

## Information for teachers Classroom Management

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Students with learning difficulties respond most favourably to an educational environment that is structured, predictable and orderly.

The following techniques have been found useful on a day-to-day basis in a class situation that includes at least some students with learning difficulties. They can also often be beneficially employed even if the class does not include any students with learning difficulties.

- Display the rules for the class. State them positively ("Raise your hand" is better than "Don't call out"). Tell the students what you want them to do, not what you don't want them to do.
- When a seatwork task is to be undertaken, set a one-minute kitchen timer. If the class has commenced the task before the timer goes off, they may receive a group reward.
- When giving directions to the students, only give "bite size" directions. If possible accompany the explanation with a demonstration.
- Present work in small, carefully planned and manageable steps and work from easiest to hardest in a task or an activity.
- Remember that talking with or talking to students with language difficulties is not equivalent to communicating. Just because a student hears what you say does not mean he or she understands and can carry out the request or the instruction you said. It is a good idea to ask the student to repeat what you have just said in his or her own words to make sure he or she knows and has understood. Writing the instruction on the whiteboard or on an overhead transparency as well as giving it orally is a good strategy.
- Stress the most important information orally by using volume (very loud or soft), pitch (high or low), speed (slow) and other inflectional cues.
- Allow plenty of time for a student with a learning problem to respond to a question.
- It can be helpful to maintain a deck of index cards – one card for every student in your class. Use the cards for a variety of purposes including:
  - Calling on students during reading or class discussions. Shuffle the cards so students will not know who is to be asked next. Remember, however, that some students become extremely stressed if asked to read aloud without prior warning.
  - Making notes on individual needs, class behaviour, homework performance, etc.
- If the student is frequently forgetting to bring his or her books to school from home, suggest he or she obtains two copies of the text book. One book stays at home and the other is for school use and remains at school.
- Suggest the student colour-code his or her books. All Maths books could have a red bar on their spines; all English books could have a blue bar on their spines. This allows books to be easily identified and taken to the appropriate class.
- It is helpful to pin up a weekly and a monthly calendar in your classroom. Use it to post the dates of class excursions, special visitors, school concerts and plays, sports and swimming practices and carnivals, birthdays, holidays and any other dates that pertain to your students. You may also want to post research work and assignments on the calendar (for example, "Measurement work starts today". "Commence reading novel tomorrow".). This provides students with information about teacher and class long-term goals and expected outcomes.
- Find out whether each individual student with a learning disability is an auditory, visual or kinaesthetic learner and use this information to accommodate individual learning styles.
- Use a tape or cassette recorder to modify the curriculum for students with particular special needs. Allow the student who is not an



effective reader to record answers for tests or assignments on tape. The student with writing difficulties may compose his or her story or report on the tape recorder and then write or type it by replaying it in short segments.

- Some students will benefit from a voice-activated computer. He or she can dictate his or her work onto the computer and then proofread it to ensure it has been recorded properly. The IT staff at your school should be able to provide support and the necessary information before purchasing such a program.
- In order to give the slower working student credit for accuracy, score a test according to the number correct over the number attempted, rather than over the total number of questions set.
- Print information on one side of the whiteboard at a time, and then continue on the other side. Come back to the first side and rub off. Then, start all over. This gives the student time to copy the information.
- Copying from the whiteboard is a very difficult task for some students with learning difficulties. Assigning a "buddy" who may have some carbon paper or photosensitive paper and who can automatically produce a worksheet can often assist the student.
- Use different coloured markers for each sentence when writing on the whiteboard. This helps the student find his or her place and helps him or her copy the work more easily.
- Build success into every lesson. This may entail modifying lessons, modelling and demonstrating strategies as appropriate. Success is a wonderful way to enhance a student's self-esteem and increase motivation to tackle the next task. Set tasks that give all students a challenge but that are not so difficult as to cause feelings of frustration.
- Help students to develop and use memory strategies. Encourage them to visualise a description or a statement.
- Use mnemonics – words, short poems or sentences designed to help a student remember things such as spelling rules. An example of a mnemonic is found in the sentence – Big emus can always upset small emus. The first letter of each word when put together spells the word "because".
- Computers are very useful for students with learning difficulties, provided teachers use them as teaching aids rather than as the principal teacher. With assistance, students can learn word processing skills, and encyclopaedias on CD ROM make looking up information fun.
- Provide feedback to each student as soon as possible after a particular task or piece of work has been completed. Write encouraging comments on a student's work that reinforce the student for planning and organising his or her work and any other aspect that can be reinforced. Always end comments on a positive and, if possible, a forward looking note.
- When setting homework remember the 3 R's of effective homework:
  - RELEVANCE – Assignments should be directly related to work being done in class
  - REVIEW – All homework should be a review of work already covered. New or unfamiliar concepts should not be introduced as homework.
  - REALISTIC – It generally takes a student with learning difficulties three times as long to complete an assignment at home as it would to complete it in a structured classroom setting. Therefore, a 10-minute classroom assignment will take approximately 30 minutes at home.
- Help him or her to develop a good self-concept. Encourage him or her to become involved in extra-curricular activities: Sport - rowing, netball, soccer, athletics, swimming; Music - band, orchestra, choir; Drama; Audio-visual; Outward Bound and especially The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme (for secondary aged students).

### For more Information

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