

The Big6™ and Special Needs Students: My Personal Experience

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Children with special needs often have difficulty completing class work and school assignments, particularly complex assignments such as book reports, science projects and end of the unit projects. These tasks that may appear “easy” for some students can be overwhelming and challenging for special needs children. This is true because the directions are often hard to process and the specific steps are hard to break down. Special needs students often have trouble understanding the specific assignment requirements and what is expected of them. In addition, these children can experience difficulty with the organizational skills required to complete a large assignment. From a Big6 perspective, the problem is clear: these students need help with Task Definition, Big6 #1. The remainder of this article shares some of my personal experiences of using the Big6 with special needs students. In a future issue, I will offer a more detailed explanation of the scope of special education and how the Big6 can make a positive difference.

The Big6™: A Special Needs Perspective

As a special education resource room teacher of fourth and fifth grade children, I see too many students give up, become discouraged and frustrated, and appear unenthusiastic about their work. I have tried different methods of helping these children, such as outlining the assignment for them, working on one piece of the assignment at a time, even reducing the assignment requirements. These strategies still presented my students with difficulties. Despite these modifications, the students became uninterested in the work, confused about the task, and unmotivated to complete the assignment. Clearly, I needed my students to take ownership of their learning and to become motivated and excited about their work and learning.

The Big6 helped me to do this with my students. The same students who once showed little interest in producing quality work are now eager to undertake a project, can create a dazzling science project or compose an amazing book report, all while feeling confident and positive about themselves as learners! My students love taking ownership of their learning and use Big6 #2 Information Seeking Strategies to determine what resources they need to get the job done, and Big6 #3 Location and Access to find those resources and the information within the resources. This helped to build confidence and allowed my students to realize that they CAN do the work and complete the assignment...with a little help from the Big6! With Big6 #4 Use of Information, and #5 Synthesis, the children were a direct part of their learning as they used the appropriate resources to complete the actual task.

Using The Big6™ with Special Needs Students

How did I achieve such success with The Big6? To begin with, I was energized and animated as I introduced my students to the world of Big6. I was extremely excited and enthusiastic when we embarked on the journey of learning the Big6 Skills. My students picked up on this and in turn, became excited themselves. The children and I first learned the Big 6 #1 Task Definition and the individual steps of the process. We went through each step with real life situations over and over until the kids were confident and comfortable with the Big6. As one child said, “We Big 6-ed inside and out. We breathed the Big6.”

For example, using The Big6, we problem solved situations that were meaningful and relevant to each child’s life: what to buy your best friend for her birthday, what movie to see, what to do over the summer. With my help, the students went through each step of the Big6 to solve the problem. The students loved doing this! Each child made a Big6 reference guide “cheat sheet” for their folders with the steps outlined on it. They gave presentations on the Big6 to the younger students and to their

parents and sang the Big6 song at a school-wide assembly. Moreover, my students became responsible for their learning and were an active part of the learning process. Therefore, they became excited and motivated to use the Big6 in a curricular context.

[Show me the Big6 song!](#)

After a few weeks, I decided to try using the Big6 with school assignments. I spent a few class hours showing the students how the Big6 can help with school work. We talked about this and I did an example project for the children using the Big6. My kids were surprised to see that they could manage their assignments, complete the work, and feel good about themselves while using the Big6. This changed the dynamics of our special education program. The children were able to complete the same assignments as their classmates just by using the Big6 Skills. Big6 # 6, Evaluation, helped my students to reflect on their work and the process of completing the project. They were able to reflect on what worked, what didn't work, and what they would change in the future. In this way, I know that The Big6 will help them achieve ever-greater success in school.

When working with students with special needs, it is important to remember that these children learn differently. It is often difficult for these children to organize and plan their work, understand directions, and complete tasks. The Big6 allows my students to stay organized, take control of their work, and complete classroom tasks in an orderly and easy to understand manner. We now use the Big6 every time a classroom teacher assigns a book report, project, or lengthy assignment. The students come into the resource room and know that it is "time to Big6!"