

## Learning Strategies for Students with Down Syndrome



### 1. **Learner Characteristics**

- Most learners benefit from frequent use of visual aids and changing up sensory stimuli
- Have non-verbal options for demonstrating understanding
- Need more time to digest new information and code it to memory
- Have some physical needs including recognition of lower muscle tone and breathing difficulties

### 2. **Some Mythbusting**

- Lots of people will infantilize kids with Down Syndrome and assume they will never date or have sex. It is really important that children, whether they have Down Syndrome or not, are taught about consent and their sexual health to better support their social and prosocial development!
- Many can and do become fully independent- think of Chris! The only barrier to his independence at first was a pattern of his teachers assuming he shouldn't continue his education due to stereotypes about what he was able to learn, and once he found support systems that made it possible to continue his education he absolutely was able to progress!
- No such thing as a learning plateau

### 3. **Strategies for the Classroom**

- Have visual calendars, visual prompts and use ASL in the class for your whole community- builds up classroom's repertoire of non-verbal communication
- Peer collaboration and discussions are excellent for cognitive and social development
- Scaffold and spiral your lessons- memory is best supported when you revisit key learning points often and over time
- Actively interrupt stereotypes and prejudices in your school community- have more conversations, more cross-collaboration and actively seek out information from your learners to best aid their learning journey

<b>Journal</b>	<i>Johnson, L., Connor, R., &amp; Guralnick, M. (2011). The Peer Social Networks of Young Children with Down Syndrome in Classroom Programmes. Journal Of Applied Research Of Intellectual Disabilities, 24(4), 310-321.</i>	<i>Kendall, L. (2019). Supporting children with down syndrome within mainstream education settings: Parental reflections. Education 3-13, 47(2), 135-147.</i>	<i>Rietveld, C. (2005). Classroom learning experiences of mathematics by new entrant children with Down syndrome. Journal Of Intellectual &amp; Developmental Disability, 30(3), 127.</i>
<b>Main takeaways</b>	Attitude of teachers, parents and mentors is the number one critical factor in a student with Down Syndrome's success at school	More like their developing peers than they are different- appreciate individuality and diversity of feelings	Conceptual feedback by teachers vital to learning advancement
	Address visual and hearing needs early in class structure to ensure participation	High focus on learning disability component often obscures areas of strength (need to combat preconceived notions of lesser intelligence)	Shifting focus to external factors contributing to learning success in the learning environment
	Many students with Down syndrome understand considerably more than they can verbally convey	Idea of a learning plateau emerged from classroom speed not meeting learning needs of students- in fact so long as material is revisited to aid memory, learning always progresses	Social and cognitive processes interrelated for student success
	7-10 seconds (at least) of processing time after questions! Resist the urge to jump in too early!	Avoid the use of saying "mild" or "severe" Down Syndrome, creates needless social hierarchies of abilities	Low task persistence a considerable barrier in cases of new math concepts

<b>Web Resource</b>	<i>Canada Down Syndrome Society Educator package: A guide to inclusive education for students with Down Syndrome</i>	<i>Down Syndrome Association of West Michigan. (2010). Supporting the student with Down Syndrome in your classroom: Teacher manual.</i>	<i>BCTF: Inclusive Education: Special Needs Designations and Categories in BC (2017)</i>
<b>Main takeaways</b>	Model speaking to students directly rather than directing questions or statements to their EAs	It is a myth that students with Down Syndrome are stubborn and thus their learning plateaus	Children with down syndrome typically fall into category K designations meaning they don't qualify for additional funding
	Celebrate communication successes- model responses with developmentally advancing vocab to increase speech proficiency	Use emotionally neutral expressions- "Fatima has down syndrome" rather than "Fatima <i>suffers</i> from down syndrome".	35% decrease in students' claiming this designation level (K) over the last 16 years
	Ask open ended questions and give lots of time for responses	Focus on making needs-based requests rather than focusing on their disability	
	Visual & tactile learning particularly beneficial		