

Accommodating All Students: 'Classic' Ideas That Teachers Can Use to Diversify Classroom Instruction

Teachers are required to accommodate a wide range of student abilities in their classrooms. Below are some 'classic' ideas that teachers found help them to meet the unique learning needs of particular students within a busy general-education classroom.

To communicate clearly with students:

- Post a daily classroom schedule. Preview the schedule with students and highlight academic and behavioral expectations for each activity. Leave the schedule up through the entire day.

- Speak in a clear voice that all students can hear easily ('strong teacher instructional signal'). Be sure that all students can see the board or projection screen without difficulty.

- Make eye contact with the student before giving directions. Have the student repeat directions back to you before beginning assignment.

- Use simple, clear language when communicating with the child.

- Keep instructions brief. Break multi-step directions into smaller subsets-and have the student complete one subset before advancing to another.

- Write assignments or complex directions on the board in addition to saying them.

To ensure student understanding of newly introduced academic material:

- Structure lessons so that they contain no more than one-quarter new material. (Students are most successful when they can 'anchor' new concepts to known information.)

- Match student's level of instruction to ability level to guarantee him or her high rate of success (80% or greater).

- Use a 'think-aloud' approach: Talk through the steps of a problem-solving strategy as you teach it so that students can understand and internalize those steps. Then have them use the same 'think-aloud' approach as they work through the strategy, so that you can observe them and offer feedback.

- Give the student your master notes as a guide for improving or expanding his or her own notes. Or at the end of each class period, have the student compare his or her notes for thoroughness and accuracy against those of a classmate who takes thorough notes.

To promote student attention and motivation in group instruction:

- Seat the student at the front of the room, so that you face him or her as you teach (the teaching 'action zone')

- Use alerting cues to get the class's attention before giving a directive or assignment.

- Integrate learning into game-like tasks that allow students to win praise, points, privileges, or rewards; promote friendly competition between student teams; or use puzzles, riddles, or other novel vehicles to kindle student interest.

- Present instructional material in short sessions at a brisk pace.

Require that students engage in some type of active responding to teacher instruction (e.g., students respond to teacher question in unison; students write down their response and then the teacher calls randomly on one student to share his or her answer; students break into small groups and use cooperative-learning strategies to solve a problem).

To increase the student's persistence with independent academic tasks:

Decrease assignment length (e.g., reduce number of items, shorten the required length of an essay)

Break assignment into smaller, more manageable 'chunks'. Acknowledge, praise, or reward student for completion of each chunk.

Explicitly recognize, praise, and reward the effort that a student puts into an assignment-no matter how imperfect the outcome. Students can become more motivated as they learn that effort (a factor is entirely within their control) can actually pay off!

Have student monitor and chart own work completion as a motivation-builder.

Provide the student with a copy of reading material (e.g., expository article) with main ideas already highlighted.

Post a range of modest classroom 'work accommodations' that any student in the room can take advantage of (e.g., moving to a different part of the classroom to work; choosing which of several in-class assignments to do first; using a tape recorder to dictate the first draft of an essay, etc.). Encourage students to choose those accommodations that help them to work most productively.

To ensure that students who need help with independent classwork get it promptly:

Create easy-to-follow 'strategy' sheet that lays out academic problem-solving steps in a clear manner for student to refer to as needed. Give copies of this model to each student, and mount poster-size versions on classroom walls.

Teach students acceptable, unobtrusive ways to get academic assistance from peers.

Put together 'help-signal' program: when a student gets 'stuck' on seatwork, he or she displays help-signal (e.g., brightly colored index card) on desk, switches to other work until teacher is freed up to approach and provide assistance.

Train classmates (or even older students from another classroom) to serve as floating 'peer-tutors' during seatwork, circulating around classroom to help students in difficulty.

To promote student retention of information that you have taught:

Review previously taught material frequently ('distributed review & drill'). Come up with high-interest learning activities that allow the student to practice skills without drudgery.

Train the student to 'help out' as a tutor in younger classrooms. The tutor can help children on academic material that the tutor has already mastered but should continue to practice (e.g., multiplication skills)

To get the student to complete and bring in homework or to finish long-range assignments:

Help the student to prioritize assignments by importance and deadline.

Establish a homework contract with the student's parent (in coordination with the school, the parent records the student's completion of homework and provides appropriate daily and/or weekly rewards).

Have the student write homework assignments into a daily planner. Check the planner at the end of each day to ensure that the student has written down all assignments accurately. Check also that the student has all necessary textbooks, materials, etc.

Discuss with the parent the student's need for an organized study area at home, as well as the benefit of a fixed nightly schedule for completing homework.

Conference with the student to break long-range assignments into shorter subtasks. Help the student to construct a timeline/schedule for completing these subtasks.