John Morphett Primary School
A learning community for students with learning disabilities

Summary
The teacher must employ a number of negotiated strategies in order for students to reach their potential because of the individual nature of the learning disabilities. Most students are working at Standard 1.

Band
Composite of Junior and Upper Primary

Context
The Special Class at John Morphett Primary School includes 12 students from years 3–7. Abilities are variable and range from:

- a year 7 student who cannot read at all, although he recognises his own name, some family names and the teacher's name, as well as a few letters
- a year 3 student who has no phonic/word connection
- a year 6 student who reads words but can't write them or comprehend unless he hears them read to him.

Learning Area
All

Timeline
Continuous

School
John Morphett Primary School

Educators
Marion Foster

The Vision
The following aims and objectives for the Special Class program at John Morphett were written for parents and for teachers of other schools who may be considering the special class for students in their current cohort.

However, the educator in the Special Class also admits that she often reminds herself of these objectives by looking back over them.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

√ To provide a physical environment conducive to learning
√ To provide a program which is purposeful and achievable for all
√ To encourage and guide them to meet these characteristics as a group and as individuals

♦ cohesive
♦ responsible
♦ cooperative
♦ reliable
♦ adaptable
♦ motivated
♦ interested
♦ enthusiastic

To create learning environment I must implement a program which will:

■ stimulate and motivate the students
■ support the efforts of all children

This material forms part of the Working with Outcomes website, which can be accessed through http://www.sacsas.sa.edu.au/. The material is provided with permission of John Morphett Primary School.
- acknowledge and respect their individual differences
- include their personal interests
- begin from what they know and understand
- increase their confidence and self esteem
- encourage them to take risks
- include techniques for a diversity of learning skills
- ensure each child has the sense of achievement and progress

**PRINCIPLES OF SPECIAL CLASS AT JOHN MORPHETT PRIMARY SCHOOL**

The class established is valued by the whole school community.

There is a positive staff attitude to the establishment and ongoing support of the integration of students into the school community.

A flexible small group learning situation is provided in the John Morphett Primary School setting to provide a specific education option for the broader school community.

A caring environment to meet the needs of the students as individuals is provided as part of the local school environment.

An instructional and social learning environment supports students to access, participate and achieve success within the areas of study they require.

A quality, balanced, purposeful, inclusive curriculum reflects the values of the school.

These include:

- developing positive attitudes towards others, self and the environment
- encouraging responsibility for own behaviour/actions
- developing positive attitudes to their own learning and achieving their personal best
- developing a program which provides students with the generic skills and competencies to assist them in future learning.

Ongoing communication and support between home and school is developed and encouraged through the School Diary, personal contact and through Learning Record Folders - acknowledging parents/carers, teachers and all involved as partners and valuing the opinions and skills of all parties.

The values of honesty, respect, cooperation and courtesy are modelled and promoted so that students have the best opportunity to develop these social skills.

Recognition and acknowledgement of knowledge, skills and attitudes already acquired by students and further develop these achievements by personal goal setting ongoing assessment and reflection.

The school’s Behaviour Management, Dress Code and Harassment Policies apply to students in the class.

Placement of a student in the special class educational option finally rests with the Principal in consultation with relevant staff, carefully considering the needs of the student together with the program on offer and the group dynamics of the current class.

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The Journey
The primary goal when planning programs for the Special Class at John Morphett must be the creation of a successful learning environment. It is therefore vital to make expectations and outcomes clear to students. The teacher begins by assessing whether an Outcome is useful for the cohort—if it does not appear useful or relevant, it is not included in the program.

Programming
Several challenges arise in programming. The educator knows that many of the students will be in the Special Class for up to five years and that she needs to find a suitable Standard to fit the mixed level of abilities in the class. She begins by adapting to the special class curriculum suitable common factors between the:

- whole school programs for John Morphett Primary School R–7 campus (particularly society and environment/science/health and Program Achieve)
- SACSA Framework
- Year 2002–2004 Operation Plan
- her own personal preferences in programming.

Essential Learnings and Key Competencies are integrated into every lesson, especially KC2 communicating ideas and information
KC4 working with others and in teams
KC6 solving problems.

Also included in the program are
- Social Skills Coordinators Program—Emotional Zones
- Recycling program from DECS.

Working with the SACSA Framework
Any program needs to match the values and philosophy of the class, so the teacher selects Outcomes that are relevant to the learning needs of the students. All society and environment tasks are integrated with English and maths.

I go first to the area of learning with which I am most familiar.

She also talks to other teachers, especially the junior primary teacher in maths, to see what they are doing and, if suitable, uses or adapts some of their programs. If she is using electronic resources to program, she often cuts and pastes what she needs onto multiple documents, prints them out and lays them out in front of her. These may include the

- SACSA CD resource
- Insites topic plans
- Pathways planning program, especially in areas with which she feels unfamiliar (she is much more familiar with English, maths and society and environment).

When I do my planning, I don't create one planning sheet, but probably make nearer 10. I find that SACSA assists by bringing together lots of different resources which used to be in different places.

As with many other educators, she often creates her own resources from these and uses them for programming.

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For example, she started by redoing the concept map from the SACSA Framework Companion Document for English to make it appropriate to the needs of her learners. Thus she took out things like critical analysis, reflection, analysis and evaluation, which she knew were beyond these students at this point in time.

One way I program is to start with a theme, do a concept map using Inspiration 7, and then go to SACSA to see which Outcomes fit.

For example, the following English indicators from draft R–7 English teacher resource were useful when programming:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strand: Language</th>
<th>Band: Early Years</th>
<th>Standard: 1</th>
<th>Outcome 1.8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1—' Constructs sentences using some linking conjunctions...'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2—' Constructs sentences using nouns (who, what), verbs and circumstance (eg when, where, why).'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2—'Uses linking and binding conjunctions'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is supported by charts around the room to assist students in vocabulary.

Written planning is essential, as well as keeping records of what you have taught—this is our accountability. Despite the planning, I have to mentally reassess mid-way through each task—I might not change the task, but I may have to change the Outcome.

Because of their variable needs and abilities, students enter and exit at different levels, so it is difficult to program Outcomes for a specific exit level. The educator pre-tests students to see where they are and records entry and exit levels, especially in maths, thus recording the distance travelled.

When programming, she finds it useful to select 2–3 main goals that are achievable. She also needs to consider how material will be presented to students, creating a balance between what is:

- provided on paper
- black boarded for copying
- black boarded for comprehension.

Some programming planning proformas associated with this program are available on the website.
Assessment
Currently there is no reporting on the SACSA Framework and Essential Learnings, although this is planned for the future.

When programming, the teacher also determines what and how assessment will take place so that assessment fits the Outcome.

*If I don't note it at the point of programming, I get waylaid or might forget and assess in different way.*

The assessment and reporting plan tracks the different types of assessment, ensuring there is a balance of assessment by self, peer and teacher.

The teacher recently attended a workshop the new Negotiated Education Plan (NEP).

*After attending the workshop, I recognised that there were so many elements included, particularly 'accommodations', which I had not known about. Simultaneously I recognised that I am already using all these elements without even realising it!!!*

The new Negotiated Education Plan (NEP) is suitable for students who are withdrawn, as well as those in mainstream classroom, and covers constructing curriculum, assessing strategies, setting goals and analysing tasks. It is available from the Special Education Resource Unit at [http://web.seru.sa.edu.au/](http://web.seru.sa.edu.au/)

*Sometimes at end of the day I think I've achieved nothing. But then I write down a list of all the students and, against each name, I write down what we have achieved in the day. The following day I'll share the list with students. On really difficult days I'll get the kids to make list of achievements, or to self-assess. But they have to have some idea of responsibility—they must have physical evidence to demonstrate achievement. They know what the expectations are—they can see where we are on the learning journey.*

The Program
The Special Class at John Morphett Primary School is a learning community; strengths and skills of individual students are celebrated so that the class may work collaboratively as a team. Students learn across all eight Learning Areas, although their social needs take precedence over their curriculum learning needs.

All students are taught basic skills and strategies in literacy and numeracy, including reading comprehension and writing. Their learning is very much negotiated, as there must be individual goal setting adapted to suit each student's ability.
As an example of negotiated learning/negotiated strategies, one student with an undiagnosed severe learning disorder does not read other than his name and those of a few family members—he has no connection between phonic sound and words. However, he has beautiful handwriting, and loves artwork and technology. He can copy words very well as a one to one correspondence, but he cannot comprehend what he is writing. He really wants to do what the other learners are doing and doesn't want to be different—he really wants to be able to read and write. We have worked together on some strategies, some of which are negotiated and initiated by the student. We don't believe in lowering expectations because of disadvantage: students need good explicit teaching with strong expectations of their learning.

Some students are partially integrated into mainstream classes, for example:
- a year 7 student takes sport with the year 7 class
- some year 6/7 students go to the high school library with the year 7 class
- all students take dance and drama with the 2/3 class.

There is a buddy system with students from mainstream classes for assemblies and SRC.

**Learning community**
- The strengths of individual students, as well as their areas for learning improvement, are made explicit; negotiated learning must, by necessity, be a strong feature in the class, but there is also a strong sense of team work. For example,
  - two students are very good spellers, so are allowed to move ahead in the program, requesting help from the teacher when necessary
  - another student is excellent at cutting out; those students who have difficulty with cutting out are advised to 'rough cut' and take their work to the student who excels in cutting out.

**Teaching methodology**
The teacher ensures that she has programmed with an Outcome in mind; this is the initial work which meets the selected Outcome and which is assessed. Most Outcomes are at Standard 1. She also plans for those students who are capable of extension and who may be working at Standard 2. By having extension work available to students, she makes explicit the notion of lifelong learning. For this to be successful it is imperative to make explicit the Outcomes expected, students' individual achievements and what is next on the learning journey.

Nevertheless, there are also times when it is necessary to reprogram if it becomes clear that the dynamics in the classroom will not support the planned task. Similarly, for those students requiring help, it may be necessary to adapt the task.
For example, a planned measuring activity had to be reprogrammed when it became clear that the activity was not on task. The teacher discussed with the students her frustrations at the 'off-task' behaviour, asking them if they thought they were undertaking the activity successfully. They all agreed it was not a success and the task was reprogrammed for the following week. This time, when the teacher asked for their feedback, they all raised their hands in recognition of their successful achievement of the set Outcome.

Thus constructivism and flexibility are paramount in this classroom. However, the students also require a routine with which they are familiar; for example, they know when literacy, maths and handwriting are programmed.

Although they see writing all the time, not all students can read. Reading comprehension includes teaching key words—what I know, what I need to know—and key action words. The teacher explicitly teaches categorising words, such as verbs and nouns, as well as punctuation. Instructions are often written on the board and students have to find key words.

A number of mainstream techniques are therefore utilised. For example, this literacy task, created from the English SACSA resources and designed to assess for reading comprehension, is similar to many given to mainstream students.

It can provide evidence towards demonstration of achievement of English Outcomes:

### Texts and contexts
1.3 Reads and views a range of texts containing familiar topics and language and predictable text structures and illustrations and recognises the ways that texts are constructed to represent real and imaginary experiences. Id. T. KC1

### Language
1.7 Identifies and talks about some features of written language and visual images when reading and viewing a range of texts. T.C.KC1

### Strategies
1.11 Experiments with strategies for planning, composing and reviewing own written texts and for attempting to spell unfamiliar words. Id.T.C.KC3
Working with ICTs
Teaching ICTs is important and many students access the internet and use word processors. With a number of students in the class struggling to create legible handwriting, word processors offer an opportunity for students to create work which will look exactly the same as any mainstream student's work. An example is provided where students were asked to create a personalised notepad.

Task— create a personalised notepad
The student who can't read can still manage this task; explicit written instructions, such as 'File' and 'Page Setup', mean that he can match words to those on the computer screen.

Product
This project has been so successful that students in the special class will teach their acquired skills to the year 2/3 mainstream class!

Negotiated learning and assessment
Some negotiated learning occurs around particular tasks, such as in society and environment. For example, last term the class did a project on giants, which integrated Outcomes from English, maths, art and society and environment and demonstrated a range of Outcomes. Topics included:
- giants in nature
- giant animals
- man-made structures.
Students were able to negotiate which animals they wished to research and presented their learning as a fold-out page and an oral presentation to the mainstream year 7 class.

A range of assessment methods were used including:
- self-assessment
- teacher assessment
- peer assessment
- student/parent assessment.

Assessment was reported both to students and parents, and was based on clearly established criteria, such as:
- information acquired
- presentation
- work completed
- oral presentation.
The goal was for students to complete their folders within the set time. The class created a timeline to ensure that they were on task and structured their planning for each week. The teacher created checkpoints, such as mid-way through the project, to check that they were keeping to task; for some students this meant reassessing their objectives and making new goals.

The teacher, in the role of facilitator, reviewed student work at each point and attempted to extend more capable students. She would do this by referring to the SACSA Framework to see if any students could be working at Standard 2 Outcomes. For example, one student had collected a lot of statistics; the next step would be to create a graph.

**Visual learning maps**

In maths, students may be working with blocks and other maths equipment to add 10s and units.

*I don’t let them move on to abstract maths until they have mastered working with materials.*

Students are therefore able to work at different levels and can keep track of their own progress. Similar charts are kept on the wall for parents to share.

Assessment is recorded as:

- Achieved (A)
- Need help (NH)
- Need practice (NP).

Nevertheless, although the teacher is not necessarily using the same Outcomes for this particular cohort as she would for mainstream students, the notion of a framework, continuous learning and transparent assessment, remains the same.