



My Thoughts for Teachers When Working with a Child with Hydrocephalus

Written by Sarah Kell, Masters of Science in Museum Studies, born with hydrocephalus.

Each child with hydrocephalus has different strengths and challenges so you must treat them on a case-by-case basis, which will require experimenting with different modes of learning and a lot of patience!

1. It always took me a **combination of seeing, hearing, and doing** to fully learn the concept of a lesson.

Example: Doing math problems on my own piece of paper while the teacher was doing it on the board and following step-by-step, then maybe doing it one-on-one with the teacher. Lastly, doing it on my own but showing them how I did it.

2. **Repetition** to learn a concept, like writing a well-constructed paragraph, graphing in science, etc.

Example: This links into the above note. Working through several similar math problems over and over again helped me memorize how to do it so I was capable of doing it on my own in the future.

3. **Verbalize.**

Example: If I was then able to “teach” or show someone what I just did successfully, it helped me retain the information.

4. **Learning tools.** The information is there, we just need to right tools to help us organize the information and pull it out.

Example: The right learning environment is important. I, for one, am very headache prone so I work best in a quiet workplace with a patient teacher. Stress tends to make me more confused and bring on headaches, so a teacher who is encouraging versus condescending is always a plus! It’s also important to know that some of us with hydrocephalus are aware of our condition and how it might hold us back. So kind encouragement works wonders.

Example 2: Notecards with sample equations on them for the test so I know the steps to take when doing a problem.

Example 3: An agenda to clearly organize deadlines so I can prioritize and work through tasks systematically.

Always provide information as clearly and as straight forward as possible.



5. **TIME.** I tend to work slowly, so in order to create acceptable work, I need to be given however much time it will take me. It will also alleviate the stress. Even though I had extra time, I didn't always use it. It was just good to have it there as a safety net.

6. **Accepting there are going to be rough days.**

Example: How can I go from acing a class to doing poorly? Individuals with hydrocephalus do not always feel 100%. Headaches and seizures are just some of the regular symptoms that affect our performance.

7. **REMEMBER, hydrocephalus affects THE BRAIN, our NUMER ONE LEARNING TOOL, so don't be surprised if **our learning habits do not always fit a pattern.****

Example: I used to be able to work through math problems step-by-step, successfully completing each step but getting the answer wrong. How does that happen? I have a wonky brain!

Other things to note:

Like any child with a disability, **I struggled to understand 'academic language,'** particularly in a standardized test setting. I was able to get through it with extra help. I went to teachers and tutors after school who taught me how to understand and decipher the language. This really helped. Once I "memorized" what they were asking I was able to approach the tests more successfully.

During middle school I underwent multiple brain surgeries that frequently kept me out of school. I would not have graduated on time if it had not been for all the extra assistance I was lucky to receive. My teachers understood that it was more important for me to **get the information that would get me to the next level,** the foundational information, versus all the extra stuff.

Lastly, "**it takes a village**" really does apply. I recently graduated with merit from the University of Glasgow receiving my MSc in Museum Studies with a focus on Historic Collections, but I would not have made it that far without all the wonderful teachers and tutors throughout my life. As I got older it was up to me to seek additional assistance but attending study halls, going in to office hours, seeking out tutors and private one-on-one assistance, really helped me get the extra time I needed to succeed fully in academia.

