Teaching Strategies to Support Inclusive Instruction
in Reading and Language Arts
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Introduction

The following document was developed to support the inclusion of children with severe physical and/or communication impairments general education classrooms. The emphasis across the strategies is to create a single instructional approach that addresses the learning needs of all of the children in the class rather than creating a parallel program for children with special needs. The strategies are meant to suggest one way to support students in an inclusive reading and language arts program. We are well aware of the unique and individual needs that all children bring, and we recognize that additional modifications and materials will be needed to insure the success of some children. However, our focus throughout has been on universal design. Without careful attention to the issues of universal design, true inclusion isn't achievable.

Specific Teaching Strategies

Include the ALL Children in any Whole Group Instruction. *When teachers engage in whole-group instruction, it is important the children with physical and/or communication impairments participate fully – passive listening is insufficient. Without active participation in these important lessons, any child would find it difficult to follow the overall flow of the class and understand the ways that they should apply what they have learned in the whole group lesson to their own reading and writing. Pulling a child for intensive instruction or related services during this time should be a carefully examined last choice.*

As much as possible, the children should be seated in a manner that maximizes their ability to participate and communicate independently during these whole class lessons – particularly when a new topic is being introduced. Paraprofessionals and related service providers might support children sometimes, but every effort should be made to keep them from sitting next to or otherwise directly interacting with the child during these whole class instructional sessions. When an adult is sitting with the child, the child is often distracted from the teacher. Finding the position that maximizes the child's ability to participate in the learning, may mean that the child cannot sit on the floor with their classmates. When this happens, teachers should consider offering chairs and other seating as options for all children so the child with physical impairments isn't the only one NOT on the floor.

Use Struggling Reader Groups Systematically. *It is common practice in general education setting for teachers to meet with children who are struggling in small groups. It makes complete sense that children with physical and communication impairments would participate in some of these small group sessions regularly to receive additional support and to increase their opportunities for participation. However, participation in*

these small groups cannot happen at the expense of opportunities to engage in independent reading and writing. Daily independent reading and writing are required for all children if they are to become fluent readers who read with understanding and writers who can communicate meaningfully with print.

Modeling Computer Use for the WHOLE Class. *If you have children in your class that use the computer to read and write, it is very important that you model the process for all of the children to see. This should be a regular part of your small and large group instruction. Modeling the use of the computer to read books, take notes, compose using word prediction and planning software, and engage in the other reading and writing processes you're teaching all of the children will provide valuable learning for the child who requires the computer, and it supports the understanding of that child's classmates who will be reading and writing partners with the children with special needs over time.*

Modeling the use of the computer requires that a computer be available to the teacher during large and small group instruction. When setting up the classroom, carefully consider how you can position a computer where the children will be able to watch you.

Model Communication Board Use for the WHOLE Class. *If you have children in your class who need to use communication boards to interact with you and their reading and writing partners, it is vital that you model the use of the boards during your small and large group instruction. Children who use communication boards need every bit as much modeling of the ways that they can respond to, ask questions about, and interact during reading as do children who use speech to communicate. Furthermore, modeling the use of the communication boards provides important visual supports that can clarify your directions for a child without communication impairments who may not have understood what you were explaining. Perhaps most importantly, modeling the use of the communication boards reveals where the boards may fall short of meeting the child's communication needs.*

When you model the use of the communication boards, you can use them yourself, you can hand them to children without communication impairments to use, and you can involve the children who need and use them every day. Each of these will play an important role in validating their use and demonstrating multiple levels of expertise in their use.

Call Upon Every Pupil Response Strategies Whenever Possible. *As you work to include ALL of the children in your class, consider a response mode that all your children really can do – including the children with significant physical impairments. Alternatives to explore include: Looking in a designated direction (up, at the window, toward the door), closing eyes, nodding/shaking head, raise arm, or thumbs up/down. Once you have established a motor response that is possible for all of your students, you can begin asking questions of the whole group. Every pupil response maximizes the participation of all children. The children who are accustomed to being the first to respond can continue to respond to each question posed by the teacher, but they are no longer calling out the answer, often interrupting the efforts of other students to process a*

response of their own. When teachers use every pupil response, they tell their students, "Okay, on the count of three, look up if you think they boy in the story was right, and look down if you think he was wrong. Up for right, down for wrong. Ready, 1, 2, 3."

Use Partner Assisted Scanning Across the Day. *Making a choice from the items on a list or on a communication board can be difficult for some students because they lack the ability to point, cannot see or read the choices, or are positioned too far away (as in group activities). Partner assisted scanning addresses these issues by asking the communication partner (a teacher, paraprofessional, or child) to point to each of the options pausing long enough at each for the child with physical and communication impairments to respond yes if the item is their desired choice. Depending on the needs of the individual child, the partner can name each option when pointing or simply point.*

We believe that teachers in inclusive, universally designed settings can lists and communication boards to support the participation of all children in small and larger group. An important and efficient means of using these lists and communication boards during group lessons is partner assisted scanning. The teacher can combine partner assisted scanning with every pupil response techniques to monitor the comprehension and attention of all of the children while meeting the unique communication needs of the child with communication impairments.

Using lists and communication boards should not limit the contributions that children without communication impairments make during small and large group instruction, but they will insure that all children have a chance to respond. It won't take long to realize that other struggling students are more successful when the teacher uses a combination of every pupil response and partner assisted scanning across the day.

Use First Letter Cueing as a Communication Strategy Whenever Possible. *Children with communication impairments who are beginning to read, write, and communicate regularly face the challenge of not having access to the words they'd like to communicate. When we attempt to provide them with every possible word they could need, they end up with unmanageable systems. When we try to guess what will be most important, we are always faced with choices and inevitably make the wrong choices at some points. Until children can spell well enough to communicate their own thoughts, we must rely on cueing strategies to help them get us close enough to the desired word that we are likely to guess what they are trying to say. First letter cueing is one such strategy. Children can use an alphabet display to point to the first letter (or try to spell more) of the word they're trying to communicate. Teachers can use this to get children to respond efficiently to questions that involve known choices. Teachers can also model the use of first letter cueing in their day-to-day interactions with the class. Natural opportunities to incorporate this strategy occur when the teacher is prompting children to recall a specific word (e.g., I am thinking of a new word we learned yesterday that started with the letter t.) or concept (e.g., Who remembers the big word we learned to describe how a caterpillar becomes a butterfly? It begins with the letter m.), but there are times across every school day when the adults in the class can model the use of first-letter cueing.*