LANGUAGE DISORDER AUSTRALIA

Supporting Students with Language Disorder in the Classroom

Students with Language Disorder will likely experience challenges in the classroom due to difficulties understanding and producing written and/or spoken language. Language Disorder is an umbrella term that refers to both Language Disorder associated with a biomedical condition and Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). The following outlines a range of adjustments and strategies that may help to support students in the classroom environment.

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

Modifying the Physical Environment
Provide a **low stimulus environment** by minimising visual and auditory distractions. **Preferential seating** – seat the student at the front of the classroom near the teacher and board.
Modifying Spoken Information
Cue the student to attend and listen before speaking or giving instructions. **Face the student** when giving verbal information or instructions. **Use clear, explicit, concise and simple language** – repeat and rephrase instructions if needed. **"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** e.g., pictures, timetables, timelines etc.
Modifying the Task
Provide modified worksheets by reducing "clutter" on worksheets. Ensure the information on the worksheet is 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 and 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 student.

Use *Shape Coding* to support the student's understanding of the functions of different words.

Check the level of understanding – 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?").

Use a graphic organiser to express knowledge, concepts, thoughts, or ideas and the relationship between them e.g. concept maps, mind maps, story maps, and Venn diagrams.

Use concrete materials to explain new concepts before progressing to abstract materials.

Demonstrate new concepts where possible.

Reduce pressure in "high language load" tasks – such as reading or presenting to the whole class. Alternatively, allow the students to complete these activities with a teacher, 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 the beginning of each section of work or the start of the term) to support staff and/or parents/caregivers.

Provide opportunities for students to use word processing in addition, or as an alternative to handwriting - as handwriting is often an added load for students. Use word processing functions such as spell check and thesaurus and make use of language-supporting software (e.g. *Read & Write*).

Provide a scribe if necessary to help get an idea down.

Give choices for the student's learning such as working alone or in a group, selecting questions to work on, reading alone or with a friend, and handwriting or word processing. This also encourages the students to have more ownership and responsibility for their learning.

Incorporate student's interests where possible. Use student's strengths, skills, areas of expertise, and interests as tools for teaching.

Organisational Support

Help with self-organisation – use checklists, colour-coded timetables and books, prioritise tasks, and allocate 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 an Optimal Social/Emotional Environment

Provide a positive and inclusive classroom environment – allow time to build social connections to create an environment safer for communication. Encouraging high-quality peer interactions may also support language growth for students with Language Disorder.

Provide clear and consistent expectations and consequences.

Discuss with all students the different modes of communication and preferences to build awareness and respect for each student, ensuring that each student feels valued and understood in their communication style.

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, and what has worked to create success.

Give positive feedback and praise – providing regular praise is a very powerful tool to motivate students to achieve their best outcomes. It is also important to provide explicit praise describing what the student has done well. Some examples 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 - Students could give their teacher a visual such as a card or coloured token on their desk if they are not comfortable with raising their hand.

As the student's skills improve, **gradually withdraw support to foster independence**. Encourage and praise all independent work.

Sharing Information and Strategies with Others

Share information with the student's learning team about effective strategies, suggestions and ideas that will continue to support student 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, and 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 references 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**

Website: **languagedisorder.org.au**

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Partnered with

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