

Developing a Thematic Unit with Accessible Activities

Choosing Your Themes & Materials:

- Adapting activities for kids with special needs is easier if you first choose a theme, then brainstorm the content & materials; start with materials you already have, and build on them!
- Choose familiar themes with overlapping content: ABCs, animals, bears, bubbles, bugs, bunnies, cities, colors, community helpers, gardens, habitats, numbers, oceans, shapes, signs, trains, vehicles, weather, zoos...
- Not only will you save yourself some time, you'll do young children a favor by revisiting favorite activities in a new context.
- For example, reuse some Bug activities in a Garden theme; recycle activities for Signs, Community Helpers, and Vehicles into your Cities theme; Pick ABC, number, color and shape activities that tie into other themes.
- Another Example: The Very Hungry Caterpillar, by Eric Carle, can work for themes on food, insects, life cycles, numbers, etc.

Choosing Your Tools:

Traditional Materials:

- Books, Folk Tales, Songs, Chants, Poems - don't forget to include props or puppets!
- Manipulatives (can they be adapted for ease of use?)
- Art Supplies, Snacks & Cooking Tools
- Other Supplies, Toys & Games:

Low Tech Materials:

- Ability Switches, with an optional Power Link or switch latch/timer
- Battery-Operated Toys &/or electrical appliances, such as blenders, spin art, poppers, CD players, etc.
- Voice Output Devices, for choice-making, sequencing, etc, not just for communication
- Other Low-Tech Adaptations:

Computer Hardware:

- Mac or Windows Computer(s)
- Alternative Access, such as IntelliKeys, TouchWindow, Trackball or Discover Switch
- Printer, scanner, digital camera, microphones, speakers, modem/internet connection, large display
- Other Hardware:

Software:

- For creating and adapting activities: Overlay Maker, IntelliPics, Kid Pix, HyperStudio, IntelliTalk or Write Outloud, etc.
- Educational Software by quality vendors like Edmark, Brøderbund, etc.
- Books on CD-ROM - always include a print copy as well!
- Other Software:

Creating Accessible Activities:

Develop an activity for each area or scheduled event in your classroom.



Story Corner:

- Choose at least one story or poem to convert to an IntelliPics story, with an overlay. Make the IntelliPics story available in the story corner for individual or cooperative exploration, and use it for a group activity.
- Gather related toy(s) or manipulative(s) for each child to use during the story.
- Pictures with sticky velcro on carpet squares are easier to manipulate than traditional flannel boards.
- Enlarge book's pages on photocopier; place in binder using plastic page protectors with stiff cardboard.



Math Station:

- An IntelliPics Counting Activity: Modify an IntelliPics Counting activity with story characters, related theme objects, etc.
- Easy-to-handle manipulatives (with magnets on a cookie sheet; with velcro on a carpet square, etc.)
- Commercial math software: activities often fit a variety of themes (carnival, circus, oceans, etc.).



Computer Station:

- Choose educational software or books on CD-ROM with a related theme. For example, Katie's Farm works for an animal theme, a friendship theme or a farm theme. The ants and jellybeans portion of Trudy's Time & Place House works for themes on colors, insects, picnics, maps, & spring.
- Try Instant Access products (IntelliTools) or Easy Overlays / Easy Scans (Don Johnston) for favorite software.
- Have related props and manipulatives available at the computer!!!



Snack Time:

- Use a Power Link and a switch to operate kitchen appliances (blenders, mixers, etc.).
- Kids can use a Voice Output device or IntelliPics activity to give recipe instructions.
- Make recipe picture cards -- or IntelliPics overlays -- that are easy to follow .
- Kids can cook cooperatively: "chef" gives directions (using a voice output device), "pourer" adds ingredients , "mixer" hits the switch to turn on the blender, etc.



Music & Songs:

- Record words to a song on a voice output device; use single-message voice output devices for refrains.
- Seek out easy-to-use musical instruments or switch-operated ones.
- Use props and posters to help kids remember the words and stay engaged!
- Kids can play musical tapes using a tape player adapted for an ability switch.
- Kids can use an ability switch to flash a light to the rhythm of the music.
- Let kids be by or touch the speaker to feel strong vibrations & rhythms in music.
- Make & explore shakers, drums, etc.



Art Station:

- Swirl paint is easily adapted for an ability switch; spin paint onto thematically shaped cards.
- Sponge painting, rubber stamps -- attach clothes pins to sponges to make them easier to handle.
- Digital cameras make a great starting point for collages or computerized cards.
- Pendulum painting or gluing
- Wheelchair painting: drag chalk or paint brush from chair; we once painted the wheels and made tracks!
- A student can give directions using a voice output device.



PE / Movement / Dance:

- Have all kids try an adapted version (table-top game; alternative movements or targets or materials); e.g. have all kids try a game blindfolded or using a non-dominant hand.
- Try "new games" with cooperative rather than competitive goals.
- Teach diverse movements for dance activities: fine motor, gross motor, etc.
- Kids with physical disabilities can direct play (e.g. Red Light Green Light).



Multi-sensory Play Area

- Hook up fan (with streamers) and music to a power link & switch; pressing the switch blows the streamers & plays the music!
- Sand, water, or corn meal (for a beach theme), soil, mud or beans (for a garden theme), etc. with a wide variety of scoops, funnels, sifters and more. Provide these activities at different heights.
- Sand-paper or puffy-paint letters, shapes, etc. glued onto tag board or onto blocks.
- Glue textures onto an overlay for a textures IntelliPics activity.
- Hot-air popper with an ability switch and Power link -- sound, vibration, temperature, smell, texture, taste.
- Stomp on or drive chair over plastic bubble-wrap.



More Fun Toys & Activities

- Battery-operated toys and games can be adapted to turn on or off with a switch. Many toys are already available from specialized catalogs. Battery-operated bubble blowers make a soothing switch toy!
- Enlarge or add handles, add velcro or magnets, modify... modify... modify...



Your Ideas: