



Pennsylvania School Librarians Association

THE LIBRARY AND STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

In 1994, the Special Needs Committee of The Pennsylvania School Librarians Association compiled a document to assist school librarians in identifying and working with students who have special needs. The purpose of the document was to be an introduction to characteristics and needs of the students so that the librarians would have a general knowledge of the student's needs when speaking with the specialists in the building. This document is an update of the original 1994 publication. Members of the committee who contributed to the update are Carolyn Kirkpatrick, Lauraine Lindbloom, Jan VanGorden, and Constance Roupp, chairperson.

Introduction

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) is a federal law insuring free, appropriate, public education for all students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Student Education Act of 2011 is a federal law that addresses the needs of the gifted and talented students.

- Each special student is to be provided an IEP (Individualized Educational Program) The IEP is to be reviewed annually by a committee, which includes the parent(s). The IEP states specific instructional goals, present level of functioning, annual goals, and a method of measuring progress.
- The special student is to benefit from related services available throughout the school.
- In-service training must be made available to those working with these students.

General Principles

Children with special needs are children who are more like than unlike children who do not have special needs. All children should be treated with respect.

- Carefully present the structure of your library to the students.
- Quickly learn the child's present level of academic and social achievement and collaborate with the classroom teacher and special needs teacher to plan for student achievement.
- Know that progress, however slowly achieved, is possible using individualized instruction.
- Develop and maintain the child's positive self-image.
- Give immediate feedback and reinforcers.
- Expect the child to respond and to behave within limits appropriate to his/her level.

Autism

(A “spectrum disorder” that affects individuals differently and to varying degrees)

Possible Characteristics

- Ability to communicate and interact with others is affected
- Lack of or delay in spoken language
- Repetitive use of language and/or motor mannerisms (e.g. hand-flapping, twirling objects)
- Little or no eye contact
- Lack of interest in peer relationships
- Lack of spontaneous or make believe play
- Persistent fixation on parts of objects
- No real fears of danger
- Insistence on sameness
- Tantrums
- Unresponsive to normal teaching methods
- Obsessive attachments to objects
- Apparent over-sensitivity or under-sensitivity to pain
- Uneven gross/fine motor skills
- Seizures
- Non-responsive to verbal cues, acts as if deaf, although hearing tests in the normal range

Source- Autism Society www.autism-society.org 19 April 2010

Teaching Implications

- Teach tasks as a series of simple steps
- Actively engage the student’s attention in highly structured activities
- Provide regular reinforcement of positive behavior
- Avoid distractions- if possible, have separate areas for individual and group work, separated by boundaries
- Provide instruction in an organized manner
- Encourage, but do not force, socialization with peers
- Provide visuals- daily schedule, label areas of the room, list class rules, labeled storage cubbies
- 3-step prompting series- (1) present the discriminative stimulus (i.e. an instruction from the teacher, (2) prompt the correct response, (3) reinforce the correct behavior
- Provide for dealing with any sensory issues that the student may have

Source- National Institute of Health www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/autism.html 19 April 2010 and www.autism4teachers.com 19 April 2010

Blind and Visually Impaired

Possible Characteristics

- Visually acuity impaired
- Field of vision impaired
- May use Braille
- May use large print or normal print with modification
- Blinks when reading
- Holds books and papers in abnormal positions
- Needs mobility training
- Dizziness
- Bloodshot eyes
- Swollen eyelids
- Irrelevant actions such as rocking, weaving, fingering or rubbing eyes, waving fingers before face, twisting
- Clap hands, clicks tongue, or snaps fingers when walking
- Facial expression not good indicator of motion, hands and fingers are more expressive
- Use adaptive device for reading and/or writing
- Eyes tire easily

Teaching Implications

- Treat the student naturally; plan activities with, not for, the student
- Do not avoid using words like blind, look, and see
- Expect reasonable standards of performance and behavior
- Do not overprotect
- Encourage the student to move around the library
- Give the student a complete tour of the library
- Describe events in the library which the sighted student knows from seeing
- Keep the room free from obstacles; doors should be fully opened or closed
- Structure the student's environment
- If the student needs assistance in finding his/her way, let him/her take your arm at the elbow. Walk slightly ahead of him/her
- Never push the student ahead of you
- Seat the student at a well-lighted, glare-free table with an adjustable top
- Do not enter or leave the room without telling the student
- Address the student by his/her name when he/she is in a group
- Say what you are writing on a board or white board
- Encourage the use of residual sight
- Use large print publication and the special features on a computer or mobile device
- Have the student use a marker to keep his/her place while reading
- Let the student position his/her paper or book to his/her own comfort
- Concentrate on ways for the student to interact and derive meaning from his/her environment
- Make use of the many resources for the visually handicapped
- Find adaptive technology, computer equipment, and monitors
- Collaborate with classroom and all special education teacher(s)

Source- National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities <http://nichcy.org>

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Possible Characteristics

- Communication needs
- Modulate tone of voice
- Unfamiliar uses of speech
- May use facial and body expressions
- Turn good ear toward speaker; stares at speaker
- Wear hearing aid and/or have cochlea implants
- May not respond correctly when questioned
- Ask to have things repeated
- Lip read
- May use sign language
- May not comprehend directions well
- May not understand nuances of language such as vernacular regional expressions, sarcasm
- Need assistance in understanding and developing appropriate social behavior
- Experience confusion, misunderstanding and a feeling of isolation
- Low reading level although IQ may be normal or above, because of communication barriers

Teaching Implications

- Seat in central location where you can face the Student when you talk and keep natural light on your face
- Use a natural rhythm of speech in complete, brief sentences with natural gestures
- Do not chew gum or have visual distractions like excessive make-up or jewelry
- If the student has an interpreter, seat student and interpreter to provide a visual connection with the library
- A “U” shaped seating arrangement for the library is recommended
- Do not stand in front of a window while talking
- If the library is darkened, keep some light on the instructor’s face
- Do not start talking abruptly; get the student’s attention first
- Use the overhead projector or document camera as a visual aid so you can maintain eye contact
- Do not speak while writing on the board with back to the class
- If educator wears a beard or mustache, facial hair should be trimmed so that it does not cover the lips
- Be aware of the noise level in the library and minimize it when working with the student
- Supply visual aids
- Give the student full attention when he/she speaks
- Do not assume the student understands if he/she nods “yes”
- Ask the student to repeat if you do not understand him/her by saying, “I can’t understand you”
- Make a special dictionary for the student of spoken and written vocabulary needed in the library
- Follow a routine so the student can anticipate what may happen next
- Learn about the hearing aid and/or cochlear implants
- Expect the same behavior, responsibility, and dependability as normal students

Source- National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities <http://nichcy.org>

Emotionally Disturbed

Possible characteristics

- Type of behavior not different from normal children, but the degree of the behavior or its occurrence is exaggerated
- Severely withdrawn, shy and reclusive
- Will not talk to anyone or very few people
- Extremely defiant and destructive
- Severely hyperactive
- Unable to control behavior
- Difficulty in relating to others
- Tells lies
- Sad, cries
- Frequent and intense mood changes
- Self-stimulation- rocking, repetitive actions
- Compulsive behavior which interferes with daily living

Teaching Implications

- Learn as much as you can about the student and how to handle him/her before the student's first visit to the library
- Quickly get to know the student's academic and behavior level so he/she can succeed at least 90% of the time
- Communicate the behavior you expect to the student. Be sure he/she understands all rules. Be realistic
- Punish or reinforce immediately after behavior is manifested
- Structure the student's library experience. Making being the library a reward in itself
- Minimize distractions
- Listen to the student
- Show affection
- Focus on the student's positive traits
- Reinforce the student with something he/she likes
- Collaborate with classroom and all special education teacher(s) to determine behavioral modification program

Source- National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities <http://nichcy.org>

Gifted and Talented

Possible Characteristics

- IQ 130 and up
- Read early
- Complex vocabulary
- Communicate fluently
- Unusual ability to perform in music, art, drama, or athletics
- Popular with peers
- Some personality patterns and reactions to frustration as average child
- Likes to make collections
- Learns faster than average child
- Superior reasoning ability
- Broad collection of information
- Wide range of interests
- Observant
- Critical and dissatisfied with own achievement
- Abstract at high levels
- Works well independently
- Mastery of most academic subjects
- May not perform equally well in all academic subjects

Teaching Implications

- Provide for new experiences
- Help him/her develop habits of independent work, initiative, and creativity
- Place emphasis on how information is derived rather than just what information is derived
- Take a cue from the child's interest and readiness
- Set up independent study
- Collaborate with classroom and all special education teacher(s)

Source- National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented www.gifted.uconn.edu

Intellectual Disabilities (Mild)

Possible Characteristics

- IQ of 55-75
- Slow rate of development- physical, emotional, intellectual, and social
- Less capable in motor skills
- Auditory and visual perception problems
- Language and speech difficulties
- Difficulty in concept formation and generalization
- Poor study skills
- Low tolerance for frustration
- Low self-esteem
- Aware of other's attitudes toward him/her
- Need guidance in social behavior and use of free time
- Will be able to work and live independently

Teaching Implications

- Be consistent, provide a structure, have reasonable expectations of student, accept him/her and be patient
- Have defined objectives which begin at the appropriate learning level
- Give clear and precise instructions
- Be sure students understands the assignment
- Do not present more than 1 or 2 concepts at one time
- Relate concepts to concrete experience giving many examples to generalize the concept
- Use repetition, not drill- present the concept in many different contexts
- Use interesting materials
- Give short assignments and shift activities to prevent boredom
- Give immediate feedback
- Encourage and reinforce appropriate social behavior
- Work to improve his/her self image
- Collaborate with classroom and all special education teachers

Sources- National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities <http://nichcy.org>

Intellectual Disability (Moderate)

Possible Characteristics

- IQ of 35-50
- Capable of learning, but at a slower rate
- Health problems
- Behave rationally at his/her level
- Will not be violent except in situation where another child would be violent
- Poor motor skills
- Non-verbal
- Limited vocabulary and concepts
- Will attain minimal or no reading skills
- Education centers around self-help skills, socialization and language
- Dependent or semi-dependent entire life
- Tend to communicate physically rather than verbally, such as tugging at your sleeve
- Many immature interests, but also share some interests consistent with chronological peers

Teaching Implications

- Carefully structure the student's experience. Make sure he/she thoroughly understands the library rules
- Carefully assess the student's concept base and add new concepts one at a time
- Construct learning activities so that the student can participate and experience success
- When giving instructions, make them simple and precise. When repeating them, use exactly the same words
- Use concrete materials, the more abstract the less understandable
- Repetition of the same material is desirable
- Involve as many modalities as possible during the lesson
- Use reinforceers, secondary or primary
- Limit the length of the lesson by the ability of the student
- Incorporate some physical activity into the lesson
- Using sign language may be helpful with some non-verbal students
- Let the student help, give him/her responsibility
- Let the student participate as other students do in the library
- Be consistent; follow a routine the student can master
- Expect and insist on good behavior at their level
- Collaborate with classroom and all special education teacher(s)

Sources- National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities <http://nichcy.org>

Learning Disabilities

Possible Characteristics

- Average or above average intelligence
- Adequate sensory acuity
- Significant discrepancy between measured academic potential and achievement
- Discrepancies in academic behavior from subject to subject
- Educationally behind grade level
- Can be either hyperactive or hypoactive
- Inattention to tasks
- Inappropriate over attention to part of task
- Lack of fine and gross motor skills
- Memory disorders
- Visual perception disorders- no recognition of numbers and/or letters
- Auditory perception disorders- cannot distinguish between background noises and main source of sound, or letters, words, and sentences
- Tactile perception disorders
- Kinesthetic perception disorder- difficulty in writing and reaching for objects
- Persistent repetition of word, gesture, action, writing and reaching for objects
- Poor orientation behavior- difficulties in distinguishing left from right, distance, size, or time
- Lack of motivation for academic tasks; easily distracted
- Difficulty in following directions
- Difficulty in distinguishing different types of social situations and choosing appropriate behavior

Teaching Implications

- Structure the student's experience in the library
- Provide individualized instruction
- Use a variety of sensory modalities for input and output, but not at the same time
- Teach to the strongest modality
- Determine the student's individual style of learning and use it
- Determine what target skills the student possesses
- Define your objectives, including the level of performance, you want the student to attain
- Present clearly and precisely stated visual and auditory information
- Use a carefully defined teaching strategy
- Reinforce correct responses immediately with appropriate reinforcers
- Collaborate with classroom and all special education teacher(s)

Source- National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities <http://nichcy.org>

Physically Handicapped

Possible Characteristics

- Low, normal, or high IQ
- Missing or distorted limbs
- Limited or difficult hand, arm, and/or leg use
- Tires easily
- Needs a variety of mechanical devices
- Needs special toileting considerations
- Takes drugs which need to be monitored
- Drools
- Demonstrates speech difficulty
- Unusual eye movement
- Convulsions
- Seems mentally slower than actually are
- Has differing attitudes toward disability
- Are not disabled in all areas
- May have multiple handicaps

Teaching Implications

- Use eye contact
- Have empathy, not sympathy and positive regard
- View prosthetic devices matter-of-factly
- Ask the student when and how you should assist him/her
- Remove physical barriers in the library-aisles should be wide, tables high enough, and displays low enough for use with wheelchairs
- Integrate seating if possible
- Structure activities so the student can participate with some degree of success
- Do not have unreal expectations for improvement
- Emphasize personal assets or achievement rather than comparing with peers
- Know there is always some way to adapt materials and/or implementation
- Find out what the student knows about his/her disability- from the student
- Help the student find positive models in literature
- Reposition non-ambulatory students frequently
- Collaborate with classroom and all special education teacher(s)
- Know emergency procedures for health emergencies which occur with the student(s)

Source- PSL National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities <http://nichcy.org>

Speech and Language Impaired

Possible Characteristics

- Speech Disorder
 - Omissions, substitutions, distortions of sounds
 - Difficulties with pitch, volume or quality of the voice
 - Interruption in the flow of rhythm of speech, such as stuttering (dysfluency)
- Language Disorder
 - Inability to express ideas
 - Improper use of words and their meanings
 - Omission or incorrect grammatical structures
 - Inability to respond appropriately to questions
 - Reduced vocabulary and inability to follow directions
- Causes can be organic or functional

Teaching Implications

- Give the student your full attention
- Maintain eye contact
- Do not be uneasy, impatient or evasive when he/she is attempting to communicate
- Do not finish his/her sentences
- Do not interrupt him/her
- Be a good speech model
- Help generalize skills learned in therapy
- Reinforce correct sound production or language usage (as recommended by the speech therapist)
- Cue when using voice improperly
- Reduce stress for those who stutter
- Try to duplicate conditions in which the student feels comfortable communicating
- Use signing, pencil and paper and/or gestures, if necessary, to complete a communication exchange
- Keep in touch with the Communication Disorder Specialist (Speech Therapist) and the classroom teacher(s)

Source – National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities <http://nichcy.org>

Additional Resources

- Special education staff
- School psychologist
- Guidance counselor
- Parents
- Intermediate unit
- Local groups for disabilities
- Local public library
- Pennsylvania Department of Education
- State Library
- Websites of national organizations for disabilities
- Websites of assistive technology resources