

Strategies/Resources for Mainstream Teachers who have some SEN classes.

Many subject teachers are involved in the delivery of some SEN classes without having received training in teaching and learning strategies for SEN. It could be that they have only one or two classes a week with a small group of students such as an Irish exempt group. Yet they are responsible for ensuring positive use of this valuable class time. Students with SEN may rely on these smaller classes in order to cope with the demands of second level. This is the time when their particular difficulties can be addressed. This article aims to give ideas about the use of this time suggesting topics that could be covered and highlighting resources, many of which are available on-line.

Take the example of a teacher who has two resource teaching classes a week with a first year group. A possible plan could be take two topics as a basis for classwork for an eight week block. Possible topics could be:

Sept – Oct	Organisation: SNIP Vocabulary list.
Nov – Dec	Memory: Revision timetable: ELSP worksheet <i>English used in Exams</i> .
Jan – Feb	Mindmapping: Latin and Greek roots.
Mar – May	Revision timetable: Planning for written assignments.

If a number of teachers are involved with the same group, these teachers could plan to cover different topics so as not to overlap.

It can also help to make interventions more targeted to ask students themselves where they have difficulties and would like support. Appendix C is a questionnaire which might help.

It is important to know the profile of the students in the group in order to be able to target their particular difficulties as there may be a wide range of ability and very different learning difficulties present in the group. Indeed, in an exempt Irish group, there may be students who are there solely because they returned to Ireland after the age of 11 and have no learning difficulties. In a group with a wide variety of ability, the teacher should be careful not to expose the vulnerabilities of students. When working in a small group, it becomes very obvious if a student cannot do something the others can. Teachers can find out about these profiles by asking the SEN teacher or Guidance Counsellor.

Small group work allows for interventions which would not be possible in full class. It might be possible that, on occasion, some students could work independently thus allowing the teacher time to work with individual students.

Strategies that might help

Organisation

Encourage and help students to do the following:

- To keep the homework journal kept up-to-date, entering homework and using it to check their bag for school in the morning. It can be helpful if they write in the names of classes they will have during the day. It saves time in class when taking homework down.
- Have colour coded their timetable (see Appendix A) and have copies of it for their journal, school locker and study area at home. They should put in the names of teachers and the room number in once on the timetable. In some cases they might need help spelling the teachers' names. This is a very valuable resource for parents as they then know who to contact and whom to talk to at the parent teacher meeting.

- Use the same colours as used on the timetable to colour code their copies and files/folders. If they cannot get copies in different colours, they could put coloured tags on the spine of the copy.
- A filing system that they **use** for notes and that they undertake a weekly housekeeping of their bag and their locker.
- A realistic (one they can keep to) homework timetable. About 6 weeks before an exam, they should plan a revision timetable and also do a mastersheet of the topics for each subject that they will be examined on. Sometimes they might need to ask teachers for these. Even if teachers have mentioned the topics in class, it might not have registered with the student.

Memory

A key difficulty for many is to get material into long-term memory. Some of these ideas will help.

- Work with them on using SMART goals. This gives them an exact idea of what they have to learn within a given time. This helps to keep them focussed. It is far more productive than reading over a chapter. There is more on SMART goals at www.studentenrichment.ie/simple-study-techniques.

Here is an example of SMART goals from History

- *At the end of 20 minutes I will know the following key facts and be able to test myself.*
 - *5 causes of the Reformation*
 - *5 facts about Martin Luther*
 - *5 differences between his beliefs and those of the Catholic Church.*
- Give them access to key facts if they find it difficult to make their own notes. This could be through revision books or through websites. See www.dyslexiacourses.ie under downloads for the article *Useful websites/APPS on study skills, exam preparation, assistive technology, on-line tutorials, revision notes, subject specific resources*.
- Help them develop memory techniques that work for them. For example, rote memory does not suit many students with dyslexia whereas learning with patterns and understanding does.

Memory techniques that might help include:

- Multi-sensory learning. Use several senses when learning. It is hard work but it works. Activities such as talking, writing, drawing, mindmaps, timelines, visualising, flashcards, posters, lists of questions can all help.
- Use class time to help them with mindmaps and note-taking. The website www.ucc.ie/en/dss/atoutreach/ has on-line tutorials for secondary school students on mindmaps. Tony Buzan books (Appendix B) are also helpful.
- Summarise a section of text, so they can develop their ability to identify keypoints.
- These memory strategies could also work.
 - Visualisation: Making images in the mind's eye. An example is the colour of wires in an electric plug. Let them visualise: *A teddy (brown for the live wire) on green grass (green for earth) with a blue background (blue for neutral)*. See Cogan and Flecker (see Appendix B Resources) for more on visualisation
 - Mnemonics: Help them to work out their own mnemonics such as *FATDAD for counties of Northern Ireland*.
 - Grouping facts into blocks for learning.
- Let them do learning homework inside the class. Monitor how they approach the task and see are there strategies that might improve the quality of the learning.
- Develop memory by playing Memory Games. It could be visual such as the card game Memory or auditory by reciting numbers/facts and asking them questions about them.

- The Little Book is a way to get students to learn bits of information such as definitions by teaching one another. Full instructions on creating and using Little Books are on the PDST website. www.pdst.ie/node/2833.

Reading

Reading is a key skill at second level. So using the class time to develop reading skills is very valuable. Ideas and resources that might help include:

- Reading should be encouraged including reading at home. It could be anything that captures their interest such as magazines, newspapers, etc.
- The National Behaviour Support Service www.nbss.ie has extensive range of resources, worksheets, summary maps /organisers and classroom posters on comprehension and learning strategies for before, during and after reading. These are free to download at www.nbss.ie/publications-resources.
- The most effective way to develop reading skills is to read. The school could encourage this by having a library with books at different reading levels. The NBSS website has a comprehensive listing of such books called **READ – Engaging students with high interest and low readability books**. The Public Libraries often have such books available. It is important that the student has the skills to read the book comfortably. Ask the SEN teacher for an indication of the student’s reading ability in order to match books with the student.
- Does the school have a reading scheme such as SRA Reading Laboratory or Literacy Lift-off programmes? These allow the student to read independently at their own level inside the classroom. This would provide the opportunity for the teacher to work with other individuals inside the classroom.

Vocabulary and Spelling

Many of the students might have a limited vocabulary due the fact they are not reading for pleasure. Ideas to help include:

- Activities using a dictionary. Recent editions of dictionaries such as EdCo and Collins have the alphabet printed on each page. This is helpful for those who might have difficulty with the sequence of the letters.
- A vocabulary notebook for each subject. The NBSS website and the JCSP Literacy website had templates for these as well as many other resources for teaching vocabulary.
- The English Language Support Programme www.elsp.ie, while designed primarily for students whose first language is not English, has resources which equally well suit students who need literacy support. In particular it has lists of key words and worksheets in most subjects including one on *The English used in Exams*.
- The Special Needs Information Press which helps the students recognise and understand specific secondary curriculum words. It can be used on a one-to-one basis or with groups. It is free to download at www.snip-newsletter.co.uk/pdfs/downloads/precision_teaching.pdf. SNIP also has worksheets that develop spelling strategies. NEPS includes SNIP in its publication *Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers*. It also has a video of SNIP in action at www.education.ie/en/Education-Staff/Information/NEPS-Literacy-Resource/neps_literacy_good_practice_guide.pdf.
- Students will find it difficult to learn new spellings by simply copying words. A multi-sensory approach LOOK-PICTURE-COVER-PICTURE-WRITE-CHECK is a proven method for learning spelling.

- Mnemonics help them to have a rule in their head. Examples include: **A piece of pie** or **Never believe a lie** or **Emma has a dilemma**.
- Up to 75% of English comes from Latin and Greek roots. At second level students meet new words in different subjects. Many will come from these languages. This is particularly true for science subjects such as Biology. Giving them a familiarity with these roots will help them see how the word is constructed, how to pronounce it, how to make an informed guess at its meaning and a tool for remembering and spelling it correctly. This could be combined with dictionary work as a good dictionary will give the roots to a word. Here are some resources available on the internet.
 - <http://www.syracusecityschools.com/tfiles/folder712/Latin%20Root%20Acativities.pdf>
 - <https://quizlet.com/4749316/greek-latin-root-words-flash-cards/>
 - www.quia.com is a website that teachers can subscribe to. However if one searches Google for *Latin and Greek roots quia*, it is possible to access some Quia games such *Jeopardy*, *Who wants to be a Millionaire*, *Rags to Riches* using the roots.
 - www.english.glendale.cc.ca.us/roots.html. This site is more appropriate for senior cycle students. It includes a quiz.
- There is only ten Latin and Greek plurals. Teaching them to senior cycle students can remove much confusion particularly in the sciences. See www.biomedicaleditor.com/spelling-tip-latin.html.
- Florida Center for Reading Research www.fcr.org/resources/resources_sca_4-5.html This site is a huge treasure trove of class activities and games on phonics, reading fluency, comprehension and vocabulary. It provides the instructions and materials for each class activity.

Writing

- The first thing to look at is if the writing is poorly formed. It might be illegible or else cause muscle strain. The NBSS (www.nbss.ie) have a booklet on Handwriting which outlines possible strategies that might help.
- Making sure they understand the words used in questions. See ELSP handout and activities on the *English used in Exams*. Another activity could be to get them to read questions, and then ask them what the question is asking them. They could then plan the points they would include in the answer.
- Making mindmaps or outline plans mean they can see the structure of the essay spatially arranged. (Appendix A) PDST have a book on the use of graphic organisers. (Appendix B)
- When brainstorming to get ideas, use Post-its. This can mean the points can be rearranged without rewriting the words.
- In some subjects it is helpful to give writing frames/formats which show the structure of the answer required such as lists of points to be included in an answer.
- Get them to make up three characters in great detail such as how they look, clothes, hobbies, family, school, jobs, friends, opinions etc. They could get pictures from magazines or the internet which will help them visualise the individuals. This makes it easier to compose a short story.
- Ask them to write a short description of a scene by using their five senses.

More Ideas

The Factsheets on Dyslexia at Second Level have many more resources and strategies. Available for free download at www.dyslexiacourses.ie.

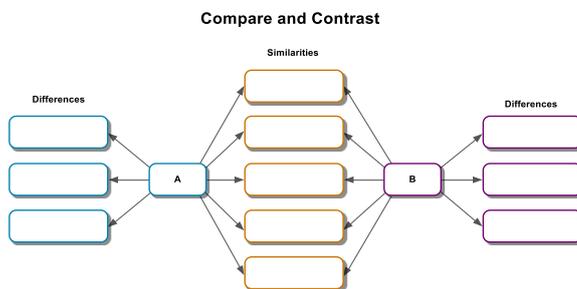
Appendix A

1. Example of coloured timetable

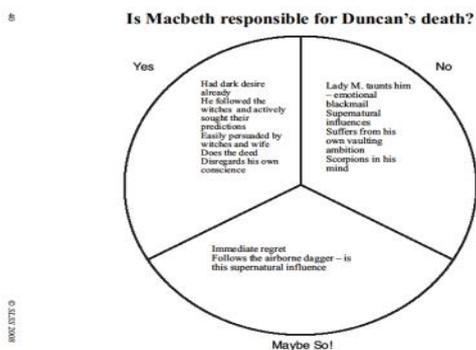
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
English R. 2 Ms Daly	Home Ec. Kitchen Ms Daly	Science	Maths	Science
Maths R. 14 Ms. Carroll	Home Ec.	Art	Religion	Home Ec.
History R. 4 Ms Keogh	English	Art	PE	Home Ec.
Geography R. 23 Ms. Kelly	PE Ms. Wilson	Maths	Irish	Art
Science Lab Mr. Dunne	CSPE R. 5 Mr. Boland	Business	Business	English
Science	Business R. 16 Mr. Malone	Business	Science	Irish
Art Room Ms. Walsh	Irish R. 8 Ms. Grey	Irish	English	Geography
Art	Maths	English	SPHE R8	Maths
Religion	History	Geography	Irish	Religion

2. Possible Writing Frames

Here is an example from Inspiration Software.



This example is from the PDST. It structures debate type questions.



Appendix B

Books

- Buzan, T. (2002) *How to Mindmap* Harper Thorsons
Buzan, T. (2008) *Mindmaps for Kids* Harper Thorsons
Cogan, J. & Flecker, M. (2004) *Dyslexia in Secondary School, a Practical Handbook for Teachers, Parents & Students* London: Whurr
MacKay, N. (2012) *Removing Dyslexia as a Barrier to Achievement* (3rd Ed.) Lancaster; SEN Marketing
McPhillips, T. (2011) *Supporting Teaching and Learning in the Second Level School: A Teacher's Resource* Dublin: Blackrock Education Centre

Websites

www.dyslexiacourses.ie

- Factsheets on Dyslexia at Second Level
- Ten Tips on Study for Junior Certificate Students
- Tips for students with dyslexia who find English Paper 1 in the Leaving Certificate challenging.
- Useful websites/APPS on study skills, exam preparation, assistive technology, on-line tutorials, revision notes and subject specific resources.

www.elsp.ie

English Language Support Service (resources on vocabulary in many subjects)

www.jcspliteracy.ie

Junior Certificate Schools Programme (resources for literacy and numeracy)

www.nbss.ie

National Behaviour Support Service (over 70 booklets and resources to support literacy development.

[www.education.ie/en/Education-Staff/Information/NEPS-Literacy-](http://www.education.ie/en/Education-Staff/Information/NEPS-Literacy-Resource/neps_literacy_good_practice_guide.pdf)

[Resource/neps_literacy_good_practice_guide.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Education-Staff/Information/NEPS-Literacy-Resource/neps_literacy_good_practice_guide.pdf). Booklet on Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers

www.pdst.ie/node/2833. The Little Book

www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/Graphic%20Organiser%20Booklet.pdf Booklet on Graphic Organisers

www.snip-newsletter.co.uk/pdfs/downloads/precision_teaching.pdf Vocabulary lists

www.ucc.ie/en/dss/atoutreach/ UCC site with on-tutorials on Assistive Technology, Study Skills, Mindmaps

On Line Library

Special Education Support Service www.sess.ie has an on-line library available to teachers. Schools register by paying €30.00

Appendix C

Student Questionnaire

	Tick if you find this difficult.	Rank the items you ticked in order with 1 = the one you need most help with.
Organisation		
Do you have problems finding books, notes, etc.?		
Is your work area, locker a mess?		
Have you difficulties managing your time or meeting deadlines to hand in assignments?		
Do you sometimes not know what homework you have?		
Have you difficulties making a study timetable or keeping to one?		
Do you find it hard to organise a revision plan for exams?		
Do you forget to bring in the correct books or homework to class?		
Do you know all your teachers' names?		
Learning		
Does learning take you longer than others?		
Is work learnt easily forgotten?		
Are some subjects more challenging than others?		
Do you find it very hard to learn from textbooks?		
Notetaking and Mindmaps		
Do you find it difficult to take notes from the board within the time given?		
Do you miss class discussion because notetaking takes so long?		
Do you find it difficult to make notes from textbooks?		
Do you find it difficult to take notes when the teacher calls them out?		
Are your notes incomplete, illegible?		
Do you find it hard to make mindmaps?		
Reading		
Do you have reread texts in order to understand what you have read?		
Are you a slow or inaccurate reader?		
Do you skip words or misread words when reading?		
Under pressure in an exam, do you misread words?		
Do you dislike reading aloud in class?		
Do you find there are a lot of words you don't know the meaning of in your textbooks?		

Writing		
Your thinking is faster than your ability to write it down?		
Do good ideas get lost when trying to write and think at the same time?		
Does your writing wander off the point when answering?		
Are your answers too short?		
Do you misinterpret questions?		
Are your answers poorly structured and lack paragraphing?		
Is your writing difficult to read?		
Does your arm begin to hurt when writing a lot?		
Does your spelling get worse under pressure?		
Does not knowing how to spell a word affect your writing?		
Other: Write down any other difficulties you may have in the boxes below.		