

## Students with Special Needs

Many of the features of the SIOP are effective for students with learning differences. However, it is also important to keep in mind the unique characteristics of students with special needs.

- Focus students' attention by limiting the clutter and excessive visual stimuli in the classroom. While we advocate Word Walls and other visuals to assist students in information recall and vocabulary development, they must be used with discretion. Students with special needs are often distracted by artwork and projects hanging around the room.

Repetition is essential. Students will retain more information if it is repeated and reviewed frequently. Poor memory is often a characteristic of students with special needs, especially memory that is associated with symbols, (e.g., letters and numbers).

- Allow extra time for students to process information. Students with learning differences are often just processing a question by the time the answer is given. Teachers may use strategies such as asking a question, letting the student know he or she will be asked for the answer, then coming back to the student.

Assessment should be scaffolded to measure understanding. Students' disabilities can interfere with their demonstration of knowledge and understanding. These students may have difficulty with vocabulary, expressing their ideas, or using language adequately. Rather than asking a student to write an explanation of a concept, have him list the features of the concept or label a graphic organizer that is provided; ask the student to complete an outline rather than generate a summary or essay; or select examples from a list provided rather than producing examples.

- Be sensitive to frustration levels. Students with special needs often have a lower frustration threshold than typical learners, which may result in outbursts or giving up easily. A structured learning environment, scaffolded instruction, and opportunities to experience success help alleviate frustration.

So, what do we do—about those who are confused, and despite appropriate instruction in English, reading, and language arts, are not making satisfactory progress? First, it's important to examine the students' present instructional context. The following questions might guide this inquiry:

1. What evidence do you have that a particular student is having difficulty with reading?
2. Do you have any evidence that this student has difficulty reading in his or her home language? If not, how might you gather some? If you are not fluent in the student's language, is there another student who is? Is there a community liaison or family member who could provide information about the student's LI literacy development?
3. If your evidence points to a reading problem, what have you and other teachers done to accommodate the student's needs?

a. Are the student's teachers incorporating cognitive and metacognitive strategy instruction (see Chapter 5) in the language arts and content subjects?

b. Are the student's teachers adapting content and texts to provide greater accessibility (see Chapter 2)?

Are the student's teachers scaffolding instruction (see Chapter 5) through flexible grouping (see Chapter 6)?

d. Are the student's teachers providing multiple opportunities for practice and application of key content and language concepts (see Chapter 7)?

At this point, we hope you're getting the idea that appropriate instruction for this student involves all of the elements of the SIOP model: those listed above as well as comprehensible input, appropriate pacing, meaningful activities, sufficient wait time, and so forth. Certainly, a student with reading problems will benefit from the effective practices advocated in the SIOP model.