Differentiated Instruction for Students with Visual Impairments

By: Courtney Monti
Educational Technician
Small Elementary School
South Portland
What is a Visual Impairment?

- Term used to describe any kind of vision loss.
- Individuals with complete blindness or partial (legal) blindness
- The American Foundation for the Blind states that 10 million U.S citizens have visual impairment.
What Causes Visual Impairments

• Occurs when part of the eye or brain is damaged or distorted and is irreparable
• Congenital blindness – visually impaired at birth (inherited or transmitted during pregnancy).
• Other conditions that may cause visual impairments include: amblyopia, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, macular degeneration, trachoma
Treatment

• No permanent treatment for some stages of visual impairment – inoperable, unable to fix with contact lenses/glasses

• Vision can be strengthened by:
  – Visiting an Ophthalmologist – eye doctor
  – Visual Therapy
    • Visual exercises
    • Computerized/non-computerized activities
Tips for the Classroom and Resource Room

- **Assigned Seating**
  - Seat the student as close to the front of the room as possible.
  - To eliminate anxiety and separation from the group, put desks in groups of two or three.
  - Seat student away from bright lights that may cause a glare
  - Use dark-colored chalk and clear, large print on the blackboard
  - Enlarge images on a SMART Board or overhead projector
Tips for the Classroom and Resource Room (cont.)

• Use of assistive technology
  – CCTV (Closed-Circuit Television)
    • Used to enlarge and magnify print
    • Can magnify up to 16 times on most devices
    • **Positive**: other students will think the CCTV is “cool” and want to learn from it as well.
    • **Negative**: may make the student feel like an “outcast”.


Tips for the Classroom and Resource Room (cont.)

- Offer student a choice to use the computer for typing papers. The student can enlarge the font size to fit his/her own needs.
- If student insists upon hand-writing papers, offer student a choice of paper with large margins between lines to encourage writing with larger print.
• Enlarge assignments from the student workbook
• Do not give students math worksheets with an overwhelming amount of problems written close together. Instead, enlarge the print and expand the worksheet to be several pages.
• Choose books that are at the student’s appropriate reading level and have decent sized print. If allowed, you can photocopy pages from the book. You can also enlarge on a CCTV.
Tracking Devices

- Use a ruler, or any handheld straight-edge device to track print when reading.

- Handheld magnifying glasses can be used to both enlarge and track print.
One major component of accommodating for student needs is obtaining student feedback. Ask the student what he/she thinks of the strategies being used. Often times students will be blunt and tell you if they do not think a strategy is working. However, do not count on every student to be so forward. It is important to gain as much feedback from your students as possible to better differentiate instruction for the future!
Collaboration

• Keep in touch with parents/guardians to ensure you are both on the same page when it comes to making accommodations for the student. Encourage continuous practice and efforts at home.

• Set up frequent meetings between the regular classroom teacher, special education instructors, and administration to discuss the success or failure of strategies and share observations/assessments.
Set “Reachable” Goals

• Many children with visual impairments will have an IEP (Individualized Education Program). It is important to set goals for the student that he/she can accomplish.

• If student does not have an Individualized Education Program, set classroom goals for the child to feel confident in reaching.
  – Receive tips from the special education staff.
  – Work collaboratively with the parents/guardians of the child to work towards goals at home.
Bibliography

• (D. Cidorowich, personal communication, October 28, 2010)

• (R. Ranger, personal communication, October 29, 2010)

