



Teaching Students With Identified Special Needs

By Rea Kirk

RESOURCES

VIDEO

How Difficult Can This Be? The F.A.T. City Workshop. Understanding Learning Disabilities (by R. Lavoie)

<https://amzn.to/2JliQgK>

See the world through the eyes of a child with learning disabilities.

WEBSITES

Information and Inspiration for Parents and Teachers of Children With Learning Disabilities

ricklavoie.com/gateindex.html

GoNoodle

gonoodle.com

Activities for movement and mindfulness during class-time breaks

National Education Association

mynea360.org

Activity directions and examples of how other teachers handle issues

Parent Information and Resources

parentcenterhub.org

For teachers, too; webinars regarding students with disabilities; chats at “Hub Central”

Teachers Pay Teachers

teacherspayteachers.com

Filtered, proven resources from other teachers

Teaching students who have special needs is, in a nutshell, just good teaching! The following tips will help you feel more comfortable and competent as you work with a wide variety of students, including those with special needs. These strategies also enable you to teach all learning levels, without setting apart any students.

- Use “people-first” language. This means saying “student with a disability” rather than “disabled student.” This student is so much more than the disability. Imagine a pink dot drawn in the center of a blank paper. Do you see the pink dot or do you see the whole paper, with the pink dot being one part of that paper? The disability is just one part of that person. When you start speaking this way, you will start thinking this way, and the fear of teaching students with disabilities will disappear.
- When handing out work packets, put the same cover sheet on all packets. Put one staple in each packet for the students who can do your classwork without help. Put two staples in the packets for those who have modified worksheets under their cover sheets. No one will catch on, and you will not embarrass the student who needs modified work.
- When brainstorming and asking for several responses to a question, first call on the student who can probably think of only one answer.

“Great teachers empathize with kids, respect them, and believe that each one has something special that can be built upon.”

—Ann Lieberman



- Offer books (or readings or assignments) on the same subject on three different levels. Label the stacks as “Challenge,” “Medium,” and “Easy.” Let each student pick from the stack of their choice. If any students select work that is either too difficult or too easy for their abilities, speak with them separately and privately.
- Wrap silly putty around a writing implement to make it easier to hold. Allow all students to have access to the silly putty so as not to draw attention to anyone.
- Many students will have sensory issues. For younger students, drape a blanket over a table so students can go to the “cave” with a flashlight to do their work. For older students, a beanbag chair facing the wall and a set of noise-cancelling headphones achieve the same purpose.
- Give 30 minutes of homework. To everyone. That’s it. For one student, this means completing two math problems. For another, it’s 30 math problems.
- Do 1-minute timings in which students can chart their own progress. This can be done for reading, for math, for how many times one can dribble a ball, for how many state capitols one can name, and so on. The idea is to compete with yourself to beat your personal best. Having to work on a dreaded subject for only 60 seconds makes it doable, and seeing tangible progress on a chart is motivating.
- Greet each student at the door each day with one of the three H’s: handshake, high five, or sideways hug. This gives you physical contact with every student as well as a voiceless way to build rapport. If a student does not want to be touched, he or she may say “Pass.”
- Greet all students each day with a smile on your face and tell them you are glad to see them—especially Joni, who always gives you a headache!
- Focus on the positives. Consider marking correct answers rather than incorrect ones. Find something good to say, either written or verbally, to

each student every day. A sticky note put on each student’s work area can make a huge difference. You will find that you start noticing the positives more than the challenges. You will therefore love being a teacher even more!

Remember ASAP for behavior!

Four reasons students act up are: Attention, Sensory Needs, Avoidance, and Power Plays.

- **Attention:** To the student misbehaving, negative attention is better than no attention. Catch this student using good behavior. Make a point of talking to and noticing this student on a daily basis.
- **Sensory Needs:** For the student with sensory needs, take a pillowcase and fill it with dried beans, then stitch it closed. You now have a weighted pillow. Have a variety of sitting options: rocking chair, floor, standing desk, beanbag chairs, or chair cushion.
- **Avoidance:** Some students will act up to get kicked out of class rather than have their peers know they can’t do the work. Allow any student to say “Pass” if there is something he or she doesn’t want to say or do. You can come back to those students later and negotiate how they will prove they can do that assignment.
- **Power plays:** Don’t partake in them! As the saying goes, you may win the battle but you will lose the war. That student may hold it against you for the rest of the school term. Speak with students individually and privately, at eye level, and without a desk in between. This signals your respect and willingness to resolve the issue.

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