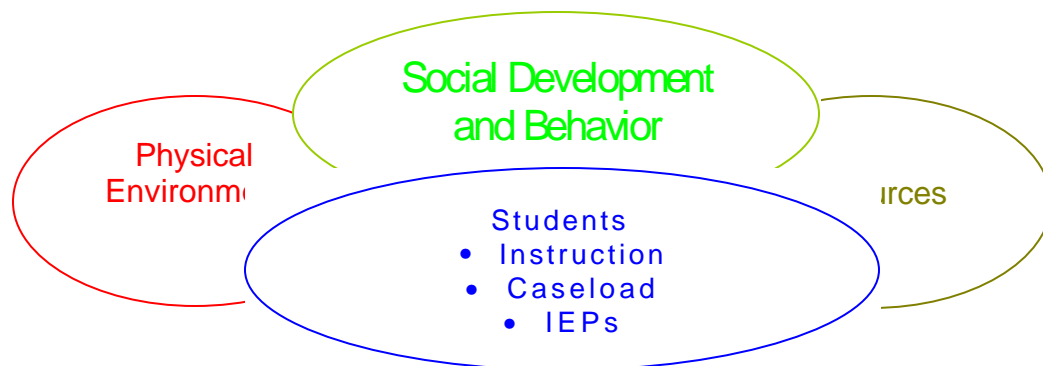




Special Teachers and Exceptional Pupils = Urban Promise

A Teacher's Year, Part 2: Setting the Tone



The first part of a teacher's year effects the rest of the year. Though individual teachers do things differently, most teachers move through similar kinds of thinking and actions as they open their classrooms. At the beginning of the year we help set the tone for the kind of learning community we want to establish. Multiple dimensions are key to setting the tone, with the main outcome of creating child-centered instruction. How we teach needs to be integrally connected to our students' learning.

One major aspect of opening the classroom is **physical environment**. This encom-

passes everything from the placement of desks to the bulletin board messages. Ideas for environment include:

- Arrange desks in small groups to promote student interactions.
- Have students bring in pictures of themselves, and perhaps write or draw about their family.

Another area needing thought and planning at the beginning of the year centers on **social development and behavior**. Establishing and reviewing classroom routines and rules from the first day through the first few weeks of school can help kids learn expectations

and appropriate limits. Ideas include:

- Brainstorm a list of rules with your students. Even young students will have an idea about how they should behave. Students will be more invested in the rules. Make sure to discuss related rewards and consequences.
- Limit your rules to no more than five or six.
- State your rules positively. Say "Keep your hands to yourself" instead of "No touching"

A third aspect to consider is **resources**. Unfortunately, many beginning teachers spend money on supplies, only to look back a year or two later at a room full of books and manipulatives that are unusable. Ideas:

- Ask your principal or payroll clerk about additional funds for beginning teachers. Many districts at

Features

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Important Dates

- **September 21:** Mentor Meeting 4-6 rm 4013.
- **September 28:** Mentor Connection (Mentors and students) Rm. 3427E/W.
- **October 12:** Field Advisory Rm. 3427 E/W 4-5pm.
- **November 25:** Deadline for newsletter submissions.
- **November 27-28:** Thanksgiving holiday.
- **November 30:** Field Advisory Rm. 3427 E/W 4-5pm .
- **December 7:** Advisory Board meeting 3:30-5:30.
- **December 8-12:** Final examinations.
- **December 15:** Mentoring paperwork due.

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(con't) least reimburse some money for teacher supplies

- Make friends with your department chair, or the person in charge of books. Often time they can point you in the right directions.
- Ask students to bring in supplies such as tissues, paper towels, and markers.
- Create lessons around a theme, such as “my family” or “my neighborhood”, in which students can provide all sorts of input. If they bring in materials, you do not have to buy them yourself!

All three of these areas: **resources, behavior/social development, and physical environment** are something to think about because of one person: the student. All things that we do, that we plan, and that we make, center on helping the student progress through the school year.

We review IEPs and case files to get to know the student from a special education perspective. However, because a student had an experience in one educational setting does not mean he will have the same experience with you. It is important to see the first day of the school year as a new start for everyone!

There are several resources available to help new teachers with the myriad of suggestions. A reference that many first year teachers find handy is : [The First Days of School: How to be an Effective Teacher](#) by Harry and Rosemary Wong.

Digital Corner

Many websites offer beginning of the school year advice. One of these is

<http://www.inspiringteachers.com>

The site is full of ideas around the three domains we have discussed in this newsletter. The site also includes organizational tips.

Mentor's Musings: Spotlight on Maria Earman Stetter

> What population do you work with?

I currently teach at Roosevelt High School. It is my first year there. I have taught previously at Orr High School, and Ames Middle School. I don't yet know what subject area or grade level I will be teaching this year. They tell me that I will be team teaching students with learning disabilities.

>Wow, that is interesting that you don't know what you are teaching. How do you feel about the situation?

Well, at first I was a little frustrated, but then I thought about it, and I thought, “I am a teacher, I am going to be teaching, does it really matter who?” A few years ago, I think it was my second year at the middle school and my fifth year of teaching, my principal made me change classrooms three times in the first week of school. So just as I was starting to be situated in a room, I had to move again. It taught me to be flexible.

> How important do you feel that is?

Flexibility is crucial for all teaching but especially for special educators. I know that my flexibility will come in handy when I meet the teacher I will be working with as team teacher. I must work creatively with whoever it is, because this first year I do not have say about who I am working with. I must remember that I am there for the students -- to help them -- and to be flexible with this new teaching partner. In fact, creativity is just as important as flexibility in the job description of a special educator.

>How are you preparing, not knowing anything about the new job?

Well, I am thinking a lot about my high school teaching experiences, and trying to remember the differences between middle and high schools in terms of the kids' social development and school structures. I am also trying to be ready mentally to do a lot of preparing the two work-days we have before school starts. I am trying to formulate questions, and be ready to listen and try to fit in at this new school. I will have a lot to do in a few days! For more see:

<http://www.uic.edu/orgs/stepup/mariaearmanstetter>