

*Beyond discrimination,  
beyond special treatment*

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## **TEACHING STRATEGIES**

**FOR ALL STUDENTS WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS  
ON THOSE WITH A LEARNING DISABILITY,  
COMMUNICATION DISORDER OR  
NEUROLOGICAL DISORDER**

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Here are some teaching strategies to promote student involvement in learning, help them assimilate and retain concepts, allow them to develop and improve specific competencies and provide them with the opportunity to achieve their potential in keeping with their limitation.

**LD:** *learning disability*

**ADHD:** *attention deficit hyperactivity disorder*

**TBI:** *traumatic brain injury*

## **Strategies for organizing/planning lessons**

Write the agenda (class content) on the board (e.g. *8:00 a.m.: reading, 9:00 a.m.: discussion on the reading, 10:00 a.m.: break*).

When writing on the board, use colour codes and different shapes or spacing to differentiate the class content from noteworthy material, supplies needed, etc. (e.g. *write the title of the activity in green, the objective of the exercise in white and the supplies needed in red*).

Repeat or have students repeat assignment instructions, lessons and activities, since repetition is a useful method for memorization.

Give tangible examples (with supporting documents, if possible) of your expectations for an assignment, activity or formal lesson, along with the assignment criteria (e.g. *I expect 30 pages double-spaced, with a table of contents and a bibliography. Something that looks like this [hold up the sample]*).

If possible, use formative evaluation for highly complex lessons or those requiring greater organizational and strategic skills (e.g. *this is a practice test*).

Provide access to course and background readings and to lecture notes prior to class.

Adapt evaluations to each student's functional limitation (e.g. *For ADHD: break down the instructions into steps [Step 1: read the text; Step 2: underline the passages where the author mentions...; Step 3: indicate why you think...]. For TBI: essay questions with access to lecture notes. For LD: use few words, keep the vocabulary simple or use only words that have been fully explained when giving instructions and asking questions, put punctuation marks into boldface [e.g. **?**, **!**], use multiple-choice and true or false questions.*).

Have students write down what they need for their courses, including the supplies and any preparation they need to do (e.g. *for our next class, you'll need the newspaper, a marker, etc.*).

As much as possible, use time references found in everyday life to help students organize their academic and personal schedules, plan assignments and anticipate exams (e.g. *on October 31<sup>st</sup>, or Halloween, you'll need to hand in...*).

Remind students of deadlines (e.g. *at this point, you should have done this reading, started this assignment, contacted this person, etc.*).

Give frequent short breaks (2-3 minutes) to help students with attention/concentration disorders (*e.g. change textbooks, take a sheet to the front of the class, hand out a document, hand in an assignment, tell a joke, etc.*).

Space out reading material.

Use larger, easy-to-read fonts.

### **Strategies for managing learning**

Go over the material covered in the previous class and make connections with the current class (*e.g. last week, we discussed..., so today we can talk about...*).

Explain the lessons and activities of the next class and make connections with the current class (*e.g. in the next class, we will practise using...because today we were able to...so, please practise...*).

At the end of each lesson or activity, summarize what students need to retain, apply or generalize, and explain why (*e.g. Who can tell me what we covered today? It's important to remember... because when we visit..., you will need to...*).

As often as possible, call upon the episodic memory (memory of events and personal experiences) of students rather than on their semantic memory (memory of abstract concepts, pure knowledge) for all lessons, since students with a learning disability often have difficulty with the latter (*e.g. Who can tell me about the last letter they received or wrote? What did it say? How was it structured? Give an example of an information letter...*).

Explain the importance of a lesson by giving examples or asking students to find examples from everyday life at school or work (*e.g. for those of you who work, the concept of equality allows you to have standardized schedules that are fair for everyone...*).

As often as possible, use tangible, physical references, point to them and mention them often, repeating the name of that reference (reference work, bibliography, instructional tools, posters in the classroom, maps, etc.).

To promote learning and consolidate student understanding, use many practical examples related to their age group and everyday reality (*e.g. young people learn better when they can relate to the lesson*).

Explain the purpose of the lesson and the outcome of the learning by illustrating with many examples, situation scenarios, role playing, etc., and tell them how this knowledge will be useful in everyday life, how they can generalize it and apply it to their lives, thus making the lesson more meaningful.

Present assignments and instructions in parts. Defining each step will help students to get a sense of the time they have to carry out an assignment, the work involved and the material they will need.

When explaining a concept or lesson, avoid excessive verbiage. For students with a learning disability, attention/concentration problems, a traumatic brain injury or

Asperger's syndrome, wordy lectures cause them to tune out and lose their focus on the lesson at hand.

As much as possible, use tables, diagrams and organization charts to consolidate, tie in and summarize the lessons.

As much possible, use images, pictograms and codes to explain, consolidate or summarize information (*e.g. a pencil = written assignments*).

Avoid lengthy presentations if there are no visual aids, hands-on activities or breaks. Lectures with no practical applications and long discussions that fail to make frequent references to the initial topic and connect with the subject matter should also be avoided.

When having students work in groups, emphasize deadlines and the steps involved, as this structures the assignment.

With their agreement, have students sit at the front of the class in order to be able to capture their attention by occasionally calling on them or making eye contact. This will help prevent them from daydreaming.

Add intonation when speaking, use a variety of methods to draw students' attention (*e.g. gestures, lighting, jokes, objects, etc.*), hold pop quizzes, and ask them to repeat what was just said.

Open with sensational, surprising statements to capture their attention and improve the retention of new knowledge (*e.g. Did you see the report on ... on the news yesterday? 50 per cent of students are...*).

Announce the new lesson and let students know what you expect of them.

Point out noteworthy information and material that will be on the exam.

Pop quizzes are good for getting students' attention. But do not go into specifics or the finer points of a lesson. Test their understanding of a concept or task or validate this understanding through examples from everyday life, which helps to determine their knowledge retention.

Give students frequent feedback on what they do and say.

Use a variety of teaching methods (*e.g. the multisensory approach, where all the senses are used for learning*).

Be consistent in your evaluation methods.

Allow students to use technological devices (*e.g. laptop computer, electronic dictionary, electronic agenda [Palm], digital recorder, correction tools, etc.*).

Build a glossary of terms used in the field studied and allow students to refer to it.

## **Strategies and accommodations for evaluations**

For subjects other than English, use multiple-choice rather than essay questions. Given their poor spelling, essay questions do not adequately reflect students' true level of knowledge.

Alternatively, students can be evaluated orally, if they wish.

Allow students to read the questions aloud.

## **Reading strategies for students (teachers should go over (repeat) these strategies and even strongly recommend them)**

Anticipate a word or group of words from previous content.

Identify key words and highlight them with a marker.

Clarify the purpose for reading and keep it in mind.

Explore the text structure to help promote understanding.

Skim through the text to get an idea of the content (title, illustrations, subheadings, sections, etc.).

Identify the words to which pronouns and substitute terms refer.

Use the context to clarify the meaning of idioms and proverbs.

Use punctuation as clues.

Call attention to the links established by conjunctions and prepositions in the text.

Assemble various pieces of information from clues found throughout the text.

For dyslexic students, make textbooks available in audio format, as this can facilitate their learning.

To increase their reading speed, students should practise reading a short text (200 to 250 words) aloud every night, four times in a row, timing themselves on each occasion. This exercise in "over-reading" should progressively improve their reading time. A different text should be used each night and the exercise should be done five times a week.

## **Writing strategies**

Recall past writing experiences.

Use triggers to stimulate the imagination (*e.g. a work of art, an object, a photo, etc.*).

Clarify the purpose for writing and keep it in mind.

Think of the audience who will be reading your text.

Reflect on the possible content (exploring and selecting ideas).

Think about the structure and organization of the text.

Produce a web chart, diagram, sketch, plan, etc.

To maintain momentum and inspiration, write without worrying about making mistakes.

Read the text aloud.

Make changes, if needed.

Correct the text.

Reread text.

Given the spelling difficulties experienced by these students, you can allow them to use self-correction grids to help them check important elements (*Did I answer the question? Did I add an "s" when it was necessary? Do the verbs agree with the subjects?*). The use of a grammar correction grid could also be allowed during exams.

*N.B. The use of a computer will promote autonomy and enhance the performance of students in terms of reading, writing, revision and proofreading.*

### **Study strategies for students**

Students can record the material presented in class. They can listen to the recording at their own pace at a later time and take more detailed notes.

When doing homework, students should take frequent breaks (e.g. a 10-minute break every 50 minutes) in order to reduce the demand on attention. It might be necessary to divide the lesson or homework period into two or even three blocks of time.

I would like to thank psychiatrist Annick Vincent and neuropsychologist Dave Elleberg for their comments on these strategies.

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