



National Apostolate for
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**Sacramental
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Individualizing
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*Promoting the Full Inclusion of People with Intellectual/ Developmental
Disabilities in the Life of the Catholic Church*

Planning Classes for Diverse Learners

By Mary Pat Carter with Marilyn E. Bishop

Teachers have known for many years that some children learn best by seeing information, others learn best by listening or hearing information and still others learn best by touching things and experiencing things using their senses. These three learning styles are referred to as visual, auditory and kinesthetic. While this is a highly simplified explanation of how we take in and process information, it provides a foundation for a discussion of children's preferences and the implications these have in planning lessons for students who learn in different ways.

Knowing that a student has a strong learning style preference can be a help when planning activities. A visual learner responds well to pictures, images, patterns, written words, and videos. An auditory learner acquires information best through oral presentation, audio cassettes, or discussion. The auditory learner prefers to listen to stories rather than read them. It is easier for the auditory learner to remember what he has heard rather than what he has seen. The kinesthetic learner relies on the senses, touch and action to obtain information. Sometimes the kinesthetic learner is referred to as a "hands on kid."

To plan class lessons for a diverse group of learners:

- Note whether your activity is primarily visual, auditory or kinesthetic.
- Consider all the senses as you plan.
- Modify the plan for students who are visually or hearing impaired or who have a motor impairment.
- Break complex or abstract concepts into simple terms with smaller steps.
- After you design the plan, determine if anyone in the class would be left out and take steps to modify the plan if necessary.

Lesson planning needs to expand beyond a purely language arts type of activities where the primary focus is to read material from

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a textbook and respond to questions in writing or discussion. An awareness of different learning styles calls on our creativity and the creativity of our students to expand the way we think about religious education activities. Not every activity is to be done in three different ways. Avoid using too many techniques as it could cause students to focus on the process rather on the message. However, bringing variety to lessons will help students to find some piece of the lesson that “hits home” for them.

Remember that students with intellectual disabilities learn in much the same way as other students: through seeing, hearing, and doing. They use these styles in a variety of mixtures, the same as others. For example, they learn by seeing and hearing and by seeing and doing. While repetition and relating the lesson to real life is important for the student with intellectual disability, it is important for all students. Rather than “leaving out” the typical student when teaching for the student with special needs, the education of every student will actually be enhanced.