

MILD LEARNING DIFFICULTIES: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENERAL CLASSROOM TEACHERS

Maintain a predictable classroom – keep a similar schedule every day making sure to announce when things are going to be different and explain the reasons for the change. Also, be sure to announce transitions and help to guide students with learning problems through these transitions to avoid confusion.

Recognize that although mental age is an indicator of learning ability, chronological age is an indicator of motivation and interest levels. Thus, try to ensure that selected materials are of high interest to the student and have a controlled vocabulary to help reduce frustration and increase instruction and enjoyment.

Recognize that students with mild learning difficulties are most likely to learn new skills from concrete materials that have meaning to them and their environment. The student's own experiences should provide the structure for selecting academic materials. Therefore, emphasize the learning of practical real-to-life skills.

Because students with learning difficulties often approach many learning situations with an expectancy to fail, it is important to program for success. **This can be done by providing immediate reinforcement. Break learning tasks down into small, attainable units. Sequencing learning, and allow opportunities for the student to experience learning for self-enjoyment.**

Because students with learning difficulties need continuous feedback during the initial skill learning stages, the student should be informed as soon as possible whether or not a response is correct. When the response is appropriate, positive reinforcement (praise, attention, token, etc.) will strengthen the skill. If, however, the response is incorrect, repeat the trial and prompt the student toward an accurate response.

Since students with mild handicaps often remember material best when it is presented in small segments, their word lists, stories, and other academic exercises should be divided into manageable work units. This allows the student to experience closure on each activity and achieve a feeling of success.

Poor retention of previously learned skills can be alleviated by periodic review beyond criterion. Practice should be distributed throughout the school day by giving the students frequent opportunities to exercise both new and previously learned skills.

Many students with learning difficulties have problems transferring concepts, and as a result, skills may be learned in isolation. By providing a variety of learning experiences and relating academic skill exercises directly to reading or other academic tasks, the teacher can help the student generalize a concept's application.

Increase attention and reduce distractibility by providing stimulating learning experiences in a variety of learning modes. For example, visually demonstrate oral directions or give the student concrete materials such as an abacus.

To improve a student's comprehension and attending abilities, stand near the student when giving instructions. This way, the teacher's voice stands out above other noises and the student can see the teacher's facial expression and body gestures. Also, place the student so that he/she can view the board and the teacher without turning in his/her chair.

Avoid giving multiple directions or be sure to give simple one step cues when repeating directions to the class.

Talk students through a task, even if this is done from across the room. Include in your talking positive reinforcement to help students from becoming frustrated and to encourage them to stay on task.

Use cooperative learning and peer-assisted instruction. Through this type of learning, students will work together to attain a common goal. This requires students to depend on one another for positive rewards and has been found to increase interaction between handicapped students and non-handicapped students during free time.

See additional recommendations on Attending.

Additional Resources:

Rafoth, M. (1997). Learning strategies. In G.G. Bear & K.M. Minke, Children's needs II: Development, problems, and alternatives. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Vaughn, S. (2000). *Teaching exceptional, diverse, and at-risk students in the general education curriculum*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Westwood, P. (2003). *Commonsense methods for students with special education needs: Strategies for the regular classroom*. New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.

topics.practical.org/browse/Mainstreaming_in_education: Mainstreaming in Education.
www.bsu.edu/students/cpsc/diversity/divclassroom/: Diversity Issues in the Classroom.

Contributors:

Nancy Cooper

Lisa Edgell