



## Adapting the book area for the child with special needs.

Have you noticed that the child with disabilities in your inclusive classroom rarely visits the classroom book area or that when they do, it's never for very long? This handout is a tool that you and your itinerant special education teacher can use for generating ideas for making your classroom book area an inviting and engaging place for everyone.

Why is this important? In 1998 Snow, Burns and Griffin published a report from the committee on the prevention of reading difficulties in young children. This important study was carried out at the request of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. In their findings the committee reported that the primary conditions associated with the development of reading problems included: cognitive deficiencies, hearing impairment, chronic otitis media, early language impairment and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. They also reported family-based risk factors that included a family history of reading difficulties, a poor home literacy environment, exposure to a lower quantity of verbal interactions, a home language other than English and low socio-economic status. Most likely when you think about this list in relationship to the special education student in your class, you see that there is cause for concern. Student such as these call us to do our best to provide early literacy experiences of high quality.

The nature of the child's disability can provide some clues to what the problem may be with the current arrangement of the classroom book area. For example, the child with delays in the area of language or cognition, may not see any books with pictures that they can quickly and easily relate to. If the child has physical delays they may be having difficulty getting comfortable or turning the pages of the books. If the child has attention difficulties, they may be too distracted by children playing in the other areas nearby.

Following is a list of modifications that might be made to a classroom library area. There is space left at the end for you to jot down additional ideas as they come to you. The list is long not because you need to make lots of changes but because there are so many possibilities.

### 1. Alter the Physical Environment.

- a. "Carefully consider the arrangement of your book corner. It should be in an area that is not well traveled and is near other quiet centers."

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## Supporting Early Literacy in Natural Environments

- b. "If the child has difficulty with turning the pages place bits of Styrofoam in the upper right hand corner of the pages. It makes them easier to lift. You can also make or use cardboard books." (Sandall & Schwartz 2002, p. 93)
        - c. Add furniture such as a bean bag chair, child sized rocker or small table and chair.
        - d. For a change of pace, create a tent for book browsing or a cardboard box-house.
        - e. Consider changing the home center into a "book store".
2. Alter the times that the book corner is open.
  - a. Hold small group time in the book area to familiarize the child with the area.
  - b. During a transition period, only have the quieter areas open such as the book nook, table toys and writing center.
3. Simplify the books available.
  - a. Provide books with simple colorful pictures or photo albums.
  - b. Provide predictable stories that are easy for a child to "read".
  - c. Provide word-less story books such as *Goodnight Gorilla*.
4. Use Child Preferences:
  - a. Have a favorite adult stationed in the book area.
  - b. Display books on the child's favorite topic.
5. Use Special Equipment
  - a. Provide books with textures to touch or books that make sounds (see make-it page).
  - b. Use a lap buddy to apply weight to the lap to encourage sitting while looking at books.
  - c. Provide books with flaps to lift or holes to look through.
  - d. "Place toys that go along with certain books in the book corner. For example, offer *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and add some plastic fruits and vegetables and a caterpillar puppet. (Socks with eyes on them, work great.)" (Sandall & Schwartz 2002, p. 95).
  - e. Provide books on tape with a tape recorder and head phones.
6. Provide Adult Support
  - a. Have an adult hold the child on their lap and make comments to encourage their continued engagement with books.
  - b. Announce before free-play that an adult will be available to read stories in the book area.
7. Provide Peer Support



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- a. Encourage a more capable peer to "read" a book to the target child.
  - b. Encourage a more capable peer to invite the target child to the book area.
8. Involve Parents
- a. Ask parents for titles of the child's favorite books and perhaps borrow them to be displayed in the book area.
  - b. Invite parents to send in a small family album for the child to look at in the book area.
9. Alter the way you present book-browsing.
- a. Rotate the books in the book area so there is some novelty. Show-case some of the new books at circle time to peek the child's interest.
  - b. Display books that have been read in class so they are familiar.
  - c. Provide book displays in other areas such as books about construction in the block area, about pets near pet displays and in the home center for "reading" to the babies.

Jot Your Ideas Here:

Sandall, S. & Schwarz, I. (2002). *Building blocks for teaching preschoolers with special needs*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Snow, C.E.; Burns, M.S. & Griffin, P. Eds. (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. Washington D.C.: National Academy Press.