



Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)



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Education

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Introduction

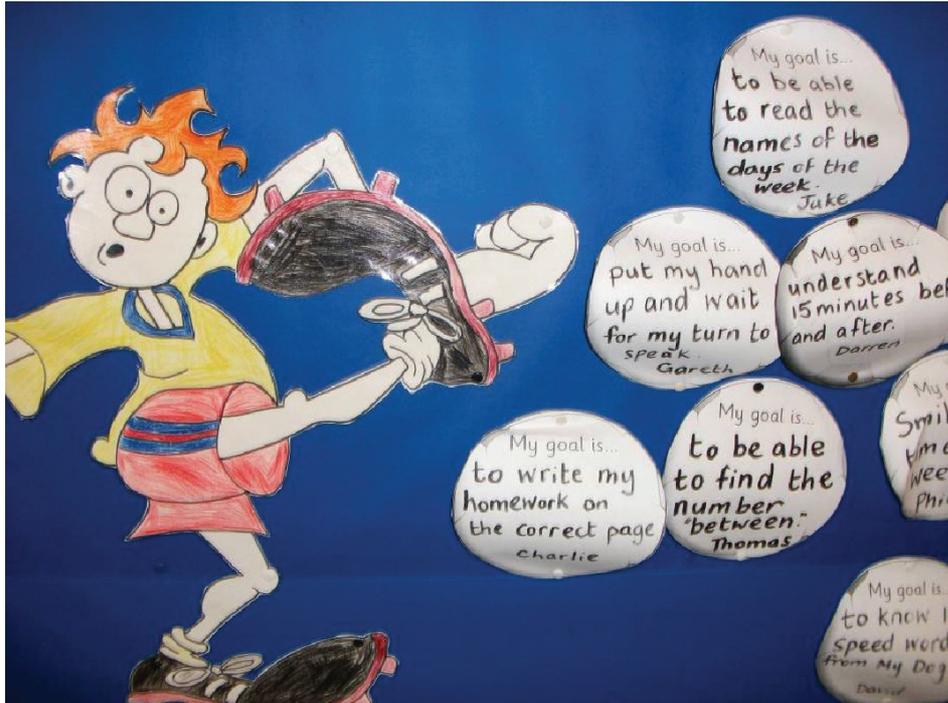
A student with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) is understood to display significant delay in reaching developmental milestones and may have much greater difficulty than their peers in acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills. They may also have associated speech and language delay, low levels of concentration and under-developed social, emotional and personal skills.

These students, using standardised measures of general ability and educational attainment, have scores in the range of 50 – 69.

Students with MLD may exhibit barriers to their learning such as:

- Difficulties with conceptualising and understanding abstract concepts.
- A lack of logical reasoning.
- An inability to transfer and apply skills to different situations.
- Poor fine and gross motor skills.
- Difficulty with personal organisation.
- Poor auditory/visual memory.
- Poor long and short term memory.
- Non-compliant and oppositional behaviours.
- A lack of awareness or responsibility for the consequences of actions.

Students with MLD may also have an additional diagnosis e.g. physical, visual or hearing impairment, ASD, ADD/ADHD which would lead to a greater complexity of needs.



However, it is important to remember that each child is an individual with their own needs, strengths and weaknesses. Establishing a profile of students' needs through a multi-agency, diagnostic approach is vital in order to put in place comprehensive education plans specifically tailored to address these needs.

GOOD PRACTICE

- Develop whole school and individual teacher planning to set specific targets to address the pupil's particular needs.
- Develop a thorough understanding of, and empathy for, each child's individual needs so each may fulfil his/her fullest potential.
- Establish a supportive relationship with the student.
- Focus on what the student can do rather than what he/she cannot do and build on his/her strengths.

- Observe the students learning style and differentiate learning and teaching accordingly.
- Provide students with access to an age-appropriate differentiated curriculum.
- Tasks should be set which are within his/her capabilities and allow him/her to experience success.
- Simplify language, repeat words and clarify meanings.
- Ensure tasks have a clear meaning and purpose.
- Use short sequential steps when teaching.
- Build opportunities for over-learning and repetition into lessons.

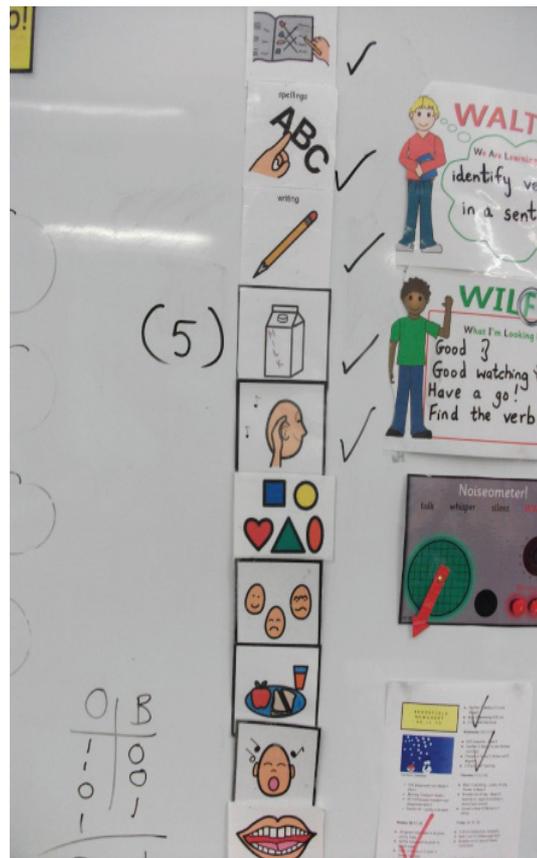




- Differentiate questioning as well as teaching. Include lots of praise and encouragement as part of the student's learning and teaching experience.
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- Help students to realise that making mistakes is part of the learning process.
- Use a wide range of learning resources (e.g. visual aids (charts/ artefacts), concrete objects, computer software, digital cameras, scanners and accessible texts).
- U.I.C.T. should be fully integrated into the daily learning programme.

- Students may derive benefit from assistive technology e.g. lower case keyboards, keyboard overlays, optical mice or roller balls.
- Classroom layout should reflect the needs of the individual students.
- Where appropriate an individual workspace may be made available to enable a student to work in a distraction-free environment.
- When appropriate provide worksheets to minimise the amount of writing required.
- Provide immediate feedback whenever possible.
- Be flexible allowing for sustained attention and concentration difficulties and provide "rest" opportunities.
- Where appropriate students should be involved in tasks which allow for participation and collaboration with peers.
- Maintain an emphasis on active learning through thinking, doing and problem solving.
- Provide opportunities for students to make choices about their learning and allow them sufficient time to think things through.
- Utilise assessment in order to set targets and monitor progress.
- Be explicit when giving instructions and use clear and unambiguous language.
- Help the students to complete tasks independently by ensuring that they know the following: What work do I have to do? How much do I have to do? How do I know if I am finished? Where do I put the finished work? What will I do next?

- Consider using a model or picture of the final goal or end product so that the student knows what is expected.
- Make the beginning and end points of a task clear and avoid ambiguity.
- Help the students to predict and organise their school day and to transition successfully between activities by using, if appropriate: routines to provide security and consistency; day/part day schedule in pictorial/written form; clear directional /labelling signs.
- Where appropriate use visual clues to highlight meaning – present tasks using symbols or give instructions with a written/pictorial prompt card.
- Do not introduce more than one new skill at a time.
- Encourage students to become independent learners.
- Use practical activities including games, simulation, role play and field trips.
- Use self-esteem and confidence building activities.
- Give students the opportunity to generalise knowledge and skills. Students moving into a different environment e.g. a new school, may lose some previously acquired skills and need to re-learn some skills.





- Develop personal and social skills. These may need to be explicitly taught. Particular attention should be paid to the listener-speaker relationship, turn taking, waiting in line working in groups.
- Provide clear and explicit boundaries for behaviour.
- Try to ensure consistency of approach is adopted by all those who are working with a student.
- Real and ongoing home-school communication systems should be set up.
- Schools should develop a culture of sharing good practice within schools and between mainstream/M.L.D. Units/Special schools.

Further Reading and Resources

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NICCA) (2007) Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Moderate Learning Disabilities.

<http://www.ncca.ie/>

Special Education Support Service (SESS) provides advice and guidance on general learning difficulties.

<http://www.sess.ie/>

Teachernet: Information on Special Educational Needs, including the SEN Toolkit.

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/>

Teaching Expertise: will inform and your work with pupils with SEN

<http://www.teachingexpertise.com/special-educational-needs>

Buttriss, J. and Callander, A. (2008) A-Z of Special Needs For Every Teacher, London: Optimus Education.

ICEP Europe provides a comprehensive suite of specialised research based courses including Understanding Autism, ADHD, Aspergers Syndrome, General Learning Disabilities, Supporting and Managing Pupil Behaviour and Teaching Troubled Children.

<http://www.icepe.ie/>

The Oakwood Advisory Team aims to advise parents and schools in meeting the needs of children identified with ASD or whose difficulties can be described within the triad normally associated with ASD. The service is available to parents of pre-school children and to pupils in mainstream schools in the BELB area.

www.oakwoodasd.ik.org

Credits

- 'Signposts'
SESS
www.sess.ie
- 'Good Practice Guidelines for Schools to meet the special educational needs of pupils at the school-based stages of the code of practice'
Inter-board Guidance (2009)
- 'Provisional Criteria for initiating statutory assessments of special educational need and for making statements of special educational need'
Inter-board Guidance (2009)

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and

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