TOOLS FOR THE TEACHER
Adapting The Classroom And Activities To Support Students With Visual Impairments

It is sometimes difficult to remember that students with visual impairments require simple adaptations that can significantly assist their participation in class activities. Below are some thoughts that might help the classroom teacher in providing some very simple strategies and ideas to make the class environment more meaningful to the student with a visual impairment.

Classroom set-up:

- Use daylight lighting when possible
- Avoid the use of overhead lighting
- Less clutter on the walls and floors will reduce the distracters within the classroom
- Try to avoid white boards (glare affects ability to see)
- Organize the class for ease of access (line the desks or place them in a semicircle)
- Have good and accessible storage spaces
- Use contrasting colours to separate the class space or for identifying specific areas in the class
- Do not change the classroom floor plan once the student is familiar with it
- Place used items in a consistent place within the class
- Use a desk top easel (wedge board) to bring visual information closer to the student's visual field on his/her desk, if appropriate
- Promote a quiet environment so that the student is able to focus on what is being discussed in the class

Position of Student:

- Student should be positioned for his/her best visual field to have full range of the board (e.g. if best visual field is the right, student should sit to the left of the class)
- Student's desk placement should remain consistent throughout the year
- There should be an easy pathway to the student's seat
- Most students benefit from sitting fairly close to the board/teacher

Tools for the Teacher:

- Universal Design: use as many modalities as possible when teaching (e.g. visual, auditory, tactile, etc.)
- Always use **your voice** to tell the student the class routine. Tell them when the lesson is beginning, call them by name when you require their attention, use your voice to emphasize

important points, describe what is happening in the class and verbally explain your expectation of your student
- Keep visual information simple and support with verbal cues
- Use adaptive tools e.g. large overhead projectors, tools that make the image larger for group presentations, technology of all types
- Use colours and contrasts when presenting information and highlight important or new information, where appropriate
- Use simple, very **concrete** and descriptive language (e.g. say 'to the right', rather than 'over there…')
- Adapt materials to meet your student's visual needs (e.g. use of tactile input, colour, voice output, tapes for auditory instructions, etc.)
- Use adaptive materials such as raised paper, tactile learning materials, etc.
- Ensure that the student is aware of the concepts being spoken about (e.g. does the student know that a car moves or do they think that the ground is moving when they get in the car?)
- Use a student chosen sound to attract the student's attention in a crowded environment as sometimes the name gets lost (e.g. a clap)
- ***Remember*** the teacher for the visually impaired will give lots of 'cues' and ideas for inclusion

Including the Student:
- Encourage group activities where the student is part of the group
- The student with a visual impairment could present an 'oral' report or presentation
- If able, oral tests may be better suited to this category of student
- Include the student with a visual impairment in group 'projects'
- Ensure that the student with the visual impairment has a specific job within the project. The job can match the student's abilities and may be as complex as working on data on the computer, to simply collecting materials with assistance
- Buddy the student with another student for some class activities and recess
- Encourage writing as a group. Journals, autobiographical books, how to books, travel books, favorite sports, hobbies etc.
- Have the student or group create books for younger students that could be made bigger, more colourful, etc.
- Some math projects could be completed in a group setting. Other math ideas may need extra tactile input and may require a more structured setting for the student to pay close attention to verbal instruction.
- For those students who also have physical and cognitive difficulties, using voice activated or other devices can allow them to participate (e.g. giving a test on a step by step; using the All-Turn-It for math questions, etc.)

A Teacher of the Visually Impaired will be able to provide more direct and student-specific strategies.

Where possible collaborate with your student, the EA and the Teacher of the Visually Impaired to identify additional strategies that will work for all concerned (i.e., you, the class and your student).