How to Adapt Your Teaching Strategies to Student Needs

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Teachers are often asked to modify instruction to accommodate special needs students. In fact, all students will benefit from the following good teaching practices. The following article takes the mystery out of adapting materials and strategies for curriculum areas.

If the student has difficulty learning by listening, then try…

Before the lesson:
- Pre-teach difficult vocabulary and concepts
- State the objective, providing a reason for listening
- Teach the mental activities involved in listening — mental note-taking, questioning, reviewing
- Provide study guides/worksheets
- Provide script of film
- Provide lecture outlines

During the lesson:
- Provide visuals via the board or overhead
- Use flash cards
- Have the student close his eyes and try to visualize the
• Have the student take notes and use colored markers to highlight
• Teach the use of acronyms to help visualize lists (Roy G. Biv for the colors of the spectrum: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet)
• Give explanations in small, distinct steps
• Provide written as well as oral directions
• Have the student repeat directions
• When giving directions to the class, leave a pause between each step so student can carry out the process in his mind
• Shorten the listening time required
• Provide written and manipulative tasks

Be concise with verbal information: "Jane, please sit." instead of "Jane, would you please sit down in your chair."

If the student has difficulty expressing himself verbally, then try…

• To accept an alternate form of information sharing, such as the following:
  Written report
  Artistic creation
  Exhibit or showcase
  Chart, graph, or table
  Photo essay
  Map
  Review of films
  Charade or pantomime
  Demonstration
  Taped report

• Ask questions requiring short answers
• Provide a prompt, such as beginning the sentence for the student or giving a picture cue
• Give the rules for class discussion (e.g., hand raising)
• Give points for oral contributions and preparing the student individually
• Teach the student to ask questions in class
• Specifically teach body and language expression
• Wait for students to respond — don't call on the first student to
raise his hand

- First ask questions at the information level — giving facts and asking for facts back; then have the student break in gradually by speaking in smaller groups and then in larger groups.

If the student has difficulty reading written material, then try…

- Find a text written at lower level
- Provide highlighted material
- Rewrite the student's text
- Tape the student's text
- Allow a peer or parent to read text aloud to student
- Shorten the amount of required reading
- Look for same content in another medium (movie, filmstrip, tape)
- Provide alternative methods for student to contribute to the group, such as role playing or dramatizing (oral reading should be optional)
- Allow extra time for reading
- Omit or shortening the reading required
- Substitute one-page summaries or study guides which identify key ideas and terms as the reading assignment
- Motivate the student, interesting him
- Provide questions before student reads a selection (include page and paragraph numbers)
- Put the main ideas of the text on index cards which can easily be organized in a file box and divided by chapters; pre-teaching vocabulary
- Type material for easier reading
- Use larger type
- Be more concrete-using pictures and manipulatives
- Reduce the amount of new ideas
- Provide experience before and after reading as a frame of reference for new concepts
- State the objective and relating it to previous experiences

Help the student visualize what is read.
If the student has difficulty writing legibly, then try…

- Use a format requiring little writing
  - Multiple-choice
  - Programmed material
  - True/false
  - Matching
- Use manipulatives such as letters from a Scrabble™ game or writing letters on small ceramic tiles
- Reduce or omit assignments requiring copying
- Encourage shared note-taking
- Allow the use of a tape recorder, a typewriter, or a computer
- Teach writing directly
  - Trace letters or writing in clay
  - Verbalize strokes on tape recorder
  - Use a marker to space between words
  - Tape the alphabet to student's desk
  - Provide a wallet-size alphabet card
  - Provide courses in graph analysis or calligraphy as a motivator
- Use graph paper to help space letters and numbers in math
- Use manuscript or lined ditto paper as a motivation technique
  (brainstorm the advantages of legibility with the class)

If the student has difficulty expressing himself in writing, then try…

- Accepting alternate forms of reports:
  - Oral reports
  - Tape-recorded report
  - Tape of an interview
  - Collage, cartoon, or other art
  - Maps
  - Diorama, 3-D materials, showcase exhibits
  - Photographic essay
  - Panel discussion
  - Mock debate
  - Review of films and presentation of an appropriate one to the class
• Have the student dictate work to someone else (an older student, aide, or friend) and then copy it himself
• Allow more time
• Shorten the written assignment (preparing an outline or summary)
• Provide a sample of what the finished paper should look like to help him organize the parts of the assignment
• Provide practice using:
  Story starters
  Open-ended stories
Oral responses (try some oral spelling tests)

If the student has difficulty spelling, then try…
• Dictate the work and then asking the student to repeat it (saying it in sequence may eliminate errors of omitted syllables)
• Avoid traditional spelling lists (determine lists from social needs and school area needs)
• Use mnemonic devices ("A is the first capital letter," "The capitol building has a dome")
• Teach short, easy words in context:
  On and on
  Right on!
  On account of
• Have students make flashcards and highlight the difficult spots on the word
• Give a recognition level spelling test (asking the student to circle correct word from three or four choices)
• Teach words by spelling patterns (teach "cake," "bake," "take," etc. in one lesson)
• Use the Language Master for drill
• Avoid penalizing for spelling errors
• Hang words from the ceiling during study time or posting them on the board or wall as constant visual cues
Provide a tactile/kinesthetic aid for spelling (sandpaper letters to trace or a box filled with salt or cereal to write in)

Kathleen L. Bulloch was a speech/language pathologist for the
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