

Lesson 1: Understanding Self-Advocacy and Developing Knowledge of Self

Guidelines for Lesson Administration

These lessons can be administered to individuals or small groups of students. If working with groups of students, it is highly recommended that participating students and their parents/guardians provide consent for participation and that there is a detailed description of the lesson contents and what information will be shared amongst participants. If working with groups of students, careful consideration will be needed to protect privacy and respect individual confidentiality as much as possible. It is the lesson administrator's responsibility to ensure that the lesson plan delivery conforms to school district policies and provincial/federal laws.

Qualifications for Lesson Administration

It is recommended that these lessons be administered by an educator who has some training in special education policies, practices, and assessment.



Preparation Required Prior to Lesson Administration

Students who participate in this lesson should be aware that they have a learning disability and have a very basic understanding of how their learning disability impacts their learning. It is recommended that an educator reviews the student's IEP and psychoeducational assessment in an individual meeting prior to commencing lesson number one.

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer & Eddy (2005) indicate that for students to become successful self-advocates, students need a knowledge of self, a knowledge of rights, and the communication skills to advocate. This initial lesson will introduce the concept of self-advocacy and focus on assisting students with learning disabilities to further develop their understanding of their strengths and needs. Without this knowledge of self, students cannot be successful self-advocates.

In this lesson, students will explore their strengths and weaknesses. Many researchers and educators have identified this type of lesson as critical to the development of self-advocacy skills (Prater, Smith Redman, Anderson & Gibb, 2014; Campbell-Whatley, 2008; Phillips, 1990; Summers, White, Zhang & Gordon, 2014).

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will be able to define self-advocacy.

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2. Students will develop a further understanding of their strengths and weaknesses.
3. Students will develop the skills to express and communicate their strengths and weaknesses to an adult.

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. Handout #1: *Successful People with Learning Disabilities*
2. Handout #2: *Developing Knowledge of Self*
3. Electronic Devices with access to the Internet
4. Online Accessibility Features as needed (Ex. Text to Speech Software)

Lesson Plan (60 minutes)



Incorporating Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Learning: When beginning the lesson with a small group, you may wish to acknowledge that you are learning on the traditional territory of the local First Nation through a circle process. The process can also be used to support connection and belonging.

1. Introduce the student(s) to Prater, Smith Redman, Anderson & Gibb's (2014) definition of Self-Advocacy and its importance:

Self-Advocacy: To speak up and ask for what you need

Importance of Self-Advocacy: Self-Advocacy helps you take charge of your life and be more independent.

2. Discuss how every person has strengths and needs. Elaborate on how people must know what they need before they can begin to advocate for it.
3. Share the learning intentions with the class:

Learning Intention 1: Students will research a famous or successful person who compensates for a learning disability and be able to identify and explain this person's strengths and stretches.

Learning Intention 2: Students will create a list of their own strengths and stretches and be able to communicate them by the end of the lesson.

4. Activity #1: Successful People with Disabilities in Learning

- a) Campbell-Whatley (2008) and Phillips (1990) have used lessons where students learn about how disabilities impact others in order to destigmatize the term and develop self-advocacy skills. Highlight that there are many successful people who have

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found strategies to compensate for their learning difficulties and disabilities, developed their personal strengths, and experienced all kinds of success in the world outside of school. Some examples to share might be Johnny Depp, Albert Einstein, Tom Cruise, Thomas Edison, or Howie Mandel.

- b) Select an individual and share an article about them with students. Using explicit direct instruction, model today's activity using the graphic organizer below. You may wish to hand out paper copies of the article and read it aloud, or distribute the article electronically and have all students read it online independently with the option of using text to speech apps.

Highlight the individual's strengths, weaknesses, and strategies used from the article.

Strengths	Stretches	Strategies Used to Overcome Disability



Educator's Note: *The goal of this activity is to destigmatize Learning Disabilities and demonstrate that with strategies to compensate for one's learning disability, success in many aspects of life is very much attainable.*

- c) Provide a paper or electronic copy of Handout #1: *Successful People with Learning Disabilities* and access to an electronic device with Internet access. Review the instructions.



UDL Note: *Providing all students with a digital copy to complete will assist those students with learning disabilities who need support with easier access to text to speech programs, word processing, and spell checking features.*

- d) If working individually with a student on this lesson, simply have the student share what has been learned. If working with a small group, have students share their findings with each other and practice their communication skills. Highlight the idea that many individuals can compensate for their learning disabilities and find

success. Explicitly share this idea with the students. Some researchers have had students consider what a school day was like for one of these famous personalities (Campbell-Whatley, 2008).

5. Activity #2: Knowing Our Strengths and Weaknesses



Educator's Note: *The goal of this activity is to encourage students to think deeper about their personal strengths and weaknesses- with the goal of having students think about ways they can capitalize on their strengths and develop strategies to compensate for their weaknesses.*

- a) Explain to students that it's time to think about their strengths and stretches.
- b) Provide a paper or electronic copy of Handout #2: *Strengths and Stretches* and review the instructions for the activity. You may wish to provide students with a word bank of character traits and skills (many online resume websites offer these lists and are an excellent resource for these kinds of activities). Remind students to consider their IEP and/or psychoeducational assessment when completing the handout.
- c) To maintain confidentiality and privacy, have students hand in the graphic organizer.

6) Conclusion: Encourage students to consider what personal strengths they can use to meet the challenges and expectations of school (Summers, White, Zhang & Gordon, 2014). Additionally, students can be encouraged to consider how their strengths might be considered gifts and how their strengths might be used outside of the school setting (in regard to family, community, recreation or future careers).

Highlight the idea that students should focus on developing both their strengths and weaknesses, and that everyone develops strategies to compensate for their weaknesses. Connect the lesson's activities to the definition of self-advocacy shared at the beginning of class: "Now that we have a better understanding of ourselves, we can develop a better understanding of what we need and how to speak up and ask for what we need."

ASSESSMENT:

1. Successful completion of the graphic organizers
2. Communication of the strengths and weaknesses of a famous/successful person

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Extension Activity #1: Empowerment Posters

Using the information researched in *Successful People with Disabilities in Learning*, encourage students to create informational posters that can be displayed in the classroom to motivate students with disabilities and to destigmatize the diagnosis of a learning disability.

Extension Activity #2: Disabling Environments

Campbell-Whatley (2008) suggests asking students to consider how their disability could affect them differently (or not affect them) at various school, home, community, or work environments. Further discussion could center around the idea that “a strength in one environment could be an area of weakness in another environment” (Campbell-Whatley, 2008) or vice versa. Further discussion could also revolve around the notion that environments can be disabling (Katz, 2013).