

How can I have a friendlier, Sensory Integrative Classroom?

Scheduling/Seating:

- Activities which require intense concentration and thinking should try to be scheduled after PE, recess, or therapy.
- Try to alter activities of movement with activities which require long periods of sitting. 15-20 minutes is often a good amount of “sitting” time.
- Children whom have a hard time focusing should sit in the least stimulating part of the room (think about peripheral movement, visual distraction and noise.) A good place often can be the front and center of the room in front of the teacher.
- Alter positions during activities.
 - You can use a wall and paste up paper to draw, color, or practice letters (using a sensorimotor approach)
 - Have the students lie on their stomachs resting on their elbows to reach up and work. This is a great way to also facilitate increasing neck and trunk control/strength.

Language:

- Use simple language and give one instruction at a time to begin with (as the class is more capable slowly increase to two then three, etc.)
- Use a lot of visual, tactile aids with learning. This can help with understanding directions or learning new tasks and concepts.
- Use as much demonstration as possible.
- WAIT until you have the entire classes attention prior to beginning instructions (some children may be having a hard time sorting out papers or books and may not be ready to receive new information because they are still working on the last piece of information that was given to them.)
 - A fun way to do this is to have a made up “are you ready” song.

Touch:

- Remember that some of the children in your classroom may have some level of tactile system dysfunction. Be sure to NEVER use light touch (pats or taps on the head, back or shoulders) ALWAYS use firm pressure (straight downward pushes on the top of the head and/or on both shoulders can be very calming for a child.)
- Always be sure a child is expecting your touch.
- Do not tickle a child or play with a child’s hair. This may be extremely unpleasant for the child.
- If a child seems over stimulated he/she may need/want a “bear hug” (“squeeze hug”) for deep pressure.

Equipment:

- Large therapy ball or disc-o-sit jr.® for children whom require extra movement or proprioceptive input. If you use a therapy ball place an inner tube or something under it to stabilize it for the child to avoid falling.
- Weighted lap blanket/object/animal to help calm and organize child
- Inner tubing tied under a desk for a child to push his/her feet against for proprioceptive input can be very organizing for a child.
- Have heavy cushions/bean bags in corners if a child needs deep pressure, proprioceptive input for circle time, something heavy to lie under, or even something to punch. You can easily create your own cushion by putting cut up pieces of foam inside of a futon cover.
- You can use a small plastic pool and fill it with small plastic balls, lentil beans, or pinto beans. You can hide toys inside and have the children find them. This can offer great tactile and proprioceptive input depending on the activity. You can have a child even say what it is he/she found to practice new vocabulary/spelling words.
- Trays filled with clay, wet sand, finger-paint, sugar. Letter formation and shapes can be practiced in such trays.
- Study carrels for children who may need to decrease the amount of stimuli in their visual field.

Environments:

- Research (Painter 1977) has concluded that fluorescent lighting is detrimental to students who are hyperactive. IF there is adequate lighting in your classrooms you may want to consider turning the fluorescent lights off or turn off as many as you can to be able to see. Once in a while you may want to keep lights off to calm the children that may need calming.
- Try to provide at least one area of the classroom without a lot of excess visual stimuli. Displays for incidental learning are great, but at times classrooms tend to have too much visual stimuli. IF you can offer one area of the classroom where there is minimal traffic and windows this may help some children concentrate for work, reading, or even group time.
- Try to provide an area for children to modulate, organize themselves in a corner of the room. You may want to consider pillows, stuffed animals, mini-trampoline, and blankets. Be sure this is not an area that will be used for “time out” or play time.

Behavior Management:

- ALWAYS reinforce children behaving appropriately; often this will encourage others to follow along.
- “Sensory Diet” activities for the classroom setting. If you feel a child you are treating could benefit from such activities consult with an occupational therapist. Parent permission may be needed.
- Remember that the quiet children who may never disrupt may have challenges as serious as those whom require constant attention. Often they are these children whom get overlooked.

Overcoming Fear:

- Children with SID may be afraid to perform unfamiliar tasks or activities.
- They may feel more at ease if they watch others perform the task first.
- Do the activity with the child in a one on one situation so they can experience it with firm touch/proprioception.
- REMEMBER the child knows their limits. Do not push the child into an activity that he/she can not do.
- If a child is having a hard time with an assignment do not over push the child by telling them that they can do it if they try harder (it may be an overly challenging assignment for him/her and this may frustrate them even more.)
- Reinforce small improvements with behavior.
- If you are using a reward system: Taking away reinforces (such as pennies, good behavior checks) does not encourage positive behavior. It can only make a child more frustrated and the child may not care to behave better as a result. Turn the system around so the child will receive reinforces only for positive behavior which in turn will be more encouraging for a child.
- REMEMBER you can not take away a behavior without giving the child something to replace it with. This is where your occupational therapist may need to assist with suggestions. For example, if a child is consistently biting his/her fingers you may want to offer the child resistive gum.
- ****There are many oral activities that can encourage alertness, organization, or calmness*****

General Activities:

- Prior to instruction doing wake up activities will enrich the classroom learning environment. Jumping and running are both good activities and should be done periodically throughout the day. REMEMBER kids need stretch breaks just like we do.
- Use movement during instruction when possible. You can use creativity to incorporate bean bag tosses, relays, obstacle courses, and treasure hunts into everyday learning.
- Make sure that during recess time children are involved in movement, strenuous activity. Organizing activities for the playground which will carry over to a better learning environment are: running, swinging, spinning on times (both directions) sliding, hanging and climbing on monkey bars. For some children they may need a calming activity such as holding something heavy on the way back to the classroom.
- It is important to always allow children to go for recess even if they did not finish their work. Forcing them to stay inside can be counter-productive. It is often these children that NEED to be running around and have movement. If you feel strongly about giving a consequence allow the other children to have 5 extra minutes to play or you may want to have the children who have not finished their work go run a lap and then come back to finish their work.

- If you need heavy books, furniture, or to run messages from one classroom to the next have the child who needs movement or extra heavy work to run the errand for you.
- Do chair push-ups prior to a sit down activity.
- It is important to remember that some children may need to stand or sit on a therapy ball at times to be more productive to work; this gives them the movement they need to organize themselves.
- Have the children write on the chalkboard prior to writing on paper so they can get the large movements in first (shoulder, trunk, and arms). This will facilitate improved posture, control, and feedback for many fine motor tasks/activities.

Fine Motor Activities:

- Hit a hanging ball with two hands on a dowel (one hand on each end) to encourage bilateral movement and upper extremity strengthening.
- “Shadowing”: you move your hands slowly in all directions in front of a child. With palms facing each other about an inch apart have him/her shadow your movement.
- Trash toss: squeeze newspapers, tin foil, into tight balls and aim for trash can. See who can fill up a trash first 😊
- Practice placing stiff pieces of cardboard into envelopes. Vary the sizes of both the envelope and the cardboard to work on size discrimination and coordination.
- Mark or trace into a clay tablet (on a tray). The stiffer the clay, the harder the task. This is a great way to receive proprioceptive input and learn letters.
- Practice letters, drawings, shapes, numbers in trays filled with sand, finger-paint with sugar, shaving cream, or clay. One can practice starting with tracing and moving to copying.
- Pick up objects with tongs, tweezers. Start with the tongs since this will be easier. The activity can also be graded with heavier objects.
- Do an art project incorporating punching holes into different thicknesses of paper.
- Make letters, numbers, animals, etc. with pipe cleaners.
- Wash-rag relay: (outside activity) have two buckets, filling one with one inch of water and leaving the second bucket empty about 4 feet away. The child has to dip the washrag into the bucket with water than runs to wring it out in the dry bucket. The first team/child to transfer all the water wins.

Oral Motor Activities:

- Our mouths can be extremely organizing. This goes all the way back to birth (ex. Sucking on a bottle/pacifier.) Just think about how many times a day you as an adult put something in your mouth (pencil to chew on/ gum/ mint.) Many children will be able to concentrate and focus better and have a more appropriate level of alertness if they are given gum (organizing) to chew, or a hard sour candy (alerting) to suck on. Even if a child is allowed a water bottle that is difficult to suck out of this can also be extremely organizing because once again they are required to “work hard” to suck. The children will realize that this is being offered to help them attend in class once the initial fun of it has worn off.