



## Adapting story-time to engage the child with special needs.

Listening while a story is being read to a group can be challenging for many preschoolers with special needs. An itinerant special educator and a preschool teacher working together can create story-times that are engaging and productive for everyone. For example, children with delays in the area of language, may attend better to predictable books. A child with a physical disability may need to sit in a bean bag chair rather than on the floor. Children with social delays may need their own carpet mats to help them to stay in their own space during the story.



It may be tempting to conclude that the child with special needs is just not ready to participate in story time. However, children with developmental delays need to get the most out of every minute of their preschool day and it is our job to help them do that. Katims (1994) who studied the development of literacy in children with disabilities concluded that "the challenge for teachers of young children with special needs is to adopt curriculum and procedures similar to, yet more structured than, those successfully used with non-disabled learners" (p. 66).

Following is a list of modifications that might be made to a classroom story time. 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 you have so many choices. As you read through this list try to keep an open mind about how, when and where stories should be presented. With an open mind and some creativity you and your itinerant teacher can provide everyone in your class with an engaging story experience.

1. Alter the Physical Environment.
  - a. Provide children with individual boundaries by having them sit on carpet squares.
  - b. Take the time to arrange children to be sure that all can see the storybook.
  - c. Use big books with large illustrations that are easier for everyone in a large group to see.
2. Alter the Timing of Story-reading.
  - a. Read stories during free choice time in the book area.
  - b. Read more sophisticated stories to older children during nap-time.
  - c. Read during small groups instead of at circle time.
3. Simplify the Activity.



- a. Select short stories then over time increase the length of the stories.
  - b. Read a story with simple repetitive language.
  - c. Use a word-less story book.
4. Use Child Preferences:
- a. Let the child hold a favorite quiet toy (e.g. teddy bear) during the story.
  - b. Have a favorite person (adult or peer) sit next to them at story time.
  - c. Incorporate the child's favorite topic into story time.
5. Use Special Equipment
- a. Use a special chair to provide stability.
  - b. Use a lap buddy to apply weight to the lap to encourage sitting.
  - c. Make a sticky-story for a hands-on story experience.
  - d. Let children hold an object related to the story. For example everyone holds a small smooth stone when reading Stone Soup.
6. Provide Adult Support
- a. Have an adult sit behind the child to provide assistance when the story requires actions, sound effects or chiming in for repeating phrases.
  - b. Hold story-time when more adults are available to either sit with the children or to break the group into smaller groups.
7. Provide Peer Support
- a. Utilize a seating arrangement so that the target child is seated between peers who will consistently model appropriate behavior.
  - b. If calling on children to answer questions about the story, call on a child who will model an appropriate response just before calling on the target child.
8. Involve Parents
- a. Send books home to be read before the book is introduced in class.
  - b. Ask parents for titles of the child's favorite books and perhaps borrow them.
  - c. Invite parents in to either read to a small group or to provide support.
9. Alter Your Presentation of Stories
- a. Plan for more active audience participation.
  - b. Introduce the story with real life props to make the story personally relevant.
  - c. Use objects, puppets or flannel board pieces that represent characters or objects in the story. Move them to demonstrate the language you are using.



- d. Set a purpose for listening. For example, instruct the children to make wild-thing noises when they hear the words "wild thing" (Watson, Layton & Pierce 1994).
- e. Repeat books. Children will attend better to "favorites".

Jot Your Ideas Here:

Katims, D.S., (1994). Emergence of literacy in preschool children with disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, Vol. 17, Winter, p.p. 58-69.

Watson, Layton & Pierce (1994). Enhancing emerging literacy in a language preschool. *Speech and Hearing Services in Schools*, Vol. 25, July, p.p. 136-145.