Research-Based Practices for Teaching Students with Disabilities:

A Resource for Supporting & Evaluating General and Special Education Teachers of Students with Disabilities

The following table identifies major categories of research-based practices for teaching Students with Disabilities (Column 1), including *Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Response to Intervention (RtI), Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Assistive Technology (AT)*, as well as research-based instructional practices for students with all levels of disabilities, as well as ELLs with disabilities. In addition, it provides specific examples (though not exhaustive) of research-based best practices when teaching Students with Disabilities (Column 2) and how teacher evaluators can identify evidence of these practices in classroom observation, teacher conferences or other sources of evidence (Column 3). The citations and references listed in Column 4 have complete bibliographic information at the end of the document.

Research-Based Practices for Teaching Students with Disabilities	Specific Examples	Source: e.g, Classroom Observation, Teacher Conference
General Strategies for Students with Learning Disabilities and Other Disabilities (Vaughn, Bos and Schumm, 2007; Marzano, et. al., 2001; Tomlinson and McTighe, 2006)		
Control of task difficulty	- Teach at the student's instructional level - Sequence from simple to complex - Maintain high levels of student success - Adjust the work load as many students work at a slower pace - Provide time extensions for tests and large projects - Divide work into smaller sections	- Lesson/Unit plans - Observation - Conferences
Use a combination of direct instruction and cognitive strategy instruction	- Use a highly sequenced format with lots of immediate feedback - Use the following teaching sequence: ✓ Obtain student commitment ✓ Identify target skill/concepts ✓ Pretest ✓ Teach in multiple ways ✓ Model ✓ Rehearse/Practice ✓ Role-Play ✓ Provide feedback ✓ Practice in controlled settings ✓ Practice in other settings ✓ Post-testing ✓ Follow-up-Reteach as needed	- Lesson Plans - Observations - Conferences

Research-Based Practices for Teaching Students with Disabilities	Specific Examples	Source: e.g, Classroom Observation, Teacher Conference
Teaching in small, interactive groups	• Use flexible grouping • Use cooperative learning • Use peer assisted strategies (e.g.,cross-age, same-aged and peer tutoring) • Teach in small groups of less than 6 students • Teach group processing and social skills	• Lesson Plans • Observations • Conferences
Using "Think Aloud" techniques	• Modeling with instructional conversation how you are completing the task and processing the information • Comment on or make visible thought processes and learning processes such as finding the main idea	• Observation
Advanced Organizers/Activate Prior Knowledge	• Use visuals that let students know where they are going in a unit or lesson and orients them to the tasks ahead • Teach students to listen for the cue to use the advanced organizer and how to use it to study • Use it to activate background knowledge	• Lesson Plans • Observations
Teach self-regulation and self-monitoring	• Have students keep track of their understanding and progress • Ask students questions about their learning and progress • Have student graph their own progress • Have students set goals and monitor them	• Lesson Plans • Observation • Assessment data
Extended Practice and Application of Skills/Concepts	• Provide more guided practice with teacher feedback • Manage classroom time to provide more time for some students to practice (e.g., reading and writing workshops, individual conferences, review sessions)	• Observation • Conferences
Use technology and other learning tools	• Allow word processing and spell checking • Use dictation software • Use speech synthesizers and software to have the computer read to students • Use audio books • Use drill and practice programs for extended practice in a game format • Use calculators • Use handheld devices	• Observation • Lesson Plans
Present Learning in Multiple Ways	• Use video and other visuals • Use internet sites • Use drama, music, and the arts • Use demonstrations and simulations • When lecturing, stop so that students can work in pair to make sense of the information • Use maps and graphic organizers to show the relationships between ideas • Use analogies, metaphors and examples from real life	• Lesson Plans • Observations

Research-Based Practices for Teaching Students with Disabilities	Specific Examples	Source: e.g, Classroom Observation, Teacher Conference
Assess learning in multiple ways	• Allow for time extensions • For math, allow for pictorial representation with computation and give partial credit is visual is correct, allow for calculators • Give tests orally • Divide large projects into smaller steps with feedback along the way • Use pictures/diagrams/sequences of pictures to show understanding • Use drama • Use word processing with spell check • Use video and audio tape • Use performance assessments	• Lesson Plans • Observations • Assessment data • Conferences
Teach memory strategies	• Teach rehearsal, visualization, and categorization strategies • Teach acronyms and key words • Provide advanced organizers and study guides	• Lesson plans • Observations
Keep a positive attitude and high expectations	• Maintain understanding, compassion, patience, concern, respect, and responsiveness • Assume all students can learn • Assume most students can learn grade level material	• Observations • Conferences • Consultation with IEP team and students
Work collaboratively with IEP team	• Attend and participate in meetings • Come prepared to meetings with student work samples, assessment data, ideas for accommodations, etc. • Use team as an ongoing resource • Listen actively • See parents as partners	• Meeting observations • Consultation with IEP team • Assessment data • Conferences
Use students' interests	• Use high interest materials • Connect new learning to things students already know and are interested in • Use multiple intelligence strengths as entry points to new or complex learning • Enhance motivation to complete tasks and see the relevance of work	• Lesson Plans • Observations

Strategies for Students with ADHD
(Vaughn, Bos and Schumm, 2007)

Use novelty	• Use highlighters or color to call attention to key points/ideas • Use stimulations, field trips, guest speakers and the arts to teach • Use technology and visuals	• Lesson/Unit Plans • Observations • Conferences

Research-Based Practices for Teaching Students with Disabilities	Specific Examples	Source: e.g, Classroom Observation, Teacher Conference
Provide help with organization	• Maintain and schedule and notify of schedule changes • Emphasize time limits • Provide a notebook/assignment system and give class time to use it • Provide instruction on use of classroom materials • Give class time to organize desk, backpack and notebooks and provide rewards for organization	• Observations • Conferences • Checking assignment notebooks
Provide rewards consistently and frequently	• The frequency, consistency and intensity of rewards needs to be increased for students with ADHD • Involve the students in selecting rewards	• Observation • Conferences
Be brief and clear	• Keep lessons brief and to the point • Prepare instructions ahead of time to be clear • Present information in smaller chunks	• Lesson plans • Observations
Allow for movement	• Change groups/seats frequently • Provide stretch breaks and relaxation activities • Have students talk, walk, get materials, type, draw, use fidget devices and manipulatives	• Observation
Arrange classroom for maximizing attention	• Have student sit in close proximity to the teacher or the action in the classroom • Make sure teacher can see the student • Minimize time near distractions (such as from windows, noisy heating systems, doors, active centers of the classroom) • Sit near organized students • Provide a quiet corner that students can choose to use	• Observations • Walk throughs
Accommodate homework	• Use homework record sheets • Have well established routines for assigning, collecting, and evaluating homework • Use homework for practice of material already taught • Reduce homework to the minimum amount necessary to demonstrate learning • Provide timelines for long-term assignments • Involve families in the homework system	• Check assignment notebooks • Observation • Conferences • Consultation with IEP team

Strategies for students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities
(Bos, Vaughn and Schumm 2007)

Maintain an organized physical environment	• Keep classroom uncluttered, clean, and uncrowded in high traffic areas • Have organized supplies and materials • Consider students' needs for light and ventilation • Reduce background noises where possible • Establish a personal space for each child	• Observations • Walk throughs

Research-Based Practices for Teaching Students with Disabilities	Specific Examples	Source: e.g, Classroom Observation, Teacher Conference
	• Make sure all students can be seen and can see instructional materials • Keep a predictable routine • Post classroom rules	
Establish positive relationships	• To gain trust, act in predictable ways and do what you say you will do • Do what is best for students and not yourself • Like the student; dislike the behavior • Be empathetic • Get to know students and their interests well • Do not use threats • Never humiliate, embarrass or berate a student	• Observations • Conferences
Create a plan to change student behavior(s)	• Target behaviors for change that interfere with the ability of students to learn or teachers to teach • Target one or two behaviors at a time to change • Ignore minor behaviors; focus on important things • Choose target behaviors with students and their parents • Use Functional Behavioral Analysis (FBA) to find behaviors to change • Form a plan to teach and reward the use of replacement behaviors	• Observation • Conferences • Observations of team meetings
Use formal systems for behavior change	• Use written contracts • Use token economies • Use Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS) • Use Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) • Use Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIP) • Uses wrap around services • Uses Life Space Crisis Intervention or other crisis intervention system • Use the school discipline system • Implements interventions across settings • Implements multiple interventions	• Observations • Conferences • Discipline records • Training certificates
Teach conflict resolution	• Teach skills such as compromising, turn taking, active listening, etc. • Teach using modeling, practice, and feedback • Teach problem-solving skills (i.e. problem identification, problem analysis, plan implementation and evaluation)	• Observations • Conferences
Provide context for students	• Explain why students are studying something, and why they need to do an assignment • Explain how their learning will contribute to their success and future	• Observations • Conferences

Research-Based Practices for Teaching Students with Disabilities	Specific Examples	Source: e.g, Classroom Observation, Teacher Conference
Provide specific, immediate and positive feedback	• This is more useful in the primary years than the secondary years	• Observations
Provide tangible reinforcement	• Only needed for a small amount of students with severe problems • Fade use as soon as possible	• Observations • Conferences
Use punishment carefully and only as a last resort	• Punishment is often ineffective in the long run and should be used only in circumstances when behaviors are harmful to the student or others • To make punishment most effective tell the student in advance what the punishment will be; deliver the punishment immediately following the offence; change the punishment if it does not result in a sharp decrease in frequency and intensity of the behavior; and reinforce appropriate behaviors	• Observations • Discipline records • Conferences
Use Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS)	• Work to create and follow a school-wide consistent model of behavioral supports • Carefully observe and document the circumstances and purpose of problem behavior • Assume that student are lacking the skills needed to choose a positive alternative to getting their needs met • Teach replacement behaviors • Use behavior plans to make targeted changes to the environment to support the student's behavior change • Focus on prevention of behavior problems • Consider teaching PBS to parents	• Observation • Discipline records • Conferences
Empower Students	• Provide choice, even if limited • Provide natural consequence • Share progress monitoring with students • Allow student to feel some control over their learning and environment	• Observations • Conferences • Lesson Plans
Speech and Language Disabilities (Vaughn, Bos and Schumm, 2007)		
Provide opportunities for communication in natural, supportive environments	• Target specific skills to practice outside the therapy situation • Create personal cueing systems to let students be prepared to communicate • Make communication safe • Use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems such as gestures, writing, facial expressions, and AAC devices • Teach language skills in the context of meaningful activities	• Lesson Plans • Observations • Walk throughs

Research-Based Practices for Teaching Students with Disabilities	Specific Examples	Source: e.g, Classroom Observation, Teacher Conference
	• Use simulations and role-play to practice communication and other skills	
Use the Pause Procedure	• Pause during lectures or discussions for students to discuss what they are learning in pairs or small groups • Pause for students to review notes in pairs or small groups	• Lesson Plans • Observations
Make connections between concepts	• Explain new ideas using phrases such as "It's like….," or "You can compare it to…" or "It's the opposite of …" • Use graphic organizers such as feature analysis, semantic mapping and/or concept diagrams that show the relationships between ideas and concepts visually	• Lesson Plans • Observations
Use wait time	• Students with language problems need extra time to process the question and formulate an answer	• Observations
Use language extension and elaboration	• Repeat what students say in a more complex manner • Only expand on one element at time • Do not just correct the student but show a more complex way of expressing the thought • Provide additional information to their thought	• Observations
Use effective communication	• Use consistent visual, verbal and/or physical cues • Start instructions only when you have student attention • Be brief, practiced and specific when giving directions • Allow students to speak for themselves without finishing their answers for them or allowing a peer to do so	• Observations

Students with Autism (Odom, et. al, 2009; Bos, Vaughn and Schumm, 2007)		
Use a comprehensive treatment model (CTM) if needed	• Use a model that has efficacy such as Denver, LEAP, Lovass Institute, May Institute and PCDI (also possibly Autism Partnership, CARD, children's Toddler Program, DIR, Douglass, PRT, Responsive Teaching, SCERTS and TEACCH) • Uses the comprehensive treatment with fidelity • Maintains training on CTM	• Observation • Training certificates • CTM observers • Conferences • Lesson Plans • Walk throughs
Use focused interventions if not using a CTM	• Prompts students • Provides reinforcement • Uses discrete trial training • Social Stories • Peer mediated interventions • Highly structured learning activities • Breaks tasks down into simple steps	• Observation • Lesson Plans • Conferences

Research-Based Practices for Teaching Students with Disabilities	Specific Examples	Source: e.g, Classroom Observation, Teacher Conference
Involve parents in all aspects of program/schooling	• Uses parent information to create plan • Trains parents in program/techniques • Maintains frequent communication with parents • Maintains a log of parent contacts	• Records/logs • Parent feedback • Training agendas and participants • Meeting notes • Meeting observations
Have a highly predictable schedule and routine	• Establish a routine quickly • Has a daily schedule in multiple or the most appropriate format • Review the daily schedule each day • Involve the student as much as possible in making the schedule • Offer choice	• Observation • Walk throughs
Build on interests, likes and dislikes	• Assess what students like and do not like at least 3 times per year • Interview parents, former teachers, and the team • Observe students carefully • Intersperse high and low preference activities • Do not expect long periods of time in low preference activities • Incorporate a neutral activities between a high preference and low preference activities	• Observation • Conferences • Assessment data • Lesson Plans
Teach communication skills	• Target two communication skills to teacher during each activity of the daily schedule • Provide massed trials to teach communication skills in a distraction free place • Practice newly learned skills in a natural setting (milieu training) along with the massed trials • Use total communication including one or more of the following: gestures; facial expressions; eye blinks; and alternative and augmentative communication devices • Work closely with the SLP and the family to choose and support chosen communication system • Train parents to use the communication system	• Lesson Plans • Observation • Walk throughs • Consultation with SLP
Teach social skills	• Teach social skills directly and teach student how and when to use such skills • Target a small number of social skills to teach using observation and the IEP team • Use role-playing , Social Problem Solving, Social Stories and a variety of prompts to teach social skills • Use self-monitoring and self-reinforcement techniques • Teach in context outside the classroom with one-to-one rehearsal and feedback and in the natural settings	• Lesson Plans • Observations • Assessment data • Conferences

Research-Based Practices for Teaching Students with Disabilities	Specific Examples	Source: e.g, Classroom Observation, Teacher Conference
	• Teach Social Problem Solving: what is happening here, what should I do, make choices, role-play with feedback, evaluate effectiveness of choice • Use Social Stories that are individualized to the student; clarify the social context and perspectives of others; and show the social skill to be performed	
Address Challenging Behaviors	• See challenging behaviors as communication often to obtain desirable things • Complete a functional behavioral analysis with direct and indirect assessments to determine the function of the student's behaviors and possible interventions • Reactive and punitive procedures are not as effective as positive behavioral supports • Teach new skills and improve communication skills to prevent problems and foster independence	• Observation • Conferences • Discipline records • Student records • Lesson Plans • Walk throughs

References

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