

Classroom Techniques for Students with Language-Learning Disorders

1. Provide more information, not less
 - Keep information relevant, meaningful, contextual, purposeful, NOT broken into “meaningless” parts – these students must see the whole.
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 - Visual information is more important than the auditory
 - Less complex than auditory
 - Can be static, so student can “grab” it
 - Reference points are constant
 - Overlap information in as many ways as possible, using as many modalities, as many angles/approaches as possible to increase redundancy and help students make the associations needed to learn.
 - Focus on “events” of learning and integrate the curriculum with those events of interest for the students. Integrate reading, writing, drawing, speaking, spelling, tests so overlap occurs.
 - As we speak to our students, try to work in “connecting” words such as *so, because, then, but, when, instead, while*, etc. This gives the student more information. Our students need us to tell them *what* we are doing, *why* we are doing it, and *who* we are doing it with.
 - Consistency is important, especially when you are gone and a substitute is in your place – plan accordingly.
 - Strive for quality, not quantity. Consider staying on a unit until the concepts/basic relationships are clearly understood, instead of going on just because it’s time.
2. Learning must come from their system, not ours.
3. Sometimes, even a different placement of materials with respect to midline, up/down can make a difference, (accounts for problems some students have with material on board or chart they are supposed to copy or deal with). With material on board, language must mediate the translation to paper, might need to change student seating, or have information on paper rather than on board.
4. These students often are “egocentric”, lacking the ability to displace themselves relative to others and time, lack empathy, lack awareness of time.
5. Concepts, linguistic terms (symbols) can be understood only if they are broken down into relational, language level events, related to information the child already has; (to discuss the concepts of “pioneer”, start with traveling the student knows about, focus on the means of transportation, clothing, food, housing, etc. s/he can relate to and contrast it with that of the pioneer – do through pictures).
 - Language addressed to the child should be appropriate to his/her developmental level. Some comprehension problems are not very obvious. The child’s lack of understanding may at first seem to be lack of attention or effort.
 - Consult with the speech/language pathologist.
 - Use pointing, gestures, pantomiming, labeling to develop relationships.
 - Language is taught and facilitated throughout the day. Language time does not need to be a separate part of the curriculum.
 - Allow the student to sit so that the teacher’s face is readily visible during class.

- Use the words *so* and *because* to hook up ideas and give them more information.
- Language skills are best learned if experienced interactivity. Children need to talk as well as listen. Demonstrate the power of language to make things happen.
- If student's attention wanders, stop talking and call attention back to you.
- Tell the student *what* you are doing, *why* you are doing it, and *who* you are doing it with.
- Activities and materials should be concrete, real, and relevant to the lives of young children. Play is one of the best activities for language learning. Expand on circle time topics.
- Try to use a slower speaking rate when possible. Use pauses in speech to highlight important points.
- Don't keep asking language disordered students questions all the time. They need a lot of information first.
- Adults need to adapt their language to children's different styles and abilities.
- Provide visual support whenever possible.
- Take what the child says and expand upon it. Have them give it back to you from their perspective. Avoid saying . . . "Now you say it."
- Children need to be provided with varied opportunities for communication. They also need extra cueing and support. Some strategies include:
 - Modeling
 - Expanding
 - Incidental teaching
 - Sabotage
 - Open ended or leading statements
 - Fill in the blank sentences
 - Story boards
- Encourage the student to question what is not understood.
- Look at what the child can and can't do.
- Social skills are dependent on language and may need to be modeled and/or directly taught. This is best done at the moment the incident is occurring.
- Pair the student with another student with whom s/he can check assignments, notes, etc.
- Use the classroom environment to give the student something to talk about.
- Children with language problems are at risk for future reading and writing problems. Power of print.
- Try to keep down background noise in the classroom.
- Question the student to see if s/he understands.
- Do not move on to a new concept too quickly. You need to go for quality in concepts and connect the child's ideas together for him/her.
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- Tell student you won't call on him/her until they volunteer, but that you expect at least one per day.
- Stay in one position long enough for the child to hear completion of assignment; make assignment clear through to end.
- Look directly at student when talking.
- Reduce volume gradually.
- Ask student to repeat instruction.
- Tape instructions so student can have it repeated as necessary.

- Work on listening skills.
- Nonverbal communication is important (gestures, smiles, nods, etc.).
- Instruct during quiet period in class.

Specific Applications:

Reading/Writing –

- Letters are linguistic by themselves; they have no contextual meaning.
- Use as much contextual information as possible; pre-teach vocabulary using pictures/words, preparatory sets.
- Be sure to go over the “concepts” and “relationships” in stories, so the students see the “whys” prior to having to read the material, meaningfulness is critical.
- Remember to experiment with placement of papers/books for writing, drawing and reading activities, often to right of student midline for right-handed students and not too close to their body.
- For writing, some students need to
 - Think about it
 - Talk about it
 - Talk to self about it, *then*
 - Write it down
- Some need to read theirs/others written work out loud in order to listen for pauses and combined with the visual, will provide the meaning.
- Older students helped by doing written reports on a word processor, easy to correct, have spell check, don't have to hassle with the writing.
- Written assignments might need to be done with a peer or Para, tell each idea, write it down, and do next idea.
- In both reading/writing, make an effort to point out/encourage the notion that events are “connected”.
- In spelling, visualization is probably better phonics. Show the student the word, so then can see the “form” of the word, take a picture of the word in their mind, cover the word, then write it down – don't just spell to them, but say “It looks like . . .”

Science, Social Studies, Math, etc. –

- Must teach the “relationships” making up the concepts, in hopes the students will be able later to integrate those concepts into a symbolic whole (linguistic), have to have people doing something, agents, objects and actions.
- Again, tie into knowledge and experiences they already have, so they can build on that or develop new knowledge.

Academic Survival –

- Help students develop a method to keep track of assignments using a day timer, monthly calendar, assignment sheet, so the student has a visual representation of assignments. If this is incorporated into a timeline of other school, home activities, it is even better. Perhaps give student points/grade for maintaining this record.
- For younger students, a picture timeline of the day's activities, expectations, on the student's desk may help.
- Some older students need to photocopy another's notes, rather than trying to keep up with the teacher's lecture as it is more important to them to follow the teacher's gestures, facial expressions, and visual information on the board.
- Train students to say, “If you could just show me,” or “I need to look at it first”. Students need to understand it is okay to ask for help, to work with

the system that works best for them and not to feel they have to learn like everyone else.

- Even older students may need to use their finger on words or a marker when reading, to “ground” themselves to the page and focus visually.

Behavioral Issues –

- Routine and structure should help address some misbehavior, provides security, and helps them to organize spatially.
- Transitions – use pictures to help them know expected behaviors in transitions, individual pictures on desk, classroom pictures on wall, drawn by students sometimes, shows the expected behavior, be sure to tie with auditory.
- Talk to them more about the work to be done, rather than the time, (“We are going to read a story, talk about it, and draw a picture about it”, rather than “We will do reading for 15 minutes”).
- For specific misbehaviors, have the students draw a picture of what they would look like “doing the right thing” and contrast with a picture showing what they were actually doing. They must be in the picture. This is not enough information to understand the problem.
- Behavioral rules should be stated in “language” terms, not using such terms as “appropriately”, “listening” “carefully”, etc. Rather use words/pictures for: eyes on the speaker, hands and feet to yourselves, etc. And be sure to include the “whys” for these rules. Even better, is if the students can devise the rules, so they come from their systems, not ours.
- Give students choices, real choices, not just “hidden” ultimatums, best if they are choices they think of, sometimes best to give choices, and then walk away so student can choose without us being there. This empowers them.
- When there are schedule changes, write the schedule change on the board and having the students write it down can help reduce anxiety.

Other Instructional Considerations –

- Some students have problem copying off the board, because this requires translating to the paper, which is mediated by language – might need to change student’s seating, or have information on paper, rather than board.
- Instructional/direction language:
 - Needs to be meaningful, related to environment
 - Has to serve a purpose
- Use visual as much as possible
 - Less complex than auditory
 - Can be static, so student can “grab” it
 - Reference points are constant
- Strive for quality, not quantity. Consider staying on a unit until the concepts/basic relationships are clearly understood by the student, instead of going on just because it’s time.
- Focus on “events”, and integrate the curriculum with those events of interest for the students, so a variety of strategies, reading, writing, drawing, speaking, spelling, tests, etc. can be utilized and overlapped to increase concept understanding.
- As in all education, being consistent is important, so consider how closely your substitute plans follow your normal day, normal routines and teaching strategies.