

TEACHER'S CORNER: STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

English Language teachers interact with learners from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities. During their training, teachers usually discuss how to address the needs of learners according to their ages, proficiency levels, cultural backgrounds, and the teaching context. However, language teachers rarely receive specific training or in-class support for working with learners with learning disabilities.

Some institutions are prepared for students with physical limitations. For example, a school might provide a desk that is accessible for a learner in a wheelchair, or a school may send a sign-language interpreter to class with a learner with hearing limitations. However, institutions – and certainly teachers – are less often prepared to work with students who have diagnosed learning disabilities. Learning disabilities or disorders are described as "difficulty with certain skills such as reading or writing in individuals with normal intelligence. Learning disorders affect the ability to interpret what one sees and hears or the ability to link information from different parts of the brain" (Webster's).

There is not much research that offers suggestions for teaching language learners with such disabilities. As a result, teachers and institutions around the world are left to figure out on their own how best to teach students with learning disabilities. In addition, it is challenging to identify a language learner with a learning disability. Given the lack of research and established guidelines, it is safe to assume that institutions and teachers have little guidance in determining whether a language learner is struggling with learning the language or actually has a learning disability. Therefore, institutions and teachers must do the best they can in making referrals, seeking out diagnoses, accommodating needs, and teaching the language to all language learners.

This month's Teacher's Corner offers resources and suggestions for teachers who have students with disabilities in their classrooms. Week 1 presents the concept of Universal Design for Learning and the principles that make lessons more accessible to all learners. To follow up, Week 2 evaluates an existing lesson plan in terms of universal design. During Week 3, readers learn how teaching self-regulation can help all language learners, including those with learning disabilities. Finally, Week 4 presents a phonological awareness activity that supports language and literacy acquisition for all language learners.

Additional Resources

For additional information about accommodating and understanding disabilities, check out the following:

- [LD Online: The Educator's Guide to Learning Disabilities and ADHD](#)
- [Global Disability Rights Now](#)
- [Mobility International USA](#)

Reference

Webster's New World Medical Dictionary, 3rd ed., s.v. "Learning disability," Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008.