



Supporting Students with Language Disorder in the Classroom

Students with Language Disorder will likely experience difficulties in a mainstream classroom due to difficulty understanding and/or producing language. The following outlines some simple adjustments and strategies that might support students in the classroom environment.

Keywords: *language, classroom, receptive language, expressive language, strategies, modifications, learning*

Communicating Information

- Simplify sentence structure of verbal and written language wherever possible.
- Reduce the volume of verbal and written language wherever possible.
- Cue the student to attend and listen.
- Face the student when giving verbal information or instructions.
- Provide clear, explicit, concise, simple language – repeat and rephrase instructions if necessary.
- “Chunk” and “drip feed” the information – break information into more manageable steps.
- Give additional time to process information or instructions. Allow at least 10 seconds for students to respond.
- Provide visual cues in addition to verbal instructions – write on board, use summary sheets, pictures, timetables, timelines etc.

Modifying the Physical Environment

- Provide a low stimulus environment - minimise visual and auditory distractions.
- Preferential seating - seat student at front of classroom near teacher and board.

Modifying the Task

- Provide modified worksheets by reducing “clutter” on worksheets. Ensure information on the worksheet is short and concise, providing only information that the student needs.
- Highlight key information/questions in worksheet tasks.
- Modify the number, type and complexity of questions asked in class or worksheet tasks.



Teaching Methods/Tools

- Brainstorm ideas as a group at the commencement of tasks.
- Ask questions - to stimulate interest and thoughts, and to generate ideas.
- Use Blank's levels of questioning appropriate to the understanding of the child.
- Check level of understanding – do not assume the students understands – use open ended as opposed to 'yes/no' questions (e.g. "How are the snake and the lizard different?" instead of "Are the snake and lizard different?").
- A graphic organiser is a visual display to express knowledge, concepts and thoughts, or ideas and the relationship between them. Different types of graphic organisers include concept maps, mind maps, story maps, and Venn diagrams.
- Use concrete materials to explain new concepts before progressing to more abstract materials.
- Demonstrate new concepts where possible.
- Avoid having the student read or present in front of the whole class – at very least provide opportunity for the student to practise oral presentations initially with a teacher or school assistant or a small group of peers.
- Pre-teach vocabulary and concepts – determine relevant vocabulary, provide explicit explanations of the meaning of words such as synonyms, use word webs, and provide lists of words at designated times (e.g. at beginning of each section of work or beginning of term) to support staff and/or parents/caregivers.
- Provide opportunity for students to use word processing in addition, or as an alternative to handwriting – handwriting is often an added load for students. Use word processing functions such as spell check and synonyms, and make use of language supporting software (e.g. *Read and Write Gold*).
- Provide a scribe if necessary to help get an idea down.
- Give choices for the student's own learning such as working alone or in a group, selecting questions to work on, reading alone or with a friend, handwriting or word processing – give student some ownership and responsibility for their learning.
- Incorporate student's interests where possible. Use student's strengths, skills, areas of expertise, and gifts as tools for teaching.

Organisational Support

- Help with self-organisation – using colour-coded timetables and books, using checklists and prioritising tasks, and allocating a time for clean-up and organisation of school equipment.
- Support transitions when moving from room to room and task to task. Provide reminders to the whole class about the transition and allocate peer support for students who require help.



Creating Optimal Social/Emotional Environment

- Provide a positive and inclusive classroom environment – respect for individual differences, support and encouragement, peer and adult role models.
- Provide clear and consistent behavioural expectations and consequences.
- Explicitly teach social rules and appropriate language to use with peers.
- Learn about the student from the student – many students have insight and can provide information about what works best for them. This also helps students take responsibility for their learning.
- Focus on strengths and successes – what can the student do well, what has worked in the past, what has worked to create success.
- Give positive feedback and praise – provide regular praise as it is a very powerful tool to motivate students to achieve to their best standard. It is also important to provide explicit praise describing what the student has done well. Some examples of praise include:
 - I like the way you _____
 - Great job, you have really improved in _____
 - It is great the way you have persisted through this task
 - You've shown really good use of _____
- Encourage the student to seek help, and praise them when they seek help appropriately. Students could give their teacher a visual such as a card or coloured token on the desk if the student is embarrassed to put up their hand.
- Provide information about who/ where/ how to get help.
- As skills and competencies improve, gradually withdraw support to foster independence. Encourage and praise all independent work and behaviour.

Communicating with Others

- Share information with student's learning team with regards to effective strategies, suggestions and ideas that will continue to support student's learning. This is particularly important when students move into a new year level. Be sure to include information, such as stress indicators for the student, in addition to any social emotional strategies that may be in place.
- Share strategies, ideas and tips with parents/caregivers, especially to help with homework and assignments. Specific reference should be made to current classroom/learning strategies to provide consistency in the student's learning.



Want to learn more?

To learn more about Language Disorder and how to support children and young people for whom language is their primary disorder, please **contact us**. Language Disorder Australia provides holistic, innovative and effective therapy, education and support services and has a transdisciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Contact: 1300 881 763 or hello@languagedisorder.org.au

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