give your attention to each individual pupil?
- Do you have a high degree of empathy?
- Are you willing to prepare and put into practice very complex lessons?
- Have you collected enough information?
- Have you already acquired a large variety of methods?
- Are you very patient?
- Can you work well in a team?
- ...

TIPs for the first lesson unit

- Do not set yourself objectives that are too high.
- Behave quite naturally.
- Be patient!
- Ask the pupils with special needs to articulate their needs.
- Be well-prepared for the lesson.
- Use your imagination.
- Decide to learn from your mistakes.
- ...

Material

In integrated classes many teaching aids are required depending on the disabilities present. Some are not available at the schools and have to be prepared by the teacher for the individual pupil.

Media

Use of media is very important in integrated classes as media are often used as necessary assistance in overcoming disabilities.

Other Advice

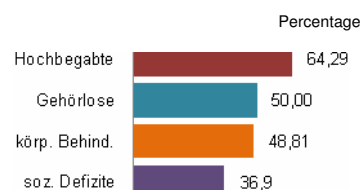
Teaching in classes for the disabled and integrated classes places heavy demands on teachers. Yet all the teachers working in integrated classes that we surveyed said they would always opt to teach in integrated classes.

Experiences of teachers in their lessons in integrated classes or classes only for the disabled

A survey "Self-Reflection on Teaching" in the scholastic year January 2008 among 84 beginner teachers in vocational schools in Vienna produced the following result:

It would be a special challenge for me to teach pupils with special needs:

	Fre- quency	Percent -age
Gifted	54	64,29
Deaf	42	50,00
Physical disability	41	48,81
Social. Deficits	31	36,90



64 % of the teachers surveyed regard it as a special challenge to teach gifted pupils; teaching deaf and physically disabled pupils is a special challenge for nearly half.

What this challenge is and what attitudes, qualities and hard work are necessary to master this challenge will be shown here by the experiences and advice of 22 teachers interviewed by us, who teach integrated classes in commercial academies, commercial schools, colleges for careers in commerce or classes for disabled pupils only.

13 of those we interviewed stated that they had made a conscious decision to teach in integrated classes. 9 had simply accepted the post that was offered to them. The average age of those interviewed was 33 and the average length of time that that had already been teaching in integrated classes / classes for the disabled was 14 years.

Special training for this sort of teaching had been offered to most of them in the shape of in-school seminars. Within the framework of these seminars information was given about all sorts of different disabilities and the problems associated with them.

Initial Difficulties

Identifying the various disabilities and the needs of individual pupils is a great challenge. At the beginning the heterogeneity does not seem manageable. How high can the level be set? Is it possible to do justice to the disabled pupils and also to the non-disabled?

The initial lack of confidence when dealing with disabled pupils has to be overcome. Speaking clearly (particularly important for pupils with impaired hearing) and large blackboard writing (visually impaired) have to be internalized and become automatic.

Some pupils require learning aids to follow the lesson. What are these aids? Are these aids available at the school? Do they first have to be prepared by the teacher? Preparing learning aids takes a considerable amount of time – especially at the beginning (until a supply of aids has been built up).

Disabled pupils do not want pity, they want to be accepted and respected as the human beings they are.

Helpful Personal Qualities

Patience with pupils and with themselves is one of the most important personal qualities that teachers require for teaching in general and for teaching integrated classes in particular.

Willingness to pay attention to the pupils' special needs is essential. Empathy, tolerance and a sense of humour help to cope with all the different situations in the class.

Overcoming problems demands flexibility, imagination, creativity and enjoyment of experimenting. The complexity of the teaching requires ability in multitasking and a high level of talent for organization.

An open, relaxed approach to pupils without pity and a good amount of perseverance will help in achieving objectives.

Thoughts for Beginner Teachers

Teachers that want to teach in integrated classes should first of all be clear about their attitude to disabled people. Can I accept a disabled person without pity as he is with all his weaknesses and strengths? What defines a person, his personality? What does working with disabled people mean for me? Can I keep my own space?

Have I collected enough knowledge about disabled people? Am I good at putting myself in someone else's shoes? Am I willing to become involved with many different individuals? Am I willing to prepare and put into practice complicated lessons?

Do I have the above personal qualities? Have I already acquired an attractive repertoire of teaching methods? Am I a responsible person? Can I accept help (support from colleagues, support teachers, even supervision)? ... Am I easily discouraged?

Knowledge about the disability

The more teachers know about a specific disability, the more easily they can understand a disabled person's way of life, abilities and problems and provide assistance.

The example of deaf people will show here how important it is for teachers to gather information about their pupils' culture (experience of Katharina Pum, a teacher classes for the deaf in Vienna).

Deaf people use considerably more physical contact than people that hear normally, they frequently hug each other and are always trying to establish eye-contact. They speak to each other in the familiar form (Du in German), ask lots of inquisitive and probing questions and express criticism directly.

Their language, signing, is a visual language with its own simple grammar. Only short sentences are signed and adjectives are placed after nouns. Sentences in sign language have no auxiliary verbs. That is why it is hard to learn to read and understand complex subject matter, which makes acquiring knowledge very much more difficult. German is a foreign language for these deaf people!

For sign language, the arms, body, face, head, eyes and mouth are needed. Facial expression is very important – with facial expression deaf people would understand only 50 percent of what is signed.

Deaf people are constantly moving while “speaking” and so they find it difficult to switch off and “just” listen. Even with sign language, deaf people often do not understand what a signed sentence is about and so lessons must be constructed differently (it is essential to establish connections to what pupils have experienced themselves, to introduce only topics that deal with practical aspects of living, to use a lot of visual material, a variety of methods, short learning sequences alternated with plenty of rest periods, ...)

What is special about teaching in integrated classes / classes for disabled pupils?

64 % of the teachers interviewed find teaching in integrated classes / classes for disabled pupils more fulfilling than in normal classes, 23 % see no difference. 9 % think that the teaching is sometimes more fulfilling and 4 % have no opinion.

Some teachers think that pupils develop a higher level of social competence than pupils in “normal” classes. Some of those asked stated that their teaching puts many things into perspective. They gain pleasure from the disabled pupils’ high level of willingness to learn and enjoy observing how contented they are. Learning from one another, feelings of achievement, cooperation between non-disabled and disabled people, breaking down prejudice, overcoming limitations, ... all give teaching in integrated classes / classes for disabled pupils additional meaning.

All the teachers of integrated classes we asked would always unhesitatingly opt again to teach in integrated classes!