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Concentrating on Students' Strengths and Curriculum Standards

This book begins by outlining students' strengths. We all learn best when we are allowed to *show what we know*. By focusing on just the limitations of different disabilities and syndromes, an instructional nightmare will ensue. Yes, there are some characteristics common to different disabilities, but you are not instructing a disability, you are instructing a child. Equally true is that you are teaching a student, not a subject. We as instructors want to challenge all students to achieve their highest potentials with feasible accommodations. Frustrations present themselves most often when there are expectations that do not match the delivery of specific curriculum objectives. As teachers, we know what standards-based objectives we'd like to achieve in a given lesson or unit, but then we are sometimes dismayed to discover that the students have not achieved our expectations. Well, were our expectations realistic? Educators need to be aware of the essential specific baseline knowledge standard for each subject, and then design objectives with accommodations that do not enable, but rather challenge students. Yes, some students might need accommodations or modifications, but these do not replace the plan of each child achieving specific learning objectives. Ultimately, educational professionals need to have high expectations for all students if academic standards are to be achieved.

Figure 5.1

<i>Years: Students With ...</i>	<i>Content Area/Skills: Reading and Understanding Words: Decoding, Encoding, Word Recognition, Vocabulary, Phonological Awareness, Print Concepts</i>
P-2	Distinguish letters from non-letters. Read and write basic sight words, including own first and last names. Know the sound-symbol relationship and apply it to spellings. Understand directionality. Follow printed words. Realise that letters form words. Match all sounds with symbols. Blend sounds to decode; e.g. c-v-c (consonant-vowel-consonant). Identify, delete and substitute phonemes and blends. Develop knowledge of how to spell high-frequency words. Understand that context clues can help identify words. Read and write both nonsense and real words with different syllable types. Introduce rhyming words and word families. Sort vocabulary into categories or headings. Identify basic relationships of words; e.g. whisper or shout.
3-5	Sort words into word families; e.g. define, confine. Apply structural analysis; e.g. prefixes, root words, suffixes; and syllabication rules to readings. Reinforce knowledge of phonemes, including diphthongs, digraphs and various syllable types. Use a table of contents, index and glossary. Use pronunciation keys in dictionaries. Apply context clues to identify words. Infer word meanings. Use a dictionary, thesaurus and computer language tools to define unfamiliar words. Build personal vocabulary "fund" with other word choices such as synonyms, antonyms and homophones. Identify common idioms.
6-8	Continue building year-level vocabulary through a variety of genres. Know different spellings of homophones and homonyms. Apply phonetic principles in readings and writings, with student automaticity. Critique different print formats; e.g. magazines, newspapers, poems. Self-correct and reread to clarify. Infer word meanings by understanding word derivations of root words, prefixes and suffixes from Latin and Greek origins. Continue increasing vocabulary bank through a variety of genres, understanding word relationships, idioms and analogies. Substitute vocabulary learned in writings.
9-12	Reinforce all skills through a variety of genres in readings and writings. Continuation of all phonetic knowledge using higher-order thinking skills. Compare and contrast organisational structures of fictional and nonfiction texts. Contrast word relationships with different connotations and denotations in readings and then writings.

Sample Primary Reading/Decoding Lesson

Baseline Knowledge Standards

Students demonstrate the sounds of consonants and long and short vowels by listening to or reading words in simple picture books. Some students who cannot yet read will point to pictures of words beginning with studied consonants as the book is read to them. Others might listen to the book on tape and turn the page as directed by auditory cues.

Advancing Level

Students sort words into their families, identifying consonant blends, diphthongs, digraphs and r-controlled vowels in readings above current year levels. Students here could also make flash cards by writing words on index cards and finding clip art and downloaded images that match the word's meaning.

More Challenging Assignments/Accommodations

Students write poems and short stories with rhyming words and varying syllable types. Some students will use a rhyming dictionary or refer to teacher- or student-constructed lists of rhyming words. Other students will play a rhyming game, where they raise their hand or count the number of rhyming words heard in a story that is read to them by a peer coach or teacher. If rhyming words are still too difficult, then the goal here might be for a student to verbalise his or her favourite-sounding words and copy the letters that spell those words in a salt tray, match a prompt with the illustrated word, or trace the letters.

Figure 6.7

Year Levels	Content Area/Skills and Standards: Communication: Speaking and Listening
P-2	<p>Listen to instructions and read alouds. Follow directions.</p> <p>Contribute to conversations. Stay focused on one topic.</p> <p>Speak in complete sentences. Share opinions and thoughts with and without prompting. Wait and take turns to speak with peers and adults. Rephrase what is heard in own words. Explore a topic with questions. Chorally recite, sing, read poems, and talk about stories. Use proper expression and pacing in conversations with peers and adults.</p>
3-5	<p>Listen for meaning and take notes. Clarify ideas by adding appropriate details and vocabulary related to a topic. Respond respectfully to others. Orally present a speech to peers using guided notes, pictures and prompts. Use proper expression, volume and eye contact. Revise speeches based on feedback from student and adult audiences. Use speech-scoring rubrics. Converse with peers, teachers and adults in academic and social situations. Interpret information from books and stories read aloud.</p>
6-8	<p>Communicate effectively with peers in cooperative assigned projects. Ask questions and use research to gain more information. Paraphrase speakers. Value merits of differing opinions and points of view. Participate in debates and formal discussions. Continue oral presentations on curriculum-related topics. Accept and give constructive comments.</p>
9-12	<p>Develop interview skills. Participate in formal and informal discussions; e.g. debates, roundtable discussions.</p> <p>Determine speaker's purpose, arguments and credibility.</p> <p>Select readings that support points of view. Understand perspectives of others.</p> <p>Edit speeches in response to differing audiences. Use appropriate rhetorical devices; e.g. parallelism, onomatopoeia, alliteration, and more.</p>

Possible accommodations a child with *visual needs* might need:

- Magnification page to enlarge writings for speeches
- Computer or handheld voice/technology programs to read, write, predict and rehearse printed words for research with speeches
- Braille-transcribed writings of teacher's worksheets and graphic organisers
- Braille texts transposed way ahead of time with publishers providing format in advance to avoid delays
- Additional auditory cues
- Tracking devices to follow line of print
- Enlarged font size on the computer or copier for easier reading
- Tactile stage directions on where to stand
- Repeated practice on audience cues
- More auditory or kinesthetic tools and props to concretise concepts (e.g. raised relief map, digital recorder to ease eye strain with readings)
- Appropriate lighting adjustments, removing extra glare from window lights or other interfering visual distractions

Possible accommodations a child with *Down syndrome* might need:

- Peer coach to help with more difficult reading assignments
- High-interest, lower reading-level books on same topics that include pictorial explanations for more difficult vocabulary
- Social directions and modelling on how to interact with peers
- Additional time on task and repetition of main ideas and details
- Rephrased and simplified directions
- Praise for partial accomplishments

Baseline Knowledge Standards

Sequencing, seriation and ordering are skills to practise and develop. Students will horizontally write seriated numbers from 1–100 on multiple 10×10 tables. If this is too difficult for some learners, they can copy from a written desk model or work with a partner. Upon verbal or written prompting, students will also highlight numbers as they skip count from 2–20, 3–30, 4–40, 5–50, 6–60, 7–70, 8–80, 9–90 and 10–100 on individual duplicated hundreds charts. For example, if learning the multiples of 3, the numbers 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, 27 and 30 would be highlighted on the *I Can Count by 3s* page.

Advancing Level

It is important to recognise the relationships between numbers. Some students will find non-traditional patterns on their hundreds charts and highlight vertical, horizontal and diagonal ones; e.g. 21, 32, 43, 54, 65, 76, 87 and 98 (pattern of +11).

More Challenging Assignments

Learners can use the hundreds chart to cooperatively create their own word problems and solve computations involving the four operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

Cuisenaire rods or attachable cubes seriate number values and concretise ordering from 1–10. Some students need to mentally see this *mathematical staircase!* Operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division can be concretely shown with rods such as these.

There are tactile ways for students to concretise maths facts, instead of counting on their fingers and toes! Unifix cubes, Cuisenaire rods and even abacuses ask students to seriate and understand number and place values, associating the abstract with the concrete. Students can learn to point to dots on numbers; develop sequencing and pattern skills; and kinesthetically add, subtract, multiply and divide. TouchMath is a specific program that asks students to kinesthetically associate numbers with their values while performing computations (see www.touchmath.com).

Learners can refer to the next chart to solve more difficult multiplication and division problems, so that the inability to remember basic facts will not interfere with learning of harder computations such as multiplying two digits by three digits. It also helps with multiple-digit divisors and dividends when students estimate to find compatible numbers; e.g. $826 \div 93$ (think $810 \div 90 = 9$ as a reasonable answer).

Figure 7.4

