



Adaptation of learning content for students with SLDs
Educational Needs and Adaptations for students with SLDs

Assessment and feedback

Introduction

As a teacher, **your goal is that all of your students assimilate the learning content** that you are teaching them. That implies that they need to succeed in **six levels of cognitive learning** – remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating – according to Bloom’s taxonomy (1956). How you could assess those six levels of learning, and how you can help your students understand their strengths and weaknesses is the tricky part, of course. Evaluation, assessment and feedback are the methods that you can use to check if your teaching goal is achieved. **Evaluation** methods are there for you **to grade** students and be able to see how everyone in your class is performing for specific tasks. **Assessment** is there to help you **understand your students’ learning over a time span**, by collecting information from various sources. Finally, **feedback** is how you will communicate the weaknesses and strengths that you identified to your students. Here we will focus on the latter two aspects, which offer

long-term constructive support and guidance, particularly important when students with SLDs are involved.

The need behind this adaptation

The purpose of giving feedback

There are several ways to classify feedback, depending on the dimension that is taken into account. The types of feedback that you can give your students are:

- Oral or written
- Informal or formal
- Individual or collective
- Direct or delayed
- Positive (“Well done”, “The part with... was very good because...”) or corrective (“Don’t forget the final ‘s’ with ‘he’ or ‘she’”, “A better way to say this would be...”)
- Formative (during the learning phase) or summative (typically graded evaluation at the end of the learning phase)
- Evaluative (involving a value of judgment, for instance with grades) or descriptive (providing more detailed guidance)

Whatever the form, feedback always pursues the same goal: it is basically the only indicator that you have at your disposal to help students progress by making them aware of their weaknesses and strengths.

Avoiding unhealthy peer comparisons

Students may only see their weaknesses and focus on the comparison with other students, instead of their own progress which can lead to demotivation instead of progress.

This can be particularly true for students with SLDs, since they may receive more negative feedback because of their disorder than other students.

The problem of “over feedback”

One strategy to help students with more difficulties is to provide as much complete feedback as possible, as often as possible. However, **students can only process a limited amount of corrective feedback at a time**, too much feedback will have a counter effect and may hinder the learning process. This is especially true for students with SLDs, whose attention is already focused on dealing with their difficulties.

What is this adaptation all about?

Video games and direct feedback focused on the learning activity

This is one of the advantages of **video games**: by being so **interactive** and immersive, **video games are very efficient in providing direct feedback**, in a safe environment.

Video games create a safe space for feedbacking:

- There are no consequences for the player personally
- Students can try again and learn from their mistakes
- There is no unnecessary pressure (peer pressure or pressure coming from the teacher)
- Students are in a mood where they will more likely accept feedback from the game and not think about it as critics.

A well-designed game will make sure to avoid providing “over feedback” but only feedback relevant to the activity.

Favour realistic descriptive feedback, focused on progress

When possible, avoid just saying “good”, “well done”, “good job” or other short feedback. Students may need more guidance to understand exactly what it is that you thought was good or bad. **Giving descriptive feedback** when you can is thus important for your students, **even when you are giving positive feedback**.

There is a catch, however. Be careful not to over-descriptive either, don’t “over feedback”. You need to guide the students but not do all the thinking for them. For instance, when evaluating a

written text, you could indicate the type of mistake (S = spelling, P = punctuation, ...) instead of correcting it directly.

Involve the students: develop peer and self-feedback

Self and peer assessment can help students identify their strengths, weaknesses and learning needs.

Make sure that peer feedback occurs in a safe and nurturing environment.

Self-feedback, while being the **ultimate goal toward learning autonomy**, may be **difficult to develop**. Make sure to guide your students by setting clear goals and success criteria, and give them time for reflection on their work.

Alternate between types of feedback

Just as there is no single teaching method that will work well with any student, in any circumstances, all the time, there is no perfect and universal form of feedback. Moreover, **depending on the SLD(s) of your students, they may have trouble with oral and/or written communication**. Therefore, it is particularly important to **alternate between feedback techniques** and make sure that your feedback is well understood.


Progress monitoring

It is **important that students with SLD realise that their effort is paying off** or if they need to make even more effort. **Feedback focused on the overall progress and not limited to the instant is thus essential**.

Monitoring the progress of your students and informing them of that progress is very helpful for them. It will also make it easier for you to **design a spiral learning** where students revisit the same topics with increasing complexity. Progress monitoring can also be the basis of individual learning plans.

Several tools and methods already exist. Examples can be found for instance here:

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/chap8.pdf>.



In order to help them efficiently, regularly monitoring the progress of your students with SLDs is essential. This is simply tied to the fact it will take a number of assessment scores in your monitoring in order to be able to interpret progress with some accuracy.

Conclusion

Always providing the best feedback possible to your students is very hard to achieve. Giving feedback to help your students with SLDs may be even more difficult, because their SLDs may make it challenging for them to receive, interpret and understand it. Yet, **feedback is the only way that students can understand their strengths and weaknesses**. It is therefore paramount to adopt some strategies maximising the chance that your feedback gets through and guides your students toward more success.

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