

Chapter 4

From TEACHING TOUGH KIDS

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Strategies to help organisation and memory Inside Tough Kids with a learning disability

Ask any youngster as they are about to enter school what they want to learn. Most will say, “I want to learn to read and write.” Of course they do, after all, reading and writing is the mystifying and alluring language of the adult world. It’s the place to aspire to.

This chapter is written for all the kids who set off to school intending to learn to read and write, remember and be organised and find success, but falter because of an unexpected and spectacular collection of invisible difficulties. Soon after starting school they realise their learning is not the same as the others. Every day the others read and write with apparent ease and scoot through the glorified reading boxes, while they struggle to crack the print code and burn with humiliation. This wasn’t their dream. Shame quickly replaces the dream to read and write, and as it grows every kid ponders the question, “How can I keep my dignity? What can I do to take the focus away from my learning?”

A few turn their shame inwards and stop trying because it’s impossible to fail if they don’t try. As the emotional pain grows into baggage too heavy to carry a few will give up and refuse to go to school. Others contemplate the incomprehensible because they see that this may be a better option than dealing with their shame in front of their peers every day. For those who prefer to act out their shame, the script plays out with surprising speed, volatile emotion and errant behaviour. Contrary attitudes are honed to perfection. Not being able to crack the code still hurts, but at least the child begins to gain recognition for something. And all the while, school continues, day in and day out, promoting reading, spelling and writing as the very essence of learning. How is it that any child with a severe learning difficulty can remain emotionally intact when the very heart of learning and recognition hinges completely on having adequate literacy skills?

Gradually educators are intelligently dismantling the traditional notion that students should only access information through the reading of print, and to prove their knowledge acquisition, produce print in essay-type formats. As one middle school student recently complained, “Doesn’t my history teacher get it?”

“If he wants me to write essays all the time then all he’s testing is my learning disability, and I’ll just keep showing him that I’ve got a really bad one.”

Overview; Specific learning disability

In the case of specific learning disability most teachers expect students to have problems in language and learning. Most know the universal link is the gap between a student’s intelligence and the acquisition of their basic reading, writing, spelling and maths skills despite support by sound teaching practice. Most know the term, specific learning disability, usually incorporates conditions as dyslexia (specific reading disorder), dyscalculia (specific calculation disorder) dyspraxia (speech) and dysgraphia (specific writing disorder) and may apply to one or two students in the class group. Arguably, that’s about 10% of the student population (Snowling 2000).

Most educators are aware of the associated behavioural characteristics. Early on children are more likely to show persistent difficulties pronouncing longer words and locating the right word when speaking. As they begin school teachers notice difficulties in their ability to acquire basic reading, writing and spelling skills. These students appear not to be keeping up and are quickly identified as underachieving. They may be able to spell a word verbally, but unable to accurately write it; the link between sounds and letters (phonology) does not develop as it does for others. Their reading lacks the fluency and speed we generally expect. They consistently trip over small words, read words that are not there, keep forgetting the same simple word from one page to the next and regularly lose their place, having to rely on their finger to keep track. They sound out syllables as they read, but forget them before they are able to blend the entire word. Classically, they are identified with dyslexia. These are also the kids who can learn for their spelling test and gain good marks, however, when tested on the same spelling words two or three weeks later they achieve poorly. One of the common observations is the misspelling of the same words over and over, year in, year out. A further indicator of a specific learning disability may be their poorly developing written language. Dysgraphia is an impairment to write coherently, despite a student being able to read, think or verbally express their thoughts and opinions satisfactorily. The student may be bright enough, but find combining the complex mixture of tasks needed for a satisfactory written result is remarkably difficult. They are often slow to learn to write; may experience letter reversal difficulties, produce inappropriately sized letters, mix upper and lower case letters, forget word spaces and produce untidy and inaccurate bookwork despite thorough instruction and given opportunities to plan adequately. These students just cannot seem to formulate their thoughts on paper and their teachers often comment on the limited production of written work. Their memory difficulties may not be isolated to reading, spelling and writing as mathematics can also present difficulties. Characteristic indicators of dyscalculia include regular number reversals (eg. 37 becoming 73), all too frequent copying inaccuracies and continual misreading of written information so that mathematical outcomes are constantly skewed (Bird 2008). These students battle hard to remember maths symbols, often saying, "that's an adding sign, isn't it?" They have great difficulty learning and retaining simple formulas, remembering the sequential steps involved in basic maths operations and recalling number patterns (especially the multiplication tables). This difficulty incessantly undermines mathematical confidence and progress.

Yet, a surprising number of seasoned educators are taken aback by the generalised weakened memory, concentration and organisation levels of students with specific learning disabilities. As school life becomes more demanding for students this invisible group of disorders can erode their organisation and prompt avoidance, time wasting, forgetfulness, the loss of belongings and disconnected or disruptive behaviour.

The inconvenience of organisation

"Arrrrrgh, she's got a memory like a sieve."

"She puts it off! She avoids! She forgets! Nothing ever gets done."

"He loses everything!"

"I'll ask him to get on with it and within a few moments he's forgotten what he's meant to be doing!"

"His desk always looks like a rubbish tip, and worse still the mess seeps all around the classroom."

Teachers often worry about the poor organisation and planning abilities of kids, especially those with learning difficulty. Unfortunately, engineering thoughtful structures, monitoring progress and reworking routines for students requires hard work (Salimpoor 2006). Some ideas are more effective than others, and most work for a while before they need a face-lift to meet a new challenge. The reality is that plans to organise those who do not yet have the natural capacity to organise themselves consumes precious time and energy.

Now and again a teacher's annoyance with a student's continual disorganisation stimulates them to tighten their expectations as a means to initiate improvement. Typical of this was the teacher who became fed up over the organisational shortcomings of a 12 year old boy in her class. Will was a friendly kid who had not found much success at school. His dyslexic difficulties in combination with inattentive ADD had convinced him early on that he was "dumb". Each year Will's school reports repeated the same inattention and organisational inadequacies highlighted years ago in his psychological assessment. His reports referred to his efforts as lazy, inconsistent, untidy, disorganised and poorly motivated. Little wonder Will had lost confidence and felt disconnected from school. During the conversation with his teacher I gently raised the issue of providing him with a little scaffolding; some reminders and new routines to help him finish off the day so he might have a better chance to fill in his school diary and get it home along with the right books to tackle his homework. However, she bristled over my suggestion. "Mark," she said, "If we do this for him he'll never learn to do it himself. He's old enough to think about what he must do and take the consequences when he chooses not remember."

For her, the matter was black and white.

For me, and for many others who know much more than I, there are shades of grey we need to intelligently navigate, especially when learning disabilities are at play. To settle on this rigid, corrective approach may have been convenient for this teacher, but it offered nothing in the way of developing a framework of structures, tips and ideas to strengthen Will's delayed organisational abilities. What Will's situation illustrates is that it's too easy to misread or misunderstand the underlying causes of memory and planning difficulties. When a specific learning disability exists in isolation it can easily compromise a student's social, emotional and academic domains. However, when a specific learning disability coexists with something else; Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Asperger syndrome their impact can be disabling.

Building structures and routines

Most students do not set out to be deliberately poorly organised, forgetful or fail to do well at school. Some are victims of depressed or chaotic home lives. Some have obvious identifiable difficulties. Others are simply not ready, and because of this, do not yet have the set of higher-order independent organisational skills required to find success. Accepting that all students do best when working in a thoughtfully developed climate of routine, order and structure is the best understanding. Organisationally challenged students rely on us to build and maintain routines to ease their natural confusion. There is no other way! And, the great spark of hope is that tricks and triggers to remind and memory jog are endless. So be creative and seize on anything that helps the forgetful or distracted mind to sort priorities and stay with task.

- setting timers
- an elastic band around a wrist
- a string on the finger
- the same habits
- establishing a routine
- post-it stickers with reminders
- a key word
- a stamp
- a tick on a chart
- an intermittent beep from a tape or CD
- a telephone call
- an email
- a text message
- countdowns
- charts
- pictures
- a look
- a smile
- schedules
- timetables
- checklists
- calendars
- daily or weekly timetables
- fortnightly or monthly planners
- the same repetitive reminding joke again
- the same silly smile
- a sound
- an aroma
- the same background music to trigger the memory
- a touch
- a gesture
- a message left on the desk

- a note to be found later
- a sign taped a chair, the diary or locker
- cue cards

Providing structure means arranging the conditions in the classroom to give every student the best chance to function well. Poorly organised kids depend on prompts about when tasks need to be tackled, what comes next and the belongings required. Start by setting up places where things belong and play with ideas to encourage students to do things the same way, at the same time, every day:

- encourage students to arrive at school at the same time each day
- hats always go on the hook or in a box
- school bags in the locker or on the assigned hook
- school diaries placed in the diary box
- homework placed in the homework box
- notes or communication from parents is placed in the mailbox
- check the white board to find out the morning lessons and what materials are required
- school books on the desk ready to start the day
- as students enter the classroom in the morning have them reach for their notebooks and solve the 'QQF' - a question (Q), a quote (Q), and a fact (F) displayed on the board
- a sign to illustrate how to keep a neat desk
- pencil case and ruler on the desk
- complete the lunch order
- empty lunch boxes returned to the bag after eating
- a verbal or visual reminder about what is required to take to specialist subjects
- time for homework to be recorded in the school diary at the end of the lesson or day
- time for the books and materials required for homework to be gathered up and placed in the bag
- to replace a the novel or reader with a new one
- activity materials returned to the appropriate activity box
- time at the end of the lesson or day to place the diary in the schoolbag packed and zip it up

Ideas to manage time, task and belongings

Many kids beyond those formally identified with a difficulty, disability, disorder or deficit find schoolwork requiring independent research extraordinarily challenging: they face uncertainty about how to begin, where to begin, what to use, they're unsure where to find the information, become confused about prioritising what's important and can feel overwhelmed by the process. In the end, the task can become so daunting that they'd rather let it slip by than tackle it.

There are strategies to support all kids who show procrastination, poor planning and time management difficulties with larger, long term project based work:

- always provide a task sheet with the topic and assessment criteria clearly stated.
- design the task sheet so it's concise and uncluttered. A task sheet ensures students have the opportunity to read and re-read instructions. It also helps parents to understand the task, rather than having to rely on unreliable student recall.
- offer a list of specific web sites and texts students can consult. The provision of specific web is much better than allowing students to become lost surfing the net as they try to 'google' information.
- create a progress checklist; a checkout of what needs to be done helps to keep students on track.
- give those one or two students who put things off a jump-start by organising yourself, an older student, another teacher, a school support officer or a tutor to spend two or three sessions with them early on.
- provide the student with opportunities to talk through how they intend to tackle the task; create mind maps, word webs, drawings, dot points and sketches. It's worth exploring the computer programs Inspiration and Kidspiration (<http://www.inspiration.com>). These allow learners to flexibly organise their ideas on the computer screen. They help students to collect and sequence ideas for assignments or provide a means to keep track of what is happening in each chapter of the novel they have read. Later, this information can be converted to a word

document or a PowerPoint presentation. By talking through the logical order of what needs to be done enhances motivation and the chances of success (Buzan 2003).

- together keep an eye on the time. Check in frequently by creating review times. During these times review what has been done and work on solutions to avoid the difficulties you instinctively know will arise. At each of these times break down the remaining tasks into smaller, more easily managed pieces so the student really knows what to do.
- every individual learns best when the task presented is meaningful to them. This helps to secure their engagement. Sometimes tasks become more meaningful by shortening, modifying and making them more manageable.
- maintain a routine. Incorporate the activity into every day, until the task is done. Remember, the success of these kids is very dependent on poised adult supervision.
- encourage the student to record what they have done on a 'progress checklist' as this will help them arrive at the end point at the same time as their peers. Take a look at the chunking form provided at the end of the chapter. They may deliver instant help!
- home help is vital, so develop ideas and opportunities for parents to know what is happening and how to best support their child.
- once students reach middle primary it's time to teach them how to use 'AutoSummarize' effectively (<http://www.microsoft.com>). This easy to use technology can identify the key points in electronically downloaded articles and reports. Although the summarising is not perfect it is easy to use and highlights the key points from each piece of reading. It is well worth a look at because it is very useful.
- be patient. It takes longer for the kids who are the focus of this book to gain independent research-based skills. They rely on plenty of opportunity to watch, listen, discuss and participate ways to read, research, chunk and present information. Supportive structures do help students to conquer planning and stay in control of managing time.
- finally, there is a crucial component worth coaching parents about. No matter what the age of the child, if they choose not to participate in constructive plans to support their time and task management, parents need to withdraw from becoming caught up in the typical last minute emotionalism over assignments that are due in the next day. Give parents permission to decline such demands. Remind parents who regularly help out at the eleventh hour that the message they give to their son or daughter is, "Why should you take seriously any of the planning ideas we've put in place? After all, I will, at the last moment, always rescue you."

Reduce books, folders and possessions

This is a lead set by shrewd educators. Instead of leaving poorly organised students with an unwieldy batch of exercise books their teachers pare them to a minimum. Then, they colour-code the covers and arrange for two subjects to be worked in each book: one subject beginning at the front and the other starting from the back. The combination of having fewer books to sort through and knowing the red covered book is for maths, quick maths and graphs makes keeping track of their books so much easier.

Work in progress folder

Rather than risking task sheets and bits of paper getting lost at home, around the classroom, or worse, somewhere in between, encourage all of your students to use a brightly coloured plastic folder to keep assignments that are 'in progress' in. Once the assignment is done and handed in, the folder is cleared ready for a new task. It's a very straightforward system that allows work to be located in one spot.

School bags

It is challenging for disorganised students to keep all manner of things ordered, and keeping school bags organised is doubly hard. The ideal approach is to not allow schoolbag chaos to become an issue of consequence. Instead, make an arrangement with the student's parent that once a week they'll go through the bag with their child. Promote the idea that the student takes the leading role as they sort through their bag and the parent takes more a reminding and supportive function. Remind them that they will be amazed by what they discover in their child's bag; notes, newsletters, library books, lunch bags, toys, collector cards and foods that have scrunched their way to the bottom of

the bag. So many students say what a great feeling it is to begin the new week knowing exactly what is in their bag! Finally, if you think this approach is only suitable for young children, you couldn't be more wrong. This is an approach I consistently use with motivated, but disorganised students in the upper years of high school. Carried out with respect, it works beautifully!

Drawers and lockers

If we know our poorly organised students can't control the growth of mess then it is up to us to tactfully manage this with them. A good idea is to set up an arrangement with your student that you, their parent or a school support officer will stay back in the classroom with them one afternoon each fortnight to go through their locker or drawer with them. So many students will tell you just how much they really hate their lockers being in a mess, but don't know how to tackle the problem or maintain it independently

Case Study, Clarkey's locker

It was too hard for thirteen year old Clarkey to keep his locker tidy and organised. As much as he wished for this, and try as he might, by the end of a week or so his locker was a confusion of crumpled notes and papers, overdue library books, pencils, texta colours, expired food and bits and pieces brought from home. This made finding things between lessons near impossible and in part was the cause for his frequent lateness to classes. In response, his kind home group teacher set up an arrangement so that at the end of each fortnight Clarkey would empty everything from his locker into his school bag to take home. Clarkey and his father would clean through the belongings over the weekend so everything was sorted and ready to be returned to the locker first thing on Monday morning. Clarkey loved the idea because it worked!

The pencil case

Ensure each student owns and regularly uses a pencil case. A great idea is to keep a small laminated checklist inside the pencil case so there is no mistake about what needs to be in it. By the way, this is especially applicable for those students who continually collect up odds and ends to store their pencil case. This adds to pencil case confusion. Each fortnight remind parents to reorganise and restock the pencil case with the basic requirements.

Ideas to improve memory

Note taking

These techniques do not come easily to students with distractible traits or to those with learning difficulties. Start by explicitly teaching students how to highlight notes and create notes. Try providing lesson notes to students and expect them to highlight the central points during the lesson. Encourage kids to draw pictures or make a simple comic strip to recording key ideas. This works as well for a chapter in science as it does for recording what happened in each chapter of the novel. Sometimes photocopying the notes of another student and asking the student with the learning difficulty to highlight the key points is useful.

Teach test-taking skills

Use low-key tests as an ordinary teaching vehicle to assist students to learn more effectively (Elliot & Thurlow 2006). Assess manageable portions of information continuously. This is such a help for students with poor concentration and those who suffer from anxiety. Some students they become deeply convinced that the purpose of testing is to expose their learning weaknesses.

Teach memory helping techniques

Memory weaknesses are common within this group of students, so teach ideas to underpin memory. Make a game out of the things that need to be remembered. Employ some of those basic junior primary games to help remembering. Secondary students love them because they work! Remembering tricks like acronyms, mnemonics, flash cards, rhymes, silly ditties, drawing pictures to scaffold ideas and concepts are sensible, sustainable supports.

The piggyback technique

Piggybacking is an appealing strategy to put together something a student tends to forget with something that is part of their everyday routine. Piggybacking can work for lots of things, both at home and school. It's the very reason most of us leave our car keys hanging from the lock on the back door. Piggyback combinations are endless!

Case study, Sam's school diary and neighbours

In complete desperation Mandy delivered the ultimate piggyback challenge to her twelve year old son, Sam. He was passionate about watching 'Neighbours' every week night and was far less passionate about bringing his school diary home or accurately recording his homework tasks. Sam was willing enough to do homework, but without the homework being recorded his poor listening skills and memory often let him down. When watching 'Neighbours' became directly linked to Melissa having to see Sam's school diary filled in each night, the age old diary problem was a problem no longer!

Prompts

Prompts enhance the performance of students. Just as they serve us, they assist kids to remember, plan, feel organised, return to task, finish off tasks and maintain momentum. Everyone has a preference, and part of the craft of teaching is to discover which mode works best to optimise the memory, organisation and persistence for the students we teach. Some do better when they can see what they need to do (visual prompts) because the listening load is too heavy to carry and overwhelms them. Others respond more effectively to the spoken word (auditory prompting). Prompts can be delivered so they appeal to the tactile, fragrant, auditory and visual senses. The best suggestion is to regularly employ a combination of prompts and this section is designed to stimulate a few ideas.

Tactile prompting

This requires minimal effort and can be as simple as a touch on the arm or placing a soft foam ball in the student's hand to deliver the message to persevere a little longer. This silent action immediately opens a link for the student to override their habitual style to procrastinate, drift off or forget. A prearranged tactile prompt is effective because it inconspicuously redirects a student's attention without the loss of their dignity.

Fragrant prompts

Fragrant reminders are not widely used. Perhaps it's because they're less convenient and may pose a health and safety issue. Nevertheless, a number of teachers believe the aroma from an essential oil is helpful (try <http://www.aromaweb.com>). Rosemary and lime are frequently recommended to enhance concentration, cedarwood and frankincense are used as relaxing agents and **anger is said to be tamed by Bergamot, Jasmine, Neroli**. Some believe that by asking a student to rub an oil essence onto the back of their hands when quiet and concentration are needed, students are better able to persevere. Others vow that burning an oil burner during classes that require sustained concentration delivers an improvement in student performance. Such improvements are most likely linked to a phenomenon called time-place cueing. That is, by doing the same thing, in the same way, at virtually the same time each day a series of potent, but subtle messages about how things need to be is drip fed into a student's memory.

Visual prompts

A visual prompt is any visual option to support a student's understanding about what to do, when to do it and how to do it. These ideas usually include: schedules, timetables, stamps, charts, post-it stickers with reminders, an email or text message, pictures, PowerPoint presentation, lists, dot point instructions, checklists, calendars, the same silly smile, notes, signs, messages, cue cards and even a string tied to a finger (Savner & Smith-Myles 2000). For additional information on the building of visual strategies browse through the section called, 'visual strategies' in chapter 6.

Case study, "a visual strategy can be the difference between success and failure for some."

"I recall working with a dyslexic 9 year old and we were tackling sequencing and story building skills. What happened in our session highlighted the importance of visual scaffolding for these kids. I was checking to see if he had a grasp of the temporal concepts we use in our everyday language and when writing narratives, specifically the words 'before' and 'after'. When I asked what day comes before Tuesday or what day comes after Thursday he just couldn't do it. However, when the days of the week were written down in a calendar format the same task was easy for him to do. This experience highlights that a visual strategy can be the difference between success and failure for some kids. Just because a student doesn't seem to understand doesn't necessarily mean they don't understand. What made the difference was that he had a visual reference to work from."

Marney Yates, Speech Pathologist and Director of TALK

The class timetable

Just as contemporary educators discuss, develop and display class rules to build a caring and cohesive group, a well developed class timetable delivers similar benefits. A large class timetable displayed so it is visible to everyone in the classroom is a great starter and takes on efficacy when students know that their teacher consistently follows it and reviews it when changes need to be made. All students are reassured by knowing what to expect.

Morning lessons and materials required

As students begin to enter the classroom first thing in the morning many teachers already have the morning lessons and materials required written on the whiteboard. In this way students can see how the morning will unfold and know the things they need.

Class-monitor systems

Some develop extensive class-monitor systems and rotate them regularly so students are thoroughly connected to the systems and to one another. This is crucial to help kids feel as though they are a part of things.

Personalised mini daily timetables

Having a student pick up their personalised mini daily timetable from the teacher's desk each morning can be both organisationally beneficial and emotional stabilising for some. In the case of students identified with Asperger syndrome, they often have a strong need to know what is going to happen so they can prepare for it. When they can't work out what is going on they can easily become anxious, disconnected and unsettled.

Homework and homework timetables

On the surface homework seems a perfectly simple idea, and for quite a few it is. Kids who eagerly embrace it please their parents and teachers as they commit to this unique learning process. They find homework stimulating, relevant and useful. For these students homework enhances learning and connects the family to school life. Yet, the reality for the students who are the focus of this book; those battling learning difficulties, immaturity, concentration problems, impulsiveness, mood swings or chaotic home lives, is that regular homework practice is tricky to achieve. These kids rely on our insight and resourcefulness to reduce and modify tasks to make homework manageable and meaningful for

them (Bryan et al. 2001). For a few others, however, the problems surrounding homework are far more serious. Their poor connection to homework is just the tip of the iceberg. Sometimes the best decision for these kids and their families, is to do away with homework altogether, for a while or forever.

Great teachers can nourish the endeavour of students and parents to get the homework conundrum right. A good starting point is to help students to make their own homework timetables. Organise for the class to fill in a blank 'after school time table'. Ask students to record each of their regular weekly activities: must watch television programs, dance lessons, scouts, karate, time to play computer games and so on. In this way they quickly see that little time is expected for homework compared to the total amount of leisure time they have. Suggest they select the best time for homework for each day and draw up a neat, colour coded timetable. Recommend they place it in a prominent position so that the planned homework time has value.

There is also value in presenting the *homework essentials, for students* to students of all ages. These provide a wonderful catalyst for realistic discussions and the development of shared practical understandings. Without this sort of dialogue around homework we shouldn't be shocked when kids become expert at avoiding and sabotaging it.

Homework essentials, for students

- Find a spot that works. Best places are bedrooms, the kitchen, the dining room table, or the study. Try working in the same spot at the same time so it becomes your routine.
- Working in front of the television doesn't work when it comes to thinking your way through a maths problem, learning spelling or writing. Although, if you have a picture or map to draw, colouring in or cutting out and gluing, then it is fine to do this in front of television (always do the thinking parts first).
- Make a daily timetable and display it on the wall. Try to start your homework early. Get it out of the way! A routine helps to keep a balance between fun and homework.
- If you don't do your homework then expect your teacher to get you to do it at a time that is not so good for you the next day.
- Your homework does not have to be perfect. It just needs to be done.
- If you like using your computer, and it helps, talk to your teacher and parents about using it more often.
- When you do not understand a question, ask for help. Listen. Then, insist mum or dad moves away. Never let them do your homework for you because teachers soon work that out.
- If you often don't know what to do for homework, or come home with the wrong books, ask your teacher to set up homework reminders to help you. Most teachers are happy to help out.
- It shouldn't matter whether you like homework or not. Think of it as a way to practice doing something someone else wants you to do. This way of thinking is a truly a skill.
- Figure out how you work best. Some go to their homework spot and stay focused until they are finished. That's great if you can. Others need to take a short break between each part. Some need a snack and wind down time after school. Others do it straight away. Experiment and find out what works for you!
- NEVER let mum or dad turn your homework into, "now, let's teach you how to do this," unless you want it to happen. If they think there is something they should teach you, tell them to arrange it at a different time and make sure they use the same methods and words to teach as your teacher does.
- Sometimes homework looks as though it's going to be hard. Your first thought might be to not do it. Instead, say to yourself, "First, I'll read the instructions". "I'll do one thing at a time". Start by thinking out loud and talking to yourself. It will help you to make your way through each task.
- When you finish your homework put it into your bag. Then go and enjoy yourself!

Planners

The idea of constructing a planner onto a black/whiteboard and making a point of adding and deleting things as they crop up with the class is a popular idea. This practice immerses students into knowing what's coming up, and when they forget, they can look at it! Alternatively, use the largest wall calendar you can find and hang it up for all to see. Have students participate as you record due dates of their assignments, up and coming school excursions, events and so on. As plans change, discuss the changes with students and make alterations. As this becomes routine your students will begin to see the value of this visually striking and very practical visual tool.

School diary

The school diary has the potential to be an uplifting planning and communication tool, but the reality is there's more to it than simply issuing the diary and expecting a win. When your instincts shout that the diary will not work for a particular student become inventive and create alternative reminding and remembering systems:

- faxing
- emailing
- personal organisers
- usb's
- iPods
- mailing work
- texting
- telephoning
- a dictaphone carried between home and school
- leaving messages on answering machines
- placing photos of the homework on to the student's mobile phone

Another idea is to use a diary buddy. Schedule an accomplished student to help fill out a less organised classmate's diary each afternoon. Train the buddy to maintain the same method each day: filling in the diary, clearing the desk, returning used items, gathering belongings needed for homework and placing them into their school bags. Try the system for a term using several diary buddies, so they do not wear out. Then allow the student who has been helped to become a diary buddy to someone else.

Grab their attention!

When it's time to explain something or give an instruction, and you think the information is vital, hold up a brightly coloured object as you speak. Alternatively, slip on something visually striking – a hat, a coat, a jacket, plastic glasses, a plastic nose, a scarf or a glove! Use the same thing every time. Despite how you may look to others, this is a powerful visual prompt to remind students that now is the moment to look, listen and remember. Teachers who use this to perfection don't overplay it and rarely repeat the instruction once it is given. Otherwise, there is no incentive for a student to listen when it really matters.

Case study, "It's on the sandwich board"

You might like to emulate Frank's approach. It's novel and works! To get the attention of his senior high school students he walks into class with vital information written on his red sandwich board. As he places the red sandwich board on his desk his students scramble to read the information written in bold, black text. Frank does not utter a sound and students in his classes know that not to read it and fail to remember it is at their own peril. Frank doesn't overplay it, but when it comes out it always contains a single important message;

"Maths test is Thursday. Review chapter 4. I like the look of pages 223 and 225."

"Friday 15th March is the day to have subject selections handed to me. Mark it in your diary. If you have any problem I need to know tomorrow."

"Everyone is complaining about surds. I don't blame you. I'm available after school today, Wednesday and Thursday in room 10 to help you. See you there. Bring sweets!"

The look

A look is worth a thousand words. The messages received from facial expressions convey a wonderful silent language. Teach kids how to read your face and interpret your critical expressions. Alternatively, if they feel unsure about what to do, teach them to use a signal to alert you that they need help. Develop simple cues together; a wink, a scratch of the head or touching your nose sends a message to help modify behaviour. Work on the cues together so they operate both

ways. The bonus is that it will strengthen your bond too. Rehearse it to a point where you can simply look at a particular student, use the cue and they know what you mean and what to do (Rogers 2003).

Highlighters can help

A highlighter can make a world of difference to a student's remembering, understanding and organisation. A good start is to teach young children to scan text and highlight key words and phrases. Obvious places to begin are highlighting the information in school newsletters, proofreading work and prioritising research information. Using a highlighter also offers the chance for kids to sort through information while using their busy fingers. Eventually, your student's senior secondary teachers will appreciate this early input. They often lament over their students' inability to efficiently highlight relevant text.

Progress charts

Make a simple chart that shows the number of individual parts that make up the entire task. Encourage students to colour, stamp or place a sticker on each part of the chart as they complete each sub-task. This really supports perseverance. Another innovative idea is to hand a number of cards that match the number of sub-tasks involved in the activity. Each card might contain a sub-heading and a brief explanation. As the student completes a sub-task they place the matching card in a box. When all cards are in the box the task is done!

Lists and checklists

Most of us panic when we're suddenly caught without our list. Whether it's for shopping or for work our list reminds us what needs to be done and encourages us to prioritise. Yet, we often forget to teach and strengthen this ordinary, effective remembering strategy. The best idea is to keep the list in the same place and make sure it can be easily accessed. Arrange for students to keep their list on their desk or hanging on the side of their desk so they can add to it, delete things they have completed and live with it as a part of their daily routine. Oh, don't forget to attach a pencil to the list! Checklists are also valuable because they can be set up to contain word or picture prompts that can sequence the task into smaller steps. They don't take long to make on the computer, or alternatively, they can be bought from stationers and newsagencies. Just as it is for lists, a checklist is best attached where it is most likely to capture the student's attention and trigger their memory. Also remember, kids benefit when they see their teacher working from their list or checklist on the board!

Auditory prompts

Auditory prompts include anything from a friendly whisper of encouragement to openly shouting, "Oi! Drop it. It bites!" The style educators most frequently rely on in the classroom is auditory prompting. That is, using our voices all day to give instructions and deliver requests, directions, orders, reminders and reprimands. While calling out instructions may seem efficient to us, it is obvious that many students simply switch us off as they become teacher-deaf. For many of the tough kids, the spoken instruction is precisely what they miss. As they mishear, miss out or forget even a relatively simple task looks too taxing right from the very beginning. Never overlook the value of whispering or miming an instruction, or saying one puzzling word or phrase that makes students turn to you and wait for more to be said. Try anything that changes the predictable auditory prompt into something new and unexpected!

Say it and write it

As much as you can, back up verbal instructions with written prompts. One way to do this is to record brief dot points on the board for students to refer back to later. Alternatively, draw a simple illustration or a silly stick figure to highlight the essence of the information or to emphasise what needs to happen next. Listening memory difficulty is an infuriating problem and can undermine a child's self-confidence. So often it leaves kids feeling as though they must rely on others.

Pair instructions

Develop a habit where you consistently state instructions in pairs to certain students. Before you know it these students will automatically expect to remember two items every time you ask something of them. For instance, “Grab the book from my desk and put it in my mail box in the staffroom” or “Go to the G7 class next door and bring back the newspapers for art.” There is always scope to build this approach out. At the next level instructions can be grouped into three, say, “I want you to remember three things. One, clear up your desk! Two, put your homework in your schoolbag! Three, return to me carrying your lunchbox!”

Repeat it

State the instruction and have the student repeat it.

“What?”

When a student calls out, “What did you say I had to do?” try replying with, “Tell me what you need to do?” It sounds odd, but this curious response encourages the learner to rethink and remember independently. It is a valuable strategy to help students to reach a little more deeply into their listening memory.

A keyword prompt

Develop ‘keywords.’ For example, when a situation becomes emotional and tension starts to build, use a predetermined keyword such as “break-time” or “walk” to indicate time out is needed. This gives everyone time to regain their composure.

Pre-teach

Pre-teaching or giving information a day or so before it is required, improves a student’s capacity to understand and perform when they need to use it. This may be about what’s going to happen on the following day, and by giving them the advantage of processing new information overnight they are likely to deal with the upcoming events more easily.

Conclusion: what can a busy teacher do to help kids with learning difficulty?

Offer reassurance

Students are reassured when they know their teacher understands the difficulty they face. One of the best ways to do this is by maintaining an optimistic dialogue (Pavey 2007). Openly discuss the sorts of special provisions, modifications and curriculum adjustments available and quickly get the most helpful in place (Bender 2007; Byrnes 2008). Set up a practical, respectful option for the student to use when busy subject teachers or relieving teachers forget their needs. A popular idea for both primary and secondary students is the development of a student access card. The access card can be fastened into the back of the student’s diary with the special provisions highlighted so it is easy for all teachers to see. For students identified with Asperger syndrome, learning difficulties or AD/HD the access card is likely to state at least several of the options below:

- exemption from reading aloud in class
- student to receive handouts instead of coping notes from the board
- supervision of diary entries for homework
- follow up of homework the next day
- this student has a modified homework program
- a five minute break from class is allowed each lesson when requested
- extra time in tests and exams
- a five minute break during tests exams for every half an hour when requested

- use of computer in lessons and tests
- use of calculator in lessons and tests (Bouck & Bouck 2008)
- use of hand held spell checker in lessons and tests
- assistance with organisational strategies when planning an assignment
- work to be marked without penalty in relation to spelling and grammar
- 'study buddies' have been organised in each class to support the student
- provision of a reader in tests
- provision of a scribe in tests
- provision of a scribe and a reader in tests
- permission to be given if the student wishes to leave the classroom and go to the special education centre

Let kids see that you and the school can keep them connected

- Investigate how their difficulty is recognised by the Government and their education system.
- Invite guest speakers into school from appropriate organisations to highlight to students how their difficulties are compensated for. It is heartening for students to know that they are not the first in the world to experience the difficulty and that people really do know how to help them succeed (Purkis 2006).
- Students with confounding issues benefit from having a Negotiated Education Plan, an Individualised Educational Program or some form of recognition. Once this recognition is applied, either formally or informally, it allows all staff to understand and cater more appropriately for the student's needs and reduces the risk of inept conclusions being made by busy teachers or subject focussed teachers.
- Every so often read a book, or an inspirational excerpt, to students written by someone with Asperger syndrome or some sort of learning difficulty (Jackson 2002 & Green 2008). Occasionally invite a motivational guest speaker to school who has made it despite the challenge of their difficulty.
- Unite students with learning difficulties. This can be as easy as making the learning centre welcoming for students. At one school, the Adaptive Education Centre is the place to be! It offers hot chocolate in winter, cool drinks in summer and the opportunity for casual conversations where students can plan assignments, have drafts reviewed, debrief and offload their worries.
- Take understandings to a new level and organise an advisory group of students to have input into the school's special provision policy. As you well know all manner of issues crop up in schools that an advisory group can deal with. Two recent issues taken to an advisory group included a year 10 maths teacher who explained to his modified maths class that none of them could achieve an 'A' because that would be unfair to the students in regular maths classes! Then there was Kat, a year 4 student, with a serious learning difficulty. Her teacher insisted that all students fastened the spelling contract into their exercise book each week. Poor Kat spent all of her time flipping pages because she could only ever remember two or three letters in a word at a time. The process was torturous. To give her relief the school support officer photocopied her spelling contract so Kat could keep the extra one near by to look at to save on flipping pages. The upshot was that Kat and the school support officer were reprimanded by the teacher. The teacher's mistaken explanation was, "How would Kat's memory ever improve if she was offered the additional sheet?"

Go multi-sensory

These kids, more so than most, tend to be better at receiving and processing information when it is provided in as many modalities as possible; seeing, touching, hearing and doing, rather than just listening. Most know that when kids are engaged in hands on activities the quality of their learning increases. Gradually educators are beginning to appreciate the significance of individual learning styles and that it is legitimate to draw on a diverse range of products to support learning styles; surveys, debates, jingles, concept maps, simulations, lyrics, experiments, dances, conferences, slide shows, class meetings, newsletters, story maps, charades, collages, designs, sociograms, interviews, raps, personal journals, dvd's, opinion polls, lists, calligraphy, recipes, audio tapes, illustrations, etc.

Rely on visual supports

Students with learning difficulty regularly struggle with the auditory processing load, and because of this develop a heightened visual awareness. The visual detail can be processed with far greater accuracy because it is longer lasting and can be accessed for longer. Verbal instructions or information is so much more transient.

Organise together

As we develop routines and participate in a student's organisation we place them in a position of learning readiness. As comprehensively explored in this chapter the use of constructive talk, diaries, planners, schedules, rosters, routines and the colour coding of books for different subject areas can help. Work with the student to discover their preferences.

Set realistic goals

These kids always need a goal to aim for! The setting of a small, achievable goal, with or without incentives, supports them to see their improvement rather than living with an attitude that it's all too hard and overwhelming. As they see progress towards the goal they are far more likely to feel that they want to achieve because they are achieving (Le Messurier 2004).

Boost confidence

A few years ago a wonderful educator, Loretta Giorcelli, raised an emotionally healthy concept termed 'Islands of Competence' (Giorcelli 2000). Her idea was for teachers to design various forums for students to showcase their interests, talents, accomplishments, ideas and dreams to the class. In this way, students had the chance to present themselves so others could see and hear what they were skilled or interested in. The upshot of course is connecting deeper appreciations between students. Mediums for kids to showcase themselves abound and may include; a short film, a slide show, a photographic display, a poster, a news report, a cartoon set, art or craft, dance, a brochure or newsletter, music, song, role-play, a personal time line or the opportunity to teach a skill to a younger group of students. Without this sort of recognition Giorcelli felt it was too easy for kids with learning difficulties to feel lost in continents where they felt incompetent.

Use a reading program

Kids with reading difficulties require a reading approach that is explicitly designed to meet their learning needs and the earlier the intervention takes place the better (Bender & Larkin 2003; Boyle 2008). Any reading program will not do. Edward Kame'enui, Professor of Education at the University of Oregon and the first Commissioner of the National Centre for Special Education Research, promotes *5 Big Ideas in Beginning Reading* as guiding principles (<http://www.reading.uoregon.edu/big/ideas/>):

1. Phonemic Awareness. The ability to hear and manipulate sounds in words (Gillon 2005).
2. Alphabetic Principle. The ability to associate sounds with letters and use these sounds to form words (James & Kerr 2004).
3. Fluency with Text. The effortless, automatic ability to read words in connected text (Cohen & Cowen 2008).
4. Vocabulary. The ability to understand and use words to acquire and convey meaning (Lubliner 2005).
5. Comprehension. The complex cognitive process involving the intentional interaction between reader and text to convey meaning (Carlisle 2002).

Research indicates that proficiency in each of the *5 Big Ideas in Beginning Reading* are good predictors of success in learning to read (<http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org>). As well, never overlook the advice and support available from passionate and experienced personnel within your system who work in the reading difficulties area. In many cases they are a source of knowledge, resources and inspiration.

Finally, as a means to supplement a planned approach there are many free educational web sites that teach and consolidate essential literacy and numeracy skills. They are interactive and fun. Explore:

- Chateau Meddybemps, <http://www.meddybemps.com/funandgames.html>
Suitable for pre-school children through to lower primary aged students; reading, writing and maths
- BBC School for Phonics and Letter-Blend Activities,
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/wordsandpictures/index.shtml>
Suitable for pre-school and junior primary aged students; spelling and reading
- FunBrain.com for reading, maths games and puzzles, <http://www.funbrain.com/>
Suitable for pre-school children through to lower secondary aged students; reading, maths and spelling
- Starfall.com for letter sounds and reading activities, <http://www.starfall.com>
Suitable for pre-school kids; reading
- National Library of Virtual Manipulatives, <http://nlvm.usu.edu/en/nav/vlibrary.html>
Maths activities for all ages and all abilities
- Arcademic Skill Builders for educational maths and word games,
<http://www.arcademicskillbuilders.com/>
Suitable for junior primary kids through to students in middle primary years; reading, spelling and maths
- SoftSchools.com for maths, handwriting, phonics and language activities,
<http://www.softschools.com/games/games.jsp>
Suitable for junior primary kids through to students in middle primary years; maths, writing, spelling and language
- Mathematics Resources by Topic and Number for number facts, quizzes and times tables,
<http://www.teachers.ash.org.au/mikemath/resources/number.html>
Suitable for middle primary through to middle secondary students; maths
- PrimaryGames.com for language and maths games and puzzles, <http://www.primarygames.com/>
Suitable for pre-schoolers through to middle primary aged students; spelling, writing and maths
- Prongo.com for maths and language games and puzzles, <http://www.prongo.com/games/ages9-12.html>
Suitable for pre-schoolers through to upper primary students; maths and reading
- KidBrainGames.com for educational word and maths games, <http://kidbraingames.com/>
Suitable for pre-schoolers through to upper primary students; maths, reading and spelling
- Gamequarium for interactive maths games, <http://www.gamequarium.com/math.htm>
Suitable for junior primary through to upper primary students; maths
- APlusMath.com for developing maths skills, <http://www.aplusmath.com/Games/index.html>
Suitable for junior primary through to upper primary students; maths
- Gamequarium for interactive maths and language games <http://www.gamequarium.com/index2.htm>
Suitable for pre-schoolers through to upper primary students; reading, spelling and maths
- The Learning Box for mathematics and problem solving activities, <http://www.learningbox.com>
Suitable for pre-school level through to upper primary students; maths
- Mathletics for mathematic activities, <http://www.mathletics.com.au>
Maths for all ages
- Spellodrome for developing spelling awareness and vocabulary, <http://www.spellodrome.com.au>
Spelling for all ages

Take advantage of assistive technology

One of the most important measures of success for students at school is to maintain pace with their peers in the mastery of literacy and numeracy skills. However, the kids who make up the learning difficulty group demonstrate persistent delay in their skill acquisition. Some will, in due course, achieve functional skills and others will experience unrelenting difficulties evermore. Avoid the pitfall of thinking assistive technology should be postponed until the student learns the basic skills of handwriting, spelling, grammar or reading first. These kids learn differently, and no matter how competently you teach many will never cope with these rudimentary skills. They need legitimate opportunities to take short cuts to reduce the frustrations of intermittent memory weaknesses for spelling rules, grammatical conventions and basic number facts. Why make a student agonise over their memory difficulty when they could use an inexpensive device to take the pressure off recalling a spelling or number pattern? Not only does this practical approach allow kids to access their higher level thinking skills more easily, but helps to buoy their motivation as successful learners.

Mobile phones

More and more students carry mobile phones. This technology is here to stay. Its sophistication continues to expand. Teach kids how to take advantage of the organising systems built into their phone. These include calculators, reminder notes that appear when the alarm sounds, a built in alarm clock, a stopwatch, a camera, a video and a count-down timer. It is a bonus for all students to know how to use these systems because their mobiles rarely leave their sides. One of the 14 year old students I work alongside recently received permission from his principal to use his mobile phone to take photos of the homework written on the board at the end of lessons. He experiences serious spelling and handwriting difficulties and this approach has been invaluable. Once he arrives home, he places the image on his computer and can see the task.

Organisers

Small hand-held organisers are fabulous for everyone, with or without, organisational issues. There is now an expansive range. At the top end are the *pocket PC's* and *Personal Desktop Assistants*. These offer amazing functions (try <http://www.hp.com>). However, those at the less expensive end are easy to use and worthwhile. They can be set to 'beep' as reminders flash on screen and display what needs to be done. Homework can be typed in, notes, reminders, tasks and phone numbers. If you run *Macintosh computers* teach students how to make 'stickies'. These are easily made messages that appear on the screen once the computer boots up. Stickies can be used to remind, to explain, to give instructions, or record phone numbers or web sites that have to be remembered. Similarly, *Microsoft Office Outlook* can be used as a wonderful little memory jogger having the capacity to set up lists, schedules, time lines for assignments and reminders.

The computer

For some students the mastering of basic word-processing skills provides the edge to maintain order and find a little more success (Cullen & Richards 2008). Presentation looks so much better, and word processors help to check spelling, grammar, save work and store it in neatly arranged folders. This is so much better than physically handling and risking losing pieces of paper. Most children are ready to start on this in the early primary school years.

Computer competency checklist (*suitable for most middle primary students*):

- Boot up the computer
- Touch type
- Create and begin writing a document
- Undo mistakes
- Change font, size and colour of print
- Use the spelling check
- Use the grammar check
- Use the thesaurus
- Check the word count
- Cut and paste
- Cut and paste text and pictures from a website into a document
- Use 'auto-summarize'
- Access drawing documents
- Save and retrieve the same document
- Save as
- Save onto a USB/ flash drive
- Retrieve from a USB/ flash drive
- Copy on to CD
- Create and label folders for storing files
- Access and send emails

Most schools are usually well stocked with a selection of touch typing programs to support the development of keyboarding skills. As well there is an ever increasing number of quality websites offering free on-line touch typing tuition (start by trying <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/typing/> and

<http://www.columbia.k12.mo.us/mce/keyboarding/keyboarding.htm>). Children are almost never too young to begin to explore the keyboard and learn to type, but there does come a time when they become too old and too resistant to learn. So, seize the moment!

Reading

New technologies have completely revolutionised how information can be gathered from print. Text displayed on the screen can now be read out loud so that instead of a student constantly tripping over their reading problem, they can access their higher level thinking skills. Try a Google search for *Microsoft Reader* (freeware) and 'e books' and you will find many free electronic books to download ready to be listened to. In addition, *Microsoft Reader* offers a digital voice recorder so students can record their thoughts and responses as an alternative to having to respond in text.

The *ClassMate Reader* is a newly released audio book player. It is about the size of a Playstation controller and reads text from its screen out loud with a naturally sounding voice. As it reads it highlights the text. It also has a number of other useful options ([ClassMate Reader.com](http://www.classmate.com)) Alternatively, *Natural Voice Reader* (<http://www.naturalreaders.com>) can read text on the internet, in emails, in MS word and in many other applications, and it is free. The website <http://www.nextup.com> offers the product *TextAloud* at a small cost. It reads out loud any PDF or MS word file in rich male or female voices. Similarly, the Nuance Corporation has developed amazing software called *Realspeak* that converts text into high quality speech in both male and female voices. With the computer reading to the student, electronic literacy has the capacity to turn a non-reader into an eager learner (<http://www.promo.net/pg>)

Help with written work

Software called *textHELP Read and Write Gold* (<http://www.texthelp.com>) is a word-processing program intended to be used alongside Microsoft Word. This program can read out words as they are typed, read back text, check spelling and can automatically correct frequently made errors. Its capacity to read back the text on screen enables the user to listen to what they have written making it invaluable for editing and proofreading work. Similar word processing and prediction programs are: *Text Ease 2000*, *Text Help*, *Clicker 4*, *Penfriend*, *ClickNType*, *Co:Writer 4000* and *Kurzweil* (<http://www.dyslexic.com> for more information). It is also worth exploring the innovative literacy software tool called WYNN (<http://www.quantumtechnology.com.au>). Available in two versions, *WYNN Wizard* will scan printed pages, word processing documents, PDF files, text files and the internet and convert them into electronic text to be read aloud. The text is highlighted as it is spoken.

Let the computer write it

That's right! New generation software, *Dragon NaturallySpeaking* can convert what is being said into print that instantly appears on to the screen. The future is here and the price is now very affordable. *Dragon NaturallySpeaking* for Windows is valuable for students who have handwriting problems, spelling difficulties, cannot type or just don't like typing. It allows them to say exactly what they are thinking and get an immediate written result. Recently it has also become available as a lab pack with a site license available to schools. Training the program doesn't take long, although younger students (middle primary age) require a planned training program. Usually, students see an improvement in the speed and accuracy of voice recognition within a few days, and find it inspiring. Sixteen year old Rhodri, identified with dyslexia and dyspraxia, recorded his experience with *Dragon NaturallySpeaking* for the Westminster eForum held in April 2007. It is enlightening to watch his video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXHawHLMtI>.

Social skills

It is a good idea to closely monitor how these kids are developing and maintaining friendships. The nature of learning difficulty does not confine itself to reading, writing spelling and grammar alone. Its complex impact can influence how an individual perceives the world and interacts with peers. Social difficulties may be the result of expressive or receptive language problems which cause kids and teens to misread and misunderstand social interactions. In addition, years of humiliation about learning does not set the perfect footing for reciprocal friendships. There are ways to support quality social interactions, and a number of these are explored in Chapter 6, Ideas to enrich social and emotional connections.

Help them love their disability

Perhaps this sounds fanciful, but it's a much better option than leaving students wishing they were dead because the emotional burden of their disability is too much to carry. If they can not love their disability or difficulty, then at least ease them towards accepting it. After all, it will always exist.

A simple thing to do is to investigate a few of the amazing individuals from the past and present identified with learning difficulty. Guide kids to discover their rich, wonderful lives and the contributions they have made. Many of their autobiographies and biographies are inspirational. Look at the problems they faced, how they got around them and why they became successful. Explore, for example, how dyslexia affects people. Explain that the organisation of the brain which produces the dyslexic difficulty is also thought to account for unique artistic, personal, musical, dramatic, athletic abilities and mechanical gifts. Highlight that most individuals identified with a learning difficulty (and many other issues) say they would never trade away their difficulty because they would be incomplete without it. Raise the idea that their different way of thinking and processing the world may be the very thing to create their own rich niche to succeed in life.

Thirteen year old Brett provided an emotionally healthy snapshot of how to compartmentalise problems. I remember asking him how he felt about his significant learning difficulty. He reached for a black jumbo sized texta and a blank sheet of paper. Then he proceeded to place a dozen bold black dots randomly over the page. He explained that each dot represented something good and not so good about himself. He explained that a particular dot, as he circled it, concerned his downhill racing and he lived for it. Another dot indicated the value he placed on his friendships, another was about his connection to his family and he continued until he reached the last dot. As he circled it, he explained this one was his learning difficulty and it was just one part of his life. As kids begin to understand the link between their strengths and challenges they are in a much better place to learn and to tackle life's inevitable challenges.

Useful website

Specific learning difficulties

<http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk>
<http://www.dyslexia.com/library/classroom.htm>
<http://www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk>
<http://www.dyxi.co.uk>
http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/standards/standards.html
<http://www.iamdyslexic.com>
<http://www.ldonline.org>
<http://www.ldinfo.com>
<http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/dysgraphia/dysgraphia.htm>
<http://www.speld.org.nz>
<http://www.speld-sa.org.au/links.html>