

3 Ways to Become a More Mindful Educator This Year

Every year, we make New Year's resolutions. We promise to lower our blood pressure, raise our expectations, and balance our checkbooks. We vow to become better professionals and build stronger relationships. This year, as English language educators, let's focus on becoming more mindful—more aware of the world you move in—and learning how to channel that mindfulness into conscientious action.

Outlined here are three achievable goals to help you improve yourself *and* the world you move in, complete with action steps to help ensure you start—and stay—the course. Choose one (or more) of the resolutions below and get started being a better, more thoughtful English language professional today.

1. Reduce your paper trail.

Why It's Important

Increase your classroom's sustainability and, in so doing, make your work easier, more efficient, and more organized. The amount of paper each school uses varies depending on student and teacher count and policies, and estimates vary from [250,000](#) to [360,000](#) sheets annually. (According to the Green Schools Initiative [n.d.], schools in Los Angeles, California, USA, go through 75,600 tons of paper per year!) In addition to bettering your classroom management, decreasing classroom paper use can also decrease greenhouse gases, nitrous oxides, and other toxic effluents (Green Schools Initiative, n.d.).

Action Steps

1. Commit to having at least one paperless day of class per week—or, if you're up for the challenge, a full paperless week every month. You might be surprised how innovative your lessons can be when you can't rely on paper, and how excited your students will be to rely on varied modes of learning.
2. Invest (mentally) in a great classroom management app—or several. It can certainly be daunting to put so much trust into a new technology, but it can be well worth the risk. There's an app for nearly every aspect of classroom management:
 - [Class Dojo](#) and [Remind](#) allow you to share photos, videos, and messages with parents and students (so you can do away with sending paper flyers home);
 - [Teacher's Class BEHAVIOR PRO](#) helps you track all kinds of student behaviors (so you can get rid of that behavior log, or scribbled notes in your attendance log);
 - [Smart Seat](#) creates seating charts and records attendance (so you can toss that attendance log completely); and
 - apps like [TeacherKit](#) do it all: organize multiple classes and manage seating charts, attendance, student behavior, and grades.
3. Get others involved. The Northeast Recycling Council created a great list of [suggestions and guidance](#) for reducing paper use in schools at the classroom and school levels, complete with a memo to send out to staff. (Just be sure, of course, to send that memo out electronically!)

2. Improve your knowledge of working with special-needs students.

Why It's Important

“Between 1989 and 2013, the percentage of students with disabilities who were in a general education class for 80 percent or more of the school day increased from about 32 percent to nearly 62 percent,” and yet “many teacher-education programs offer just one class about students with disabilities to their general-education teachers” (Mader, 2017). The increasing number of students with disabilities in general education makes it more important than ever for all teachers to know how to work with this student population. It can be especially important for English language educators, who may have a difficult time determining if their language learners’ difficulties acquiring language stem from their racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds or from a language disorder.

Action Steps

Take an online teacher education course to further your knowledge of this subject. Try one of these:

- [Separating Difference From Disability With Students Learning English as an Additional Language](#) (TESOL)
- [Disabilities in Special Education: An Overview of Students With Disabilities in Special Education](#) (National Association of Special Education Teachers; free with NASET association [membership](#))

Don't have the time to commit to a full course? Try this 77-minute webinar:

- [What's Different in the Special Education Assessment Process for English Learners?](#) (Council for Exceptional Children)

3. Don't let a first-year teacher fail.

Why It's Important

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), in the United States at least 17% of new teachers leave the field in their first 5 years of teaching, and there are a number of reasons, including low salaries and poor performance. Another reason, one that we as educators can help mitigate, is a lack of support. First-year teachers who don't have a mentor are more likely to quit. Kate Walsh, the head of the National Council on Teacher Quality, has said, “We treat the first year of teaching like it is some sorority or fraternity hazing. Educators expect a new teacher to be sick...at the thought of how she is going to survive the day just because that's what they once did” (Pondiscio, 2016). You remember what it was like when you first started: Throw someone else a lifeline.

Action Steps

This one is simple, though not necessarily easy. Become a mentor and take a new teacher under your wing. If your school doesn't already have a mentoring program in place, simply reach out to your administrator and let him or her know your intentions. He or she is likely to have a suggested mentee for you and can facilitate the arrangement. But before you reach out, make sure you know what it takes to be a great mentor. Here's some reading to get you started:

- [Eight Qualities of a Great Teacher Mentor](#) (Education Week Teacher)
- [The Good Mentor](#) (*Educational Leadership*)
- [Mentoring Mainstream Teachers of ESL Students](#) (The Internet TESL Journal), for when there aren't any new (or other) ESL teachers in your school
- **For administrators** who would like to provide mentoring professional development for their ESL teachers: [Strategic Mentoring](#) (*Language Magazine*)

You can make any number of New Year's resolutions this year; these suggestions can help you not only feel better, but they can also help improve the world around you.

References

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Tomiko Breland is TESOL project editor. She received her BA in English from Stanford University, her MA in writing from the Johns Hopkins University, and her certificate in TESOL from Anaheim University.