

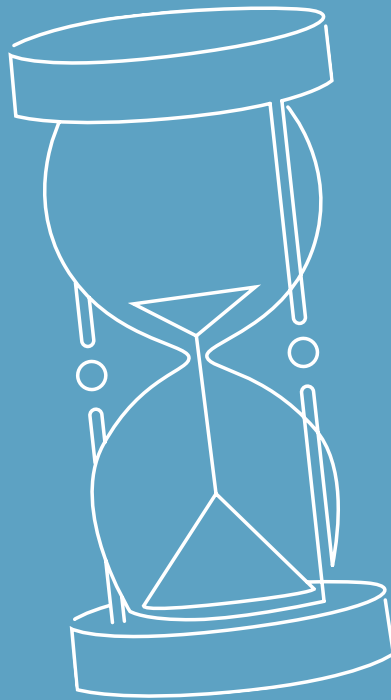
PRIMARY

Social, Environmental and Scientific Education: History

Guidelines for Teachers of Students with

MILD

General Learning Disabilities



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SESE: General introduction

Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) is presented through three subject areas in the *Primary School Curriculum*. These are history, geography and science.

Introduction

This is one of three documents designed to enable students with mild general learning disabilities to access SESE as presented in the *Primary School Curriculum*. In presenting these guidelines, recognition is given to the fact that the aims and objectives of the guidelines are the same as those outlined in the *Primary School Curriculum*. Given the breadth of the subject matter, differentiation may be necessary at many levels. The primary school SESE curriculum, however, remains the curriculum statement for this group of students and these guidelines are intended as a supplement to it rather than a replacement for it. These guidelines therefore should be read in conjunction with the primary school SESE curriculum.

The curriculum states that an understanding of the term 'environment' is essential to an appreciation of the nature of SESE and it offers the following:

The word 'environment' is used in this curriculum to denote the surroundings or external conditions with which an individual (human or other living organism) or community interacts. (Primary School Curriculum, 1999.)

Within this definition 'environment' is categorised into two broad groups, natural environments and human environments. While presented as three discrete subjects in the curriculum, history, geography and science are closely related and each seeks to provide for the students an understanding of one aspect of 'environment' both at local and global level.

By studying the constituent subjects of SESE, students are enabled to develop an awareness and appreciation of the natural, human, social, cultural and historical dimensions of life. They are also encouraged to develop an understanding of the physical world, the relationship of humans with their environment, and the historical process through which that relationship has grown.

Curriculum planning

When planning the curriculum in SESE for students with mild general learning disabilities the core principle of maintaining a balance between skills and knowledge while reflecting a spiral approach is preserved in these guidelines. There should be specific teaching of the language of history, geography and science. The following additional points should be considered.

- Students' direct experiences, fieldwork, and trips and work in the environment will be the starting point for all activities.
- Time and chronology are relevant to all three subjects in SESE and often pose a particular challenge to the student with mild general learning disabilities. The practice of recording the passing of time, of establishing classroom routines that draw the students' attention to the measurement of time, and teaching and practising the language of time are important for senior students as well as those in the junior classes. This should be done in an age-appropriate manner.
- Integration of areas within SESE and with other areas of the curriculum is important. Schools will also need to take into account that there is considerable overlap between the skills area of geography and science, and that particular skills can be developed through either curriculum.
- Time should be allocated to practise new skills and to develop competence using new equipment.
- The use of a range of methodologies for each topic will be important.

Organisational planning

In order to ensure successful planning for students with mild general learning disabilities, particular structures need to be put in place at a whole school level, in order to facilitate successful curriculum planning and to ensure agreed practices that enable the student to engage fully with the curriculum. Particular attention should be given to the following:

- Time should be provided for collaboration between class teachers, resource or learning support teachers, the principal, parents/guardians and relevant professionals to establish the strengths, areas of need and priorities of individual students. It will also be important to have agreed procedures for the use of information in psychological reports, for gaining information from previous class teachers, and for record-keeping.
- There should be agreement on the range of assessment tools and methods to be used with these students, and the resources necessary to implement them. For example, oral reports may require the student to use a dictaphone or small tape recorder.
- Working in the environment is central to the delivery of the SESE curriculum. In order to ensure that students with mild general learning disabilities engage with purpose in these activities, regular short trips that focus on the skills required to work outdoors are necessary.
- Routines common to all classes, especially those involving activities in the environment should be developed. These can be introduced to the students at the early stages of learning and developed further as they mature. They would cover issues such as safety, looking after belongings, equipment, responsible behaviour when working out doors, etc.
- Agreement should be reached on the role of school personnel such as special needs assistants or classroom assistants, given that SESE content incorporates such a high level of activity.
- Areas and sites in the environment that are appropriate areas of study at each class level and for each subject area should be identified.

- A stock of resources should be acquired, including items such as pictures, videos, computer software, artefacts, materials, tools and equipment necessary to carry out investigations in science and geography, junk material and construction toys for designing and making local maps and plans.
- A policy should be agreed on the role and use of textbooks, The SESE curriculum provides for a balance between knowledge and skills acquisition, and an essential element of SESE is that student learning is active and concrete. This feature makes the curriculum particularly accessible to students with mild general learning disabilities. Given that the vast majority of these students will experience difficulties with literacy skills, a textbook approach to SESE will only serve to exclude them.
- Environmental awareness and care should be an aspect of all activities relating to the human or natural environments.
- Identify as many ways of recording findings and presenting ideas as possible, for example oral reports, photographs, drawings, models, video, student demonstrations, role play, diagrams, charts using writing or symbols, and information technology.

Classroom planning

Planning for SESE at classroom level for students with mild general learning disabilities poses particular challenges for the teacher. The sheer scope of the three subject areas means that careful selection of content and opportunities to develop skills will be required. Classroom planning can be divided into two areas, classroom management and planning units of work. Teacher behaviour is also a significant factor in the successful delivery of the curriculum to this group of students at classroom level. The following teacher behaviour can assist the student with mild general learning disabilities to follow instructions more successfully. Teachers should

- be aware of their own language use, adjust their rate of speech, use simple vocabulary, and demonstrate word meanings
- give instructions one at a time, pointing and directing and using visual cues

- model appropriate language usage and skills, such as thinking aloud, questioning, speculating, making observations, making predictions based on simple observations, drawing attention to and commenting on similarities and differences
- demonstrate skills and activities by verbalising their actions in clear simple language
- demonstrate using the senses to make observations in an incidental manner during the school day
- make deliberate errors and self-correct out loud, showing that trial and error is an essential aspect of learning in SESE.

Classroom planning must address the issues outlined in the curriculum planning at school level, as well as planning for differentiation in the classroom to suit the particular needs of individual students with mild general learning disabilities. In order to do this the teacher will need to

- take into consideration the individual language profile of each student
- use all available information to identify the particular strengths and areas of difficulty of each student
- use this information when designing tasks, to make decisions about differentiating activities in terms of skills, content and outcomes
- plan for the fact that students with mild general learning disabilities will need additional opportunities to practise new skills and to develop competence in using new equipment, and that they will need to over-learn new content and language
- plan suitable methods for individual students to present their work.

The most important aspect of the curriculum in SESE is the interdependence of its subject areas, and its links with other areas of the curriculum. The *Primary School Curriculum* recommends an integrated theme approach to the three areas of SESE, particularly in the junior classes. It is important that an integrated theme approach is the primary method used with students at the senior end of the school also. This approach has a number of features that make it attractive for students with mild general learning disabilities:

- it is more efficient in terms of teaching and learning time
- it allows for the transfer of knowledge and skills from one area to another
- it allows the teacher to plan themes that begin with a context very familiar to the student, and then to extend that theme outwards into unfamiliar contexts
- in planning for learning through themes, the teacher can more easily strike a balance between the presentation of the historic, the geographic, and the scientific aspects of content.

Assessment

The purpose of assessment for students with mild general learning disabilities, as for all students, is to provide information on student progress and to plan for further learning. The tools used by teachers will be the same as those used for the general population of students but may need to be adjusted in order to facilitate individual student needs.

Classroom management

Classroom management issues are those organisational issues that maximise participation and learning in the classroom. Structures should be put in place that encourages the student to work as independently as possible at all stages of the learning process. Those that may be relevant to the SESE subjects are as follows:

- Match the needs of the student to the activity and employ a variety of seating arrangements to suit these. At times students may work best in pairs, in groups or individually. Students with attention difficulties may benefit from having access to a quiet work area where individual work can be carried out and timed. This area should be partially enclosed and completely free from all visual distractions such as pictures, displays or windows.
- Students can be taught to use checklists to guide them through regular work routines in the classroom. They can begin using simple steps outlined on a chart with pictures, symbols or words. Over time the students can come to verbalise these and to monitor their progress as they work. Predictable routines are particularly important for working in the environment as they provide a structure for the student.
- Students need to have access within the classroom to resources that enable them to participate in hands-on activities relating to history, geography and science. Some of these are outlined in detail in the subject areas.
- Safety is an important issue for all students. Advice on student safety while working in the environment and carrying out investigations in geography and science is offered in the *Primary School Curriculum*. For students with mild general learning disabilities it is important that safety rules are explicitly taught and practised regularly. Symbols representing hazards and the safe use of equipment and tools should also receive regular attention. Much of this work can be practised and extended through SPHE.

- Planning for appropriate and varied methods of communication of ideas and understanding is an essential part of planning work units for students with mild general learning disabilities. This may require easy access to suitable equipment such as a tape-recorder, a camera, a video camera, a computer, and construction or art materials, as well as appropriate writing materials.
- The methodologies suggested for SESE are entirely activity based. In order to implement these, careful consideration needs to be given to the best use of extra personnel such as special needs assistants and classroom assistants.
- Initiating investigations arising from students' own questions is a key aspect of the SESE programme. Students with mild general learning disabilities may be less likely to pose questions relating to phenomena spontaneously, but the teacher can promote this by deliberately arranging situations, which lead to observations and questions. For example, placing tools or vessels made of paper in the sand or water play areas could lead to questions as to why they don't work, and to an investigation of the most appropriate materials for use with water etc.

History: Rationale and introduction

In the *Primary School Curriculum* history is presented as one aspect of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education, and is intended to complement the development of students' geographical and scientific skills.

Rationale

The *Primary School Curriculum* emphasises that in order to provide a rounded historical education it is important that the curriculum reflects the nature of history itself, which is concerned with knowledge and interpretations of the lives of people in the past, and also with enabling students to experience something of the way in which historians go about their work.

By examining the influence of the past on the present, within different contexts, the student can come to understand how his/her identity has been shaped. In examining historical themes students can develop an understanding of time and chronology, change and continuity, and cause and effect appropriate to their level of development. Exploring the lives of people in the past also facilitates the development of empathy, and an understanding of the motivation and actions of others.

History can contribute to the development of students with mild general learning disabilities in a number of ways. Firstly, it can develop a sense of identity within family and community and thereby enhance their self-esteem. Secondly, history contributes to the development of empathy, which is essential for the development of personal relationships. Finally, in presenting history as an aspect of environmental studies, students are encouraged to value and respect aspects of their own heritage and that of other cultures.

Introduction

The topics to be explored in history are presented in the strands of the curriculum. These strands set out the major historical periods for the students to study, the particular genres of historical enquiry, for example local studies, and the methodological approaches. They also provide guidance for schools selecting topics or strand units to suit their students. The curriculum suggests a process of historical reflection that examines both the local environment and experiences of local, national and international communities from the past.

The strands of the history curriculum

Infants classes	First and second classes
Strand unit	Strand unit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Myself and my family ■ Story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Myself and my family ■ Change and continuity ■ Story
Third and fourth classes	Fifth and sixth classes
Strand unit	Strand unit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Local studies ■ Story ■ Early people and ancient societies ■ Life, society, work and culture in the past ■ Continuity and change over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Local studies ■ Story ■ Early people and ancient societies ■ Eras of change and conflict ■ Politics, conflict and society ■ Life, society, work and culture in the past ■ Continuity and change over time

A number of important observations about the content of the *Primary School Curriculum* in relation to students with mild general learning disabilities should be considered. The first is the fact that both *personal* and *local history* feature at every level of the curriculum. This makes planning a programme of work in this area possible right through from infant to senior class level. *Story* also features at every level and this offers an opportunity to address particular challenges faced by these students in relation to language development, for example vocabulary, sequencing, making connections and associations. The inclusion of *Change and continuity* at all three levels allows the teacher to use methodologies that will develop these students' sense of time and chronology through line development studies. Tracing changes in clothing, transport or housing over time offers opportunities for the student to develop a visual mental map relating to periods of time, to explore how change comes about, and to understand that, despite enormous change, basic human needs remain the same.

Early people and ancient societies and *Life, society, work and culture in the past* are common strands in the middle and senior class programmes. The curriculum states that in studying these strands the focus is on the everyday experiences of people, their homes, food, technologies, work, culture, art and social customs. The overlap in content within strand units is designed to facilitate a spiral approach to the curriculum through which students at senior level can return to topics previously looked at, and examine them in greater detail. This approach is particularly suitable for students with mild general learning disabilities as it means that differentiation can be planned, thus ensuring progression from junior to senior level. Two strands, *Eras of change and conflict* and *Politics, conflict and society* appear only in the fifth and sixth class programme. The *Primary School Curriculum: History, Teacher Guidelines* acknowledge that *'they involve some understanding of abstract concepts which would be beyond the grasp of younger children'*. For students with mild general learning disabilities these strands will have to be carefully considered at both school and classroom planning level.

Skills: Working as a historian

The skills section of the history curriculum, *Working as a historian*, outlines the particular skills that students should develop as they encounter the different historical topics of the course. The curriculum states that these skills can only be developed in the context of studies outlined in the content strands and cannot be taught in isolation.

Time and chronology

Sequencing events in the order that they occurred over a period of time forms the basis of chronological awareness. Developing a sense of time and chronology is important if students are to benefit from the study of history, as it allows the student to examine evidence of change and the factors that contributed to that change. The curriculum notes that *'a sense of time may not develop, but it may be taught'* to very young children. Developing an understanding of time and chronology can pose a particular challenge for students with mild general learning disabilities. To enable these students to move from a predominating interest in the 'here and now' they must develop a sense of time and chronological awareness. History presents unique opportunities to develop these skills and historical activities will also complement time-related learning in mathematics, science and geography. In addressing the development of this skill, the student should progress from exploring elements in their own past, to elements from the early, middle and modern periods. While a strictly chronological approach to history is not recommended in the curriculum, a chronological treatment of some topics may be particularly useful for these students. Extensive and continuous experience of sequencing events in chronological order using concrete and pictorial timelines is necessary for students with mild general learning disabilities of all ages.

Change and continuity

By examining change and continuity over time students come to understand that things have not always been the same and that change is an essential part of the human condition. They will also come to understand that certain basic human needs have remained the same throughout the centuries. By learning to recognise the contribution that people from the past have made to the present, students may begin to value and appreciate aspects of the environment that have survived to the present day.

It is important to help students with mild general learning disabilities to develop an acceptance that things do change and to encourage flexible attitudes to change.

Cause and effect

By examining the reasons for change, students learn to question and make judgements about factors that contribute to change over time. The curriculum acknowledges that interpreting the range of factors that contributed to change over extended periods of time and making judgements about them requires a complex level of historical understanding. However, interpreting people's motivations and making judgements about the outcomes of their actions can be explored very simply through story. For students with mild general learning disabilities the opportunities to observe outcomes, make comparisons, and make alternative predictions about what might have happened if things were different, presents scope for them to develop their oral language ability and to learn through language. The importance of these opportunities is stressed in the communication and language section of the curriculum.

Using evidence

Our understanding of the past is based on questions and the inferences we draw from evidence. By enabling students to engage with a variety of sources of evidence we encourage them to question, justify, and draw conclusions about the evidence presented. In the curriculum the use of evidence is confined to *'primary sources (those created at the time to which they relate, for example utensils, tools, buildings, photographs, contemporary letters, newspapers)'*. This skill is particularly important for students with mild general learning disabilities since they may have difficulty distinguishing fact from fiction. Encouraging students to look for evidence and constantly ask 'how do we know this?' will assist the development of their comprehension skills generally.

Synthesis and communication

Historical work involves the ability to reconstruct the past from a number of sources, and communicate an interpretation of this to others. In order to do this one must be able to synthesise an account, draw on a number of sources and use one's imagination to make a reconstruction, which is then communicated to others. To enable students with mild general learning disabilities to develop this skill they must be exposed to a range of learning methodologies and encouraged to communicate their work to others using as many techniques as possible.

Language and communication in history

The *Primary School Curriculum: History, Teacher Guidelines* states that *'in view of the pervasive influence of language throughout the teaching and learning process, examples of integration involving language and history are not delineated'*. Recognition is however given to the fact that the development of historical skills and concepts through listening, retelling and discussion is dependent upon the student's language skills. Enabling students with mild general learning disabilities to engage with the history curriculum depends, therefore, on the use of appropriate strategies for oral language development. The challenges faced by the student and teacher in this area are outlined in the communication and language section of these guidelines and should be referred to when planning areas of study.

Empathy

In acquiring an understanding of the past students are enabled to speculate on the feelings and actions of other people in different times. The ability to empathise with others is an important social skill.

Addressing potential areas of difficulty for students with mild general learning disabilities

▲ Potential area of difficulty	= Implications for learning
Delayed language development/poor vocabulary	<p><i>This may result in the student having</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • difficulty with the language of history • delayed development of the student's skills relating to history.
+ Possible strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Teach the language of history directly. ■ Label people, places, things. ■ Provide extensive experience of sequencing, predicting, comparing. ■ Refer to the oral language development section of the communication and language document. 	

▲ Potential area of difficulty	= Implications for learning
Delayed development of concepts relating to time and chronology	<p><i>This may result in the student having</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • problems differentiating between the past, the present and the future • a poor understanding of measurement of time and consequent difficulty discriminating between recent and ancient past • difficulties applying the language of time.
+ Possible strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Clearly identify periods of historical time right up to senior level in an age appropriate manner. ■ Note the passage of time over weeks and months; referring to the calendar, '<i>remember last week</i>', or '<i>in three weeks time we will be going on tour</i>'. ■ Provide a daily routine with a journal or timetable for older students. ■ Teach the language of time directly at all levels. ■ Observe seasonal changes at all levels. ■ Present timelines at every level, using objects at junior level and pictorial at senior level. ■ Use personal references when talking about a period in time, for example '<i>when your mammy was a little girl</i>'. 	

▲ Potential area of difficulty	= Implications for learning
Distinguishing fact from fiction	<p><i>This may result in the student</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • viewing historical events as simply stories, or stories as fact • developing a very uncritical view of events and simply accepting everything as fact and truth.
+ Possible strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide a range of activities examining evidence in history, geography and science, as they all contribute to the development of critical thinking skills. ■ Teach the language relating to fiction, legend, and fairy tale directly. ■ The teacher models using evidence: <i>'I know this because ...'</i> ■ Discuss aspects of story in order to establish whether something could or could not happen. 	

▲ Potential area of difficulty	= Implications for learning
Transfer of knowledge from one area to another/ application of previously learned knowledge (applies to all areas of the curriculum).	<p><i>This may result in the student</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having difficulty in applying relevant skills learned in history to other areas of the curriculum • having difficulty in applying skills to real-life situations.
+ Possible strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Plan integrated theme studies which draw together knowledge from geography and science and other areas of the curriculum. 	

▲ Potential area of difficulty	= Implications for learning
Delayed literacy skills	<p><i>This may result in the student</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not benefiting from the curriculum if there is an over reliance on texts • having difficulty if the only form of recording activities is through written work.
+ Possible strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use texts as a resource only and place equal value on pictures and text. Some books should be selected for the pictures only. ■ Plan alternative methods of recording: teacher annotating, students' drawings, oral reports, models, graphics, diagrams, role-play, and drama. 	

History: Approaches and methodologies

A very attractive feature of the *Primary School Curriculum* history programme is the range of approaches and methodologies that it offers to teachers.

A wide variety of these approaches and methodologies should be used with students with mild learning disabilities so that they can gain as much linguistic and visual experience of a topic as possible.

Detailed descriptions of the benefits and use of all these approaches and methodologies are presented in the *Primary School Curriculum: History, Teacher Guidelines*. Exemplars are also presented. Here we examine these methodologies in light of the particular challenges faced by students with mild general learning disabilities and make a number of suggestions that teachers might like to consider in their planning and teaching. We also examine some of the exemplars, and suggest how differentiation might be incorporated in order to provide access for the student with mild general learning disabilities.

Story

Using stories in history teaching can promote the student's development in a number of ways. It assists with the development of their listening and recall skills, extends their vocabulary and knowledge, develops a sense of chronology by drawing attention to sequence, and appeals to their emotions and imagination by introducing them to the lives of people in the past. The *Primary School Curriculum* suggests that story can be used in a number of ways, including

- as independent units of work, for example biographical accounts of people from a variety of backgrounds
- as a stimulus for the introduction of a topic
- as part of a wider piece of work on an historical theme, in order to enable the student to '*make the imaginative jump from the present to the context of the historical period*'.

The curriculum also distinguishes between *'telling a story'* and *'reading stories and historical fiction'*. Story telling is particularly effective when teaching students with mild general learning disabilities. It enables the teacher to

- use vocabulary and language that is accessible to the student
- dramatise, through speech and gesture, significant episodes of the story
- use direct speech where necessary to draw the student closer to the characters
- make eye contact with the students in order to maintain their attention
- pace the telling of the story to accommodate the students' receptive skills.

Reading stories and historical fiction poses particular challenges for the teacher. In preparing to read a historical novel or story to students the teacher should

- do some preliminary work with students that will set the novel in time and in context—providing visual images, of clothes, homes, modes of transport, etc. to which the student can refer
- remind the students of any previous knowledge or experience they have had relating to the topic
- provide explicit instruction relating to vocabulary
- pre-read the novel in order to judge the complexities of the language and concepts
- simplify, paraphrase or eliminate complex language and concepts
- allocate different periods of class time for comment, repetition, retelling, or reference to the story.

Exemplar 1: History

Strand: Story

Strand unit: Myths and legends

Level: Third and fourth class

(based on Exemplar 8 in the Primary School Curriculum: St Brendan's Voyage to America)

Preparing the background

The *Primary School Curriculum* emphasises the importance of thorough preparation for successful story telling. This preparation involves the teacher familiarising himself/herself with background information about the period in which the story is set in order to present a more complete picture to the listener. It is also important that the teacher has an full understanding of the levels of language, information, and imagery that students with mild general learning disabilities have in relation to the context of the story, so that they can focus on its most important aspect. In dealing with the St Brendan story this might entail short discussions relating to the following:

- the Atlantic Ocean, its vast size and location on the globe, the possible time it might take to cross it in a boat, the notion of spending days, nights, and weeks on a boat
- boats and the students' experience of them: big and small boats, sailing boats, movement of boats on water, what would happen in a small boat if the waves are big, water coming in, implications for those on the boat, getting wet, feeling cold
- possible weather conditions at sea, the language to describe these (storms, mist, fog), drawing on the students' own experiences and images that they already have from television and film
- whales: establishing some concepts of size and movements, why the whale has to surface, etc.
- a monk and missionary: drawing on the students' previous knowledge (St Patrick as a missionary), creating a visual image of simple life and simple clothes.

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Imagine and plan the story

In this exemplar the storyteller is encouraged to prepare the story mentally in episodes before telling it. He/she should also plan for adjustments in language and concepts according to the needs of the group. The story is broken into the following distinct episodes:

- introduction of the character, his love of sailing, and life as a monk
- building the boat and setting sail with the other monks
- traveling a long time in all weathers, spotting an 'island' and landing
- lighting a fire, fear and terror as the 'island' sinks
- discovering that the 'island' is a whale, the whale accompanying the boat on the remainder of its journey to a new land.

The teacher is encouraged to plan for the use of props—a model of a boat, pictures of Brendan and the other monks, a picture of a whale, a 'tunic' to wrap around the story teller as the weather grows cold.

Exemplar 1: History

Tell the story

In telling the story the teacher can vary the tone, pace and pitch of his/her voice to dramatic effect, in order to keep the students' interest. Gesture and movement will also assist the students' understanding of the story and help maintain their attention. For students with mild general learning disabilities the telling of the story might be differentiated in the following ways:

- Use contrasts in the story that enable the students to create dramatic visual images, for example *'the tiny little boat'* out in the *'big wide Atlantic Ocean.'*
- The story need not be told in one session. For students with mild general learning disabilities, breaking the story into one or two episodes per session will give them an opportunity to recap on vocabulary and concepts at the beginning of the next session and to engage in follow-up activities relating to significant episodes. For example, the opportunity to make model boats after the second episode allows the teacher to explore the significance of the simple design of the boat with the students as well as providing opportunities to explore cause and effect, for example, to make the boat move you must blow into the sail. Understanding the effect that no wind has on the boat gives the students greater insight to the image of the boat becalmed in fog as stated in the next episode. This also provides an opportunity to encourage prediction through asking *'what if'* questions.
- Drawing or providing pictures after each episode will also confirm the sequence of the story for the students.

Discussion

It is important that the teacher attempts through differentiation to enable the students to participate in structured discussion, at the every possible level, following the telling of the story.

Exemplar 1: **History**

Levels of discussion suggested in the exemplar	Possible strategies
Simple recall questions to clarify the episodes in the story.	<p>Strategies may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing accurate vocabulary where a student struggles with recall, or substitutes <i>'thing'</i> or <i>'yoke'</i> for the correct word, by repeating the sentence appropriately: <i>'Yes that's right he built a boat.'</i>
Recalling the sequence of events.	<p>Strategies may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arranging a series of pictures so that they tell the story • removing pictures from the sequence and asking the students to say what's missing • retelling the story using the pictures, encouraging the use of first, and then last • retelling the story without visual clues.
Discussion and speculation on cause and effect.	<p>Strategies may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the teacher participating as part of the group and thinking aloud, <i>'I think ... maybe, etc.'</i> • offering a number of possible suggestions but confirming for the student there is no one right answer • gently guiding the discussion and assisting the students to stay on topic.
Speculation on the emotions and feelings of the characters.	<p>Strategies may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the teacher modeling responses to open questions, thinking aloud, and offering opinions • assisting the students by offering contrasts, for example <i>'How do you think the monks felt out in the tiny little boat in the big ocean—when it was getting dark? In the fog?'</i> etc.

Exemplar 1: **History**

Levels of discussion suggested in the exemplar	Possible strategies
Identifying elements of the story which may be true, and those that are imagined.	<p>Strategies may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focusing on one aspect of the story, for example the episode where the monks mistake the whale for an island and light a fire, rather than examining the whole story in relation to what is real or imagined • breaking the episode up into smaller parts: <i>'Do you think the monks could climb up on the whale's back?'</i>, while the teacher should think aloud, <i>'I think he might move—then again maybe he was asleep'</i> • trying to get the students to use their knowledge about whales as evidence to justify their statements.
Linkage and integration.	<p>Strategies may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • examining other guidelines: language and communication, geography, visual arts, science.

Exemplar 1: History

Using evidence

The history curriculum places great emphasis on the use of evidence irrespective of the level at which students are. By examining and handling evidence students are encouraged to question, make associations, observe, compare and make deductions. In the communication and language section of these guidelines teachers are encouraged to *'treat students as thinkers'*. Engaging with evidence through oral presentations, pictures, photographs, artefacts, documents and buildings offers opportunities for the teacher to extend the thinking and communication skills of the students with mild general learning disabilities. It will also help them to develop a sense of time and chronology and heighten their awareness of the need to preserve evidence from the past.

Oral evidence

Providing opportunities for students with mild general learning disabilities to hear oral evidence about the past has particular benefits. It makes the past a reality for students in that it puts them in contact with people who have lived in a different era. It can draw attention to the everyday experiences of people in the past in a way that documentary evidence may not. It provides opportunities for students to pose questions and receive answers, descriptions and clarification. It allows students to share the feelings of people who have experienced particular events in the past, and it contributes to the development of the students' sense of time. The history guidelines note that *'some educationalists now argue that children's lack of prolonged, regular contact with grandparents and members of the extended family has had a detrimental effect on their sense of the past and of their own relationship to it'*. For students with mild general learning disabilities this will be compounded by their difficulty of relating to time and chronology. Exemplar 10 'Interviewing an older person' in the *Primary School Curriculum: History, Teacher Guidelines* outlines the planning and preparation that is required before such an interview. The following exemplar suggests extra strategies that might be included when using this method with students with mild general learning disabilities.

Exemplar 2: History

Title:
Interviewing
an older
person

Lesson: Infants to sixth classes

Level: Third and fourth class
(based on Exemplar 10: Interviewing an older person, in Primary School Curriculum: History, Teacher Guidelines)

Clarify the focus of the interview

Strategies may include

- establishing the focus of the interview—choosing and delegating one aspect of the interview (home, play, toys, school, clothes) with which students with mild general learning disabilities have direct experience.

Choosing and preparing interviewees

Strategies may include

- preparing the interviewee by alerting him/her to the needs of the student: for example appropriate language, rate of speech, clear and simple descriptions, and allowing the student time to ask a question
- making the interviewee aware of the need to be sensitive when seeking clarification from a student
- encouraging the interviewee to bring photographs or objects which might assist him/her in clarifying meaning for the students.

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Preparing for the visit

Strategies may include

- assisting the students in establishing some visual image of the period under discussion by showing pictures or photographs relating to that time
- assisting the students in establishing a sense of time by placing a picture on the timeline and relating the period to people in the students' own life, for example, '*when your granny was a little girl*', '*before your mammy and daddy were born*'
- pre-determining questions in the form of a simple questionnaire to help them get started, and encouraging them to remain engaged with the interviewee
- giving students the opportunity to rehearse asking questions
- modeling the asking of questions by drawing attention to the tone of voice, rate of speech, the importance of making eye contact, etc.
- making students aware that they can ask other relevant questions
- clarifying for the students how answers will be recorded particularly if a tape recorder or video is not being used, assigning a more able student or adult to write answers
- grouping the students according to language and social capabilities
- cautioning students about asking personal or inappropriate questions, and about sharing inappropriate personal information relating to themselves during the interview.

Exemplar 2: History

The interview

Strategies may include

- having the teacher involved at the periphery to encourage and assist the students to participate in a meaningful manner.

Follow-up

Strategies may include

- providing these students with a number of short follow-up sessions in order to let them practise new vocabulary, to establish facts, and to progress to making associations and deductions from the information they have gathered.

Using artefacts

An historical artefact is defined in *Primary School Curriculum: History, Teacher Guidelines* as ‘any surviving object that has been used by people in the past for practical and/or aesthetic purposes’. Examining artefacts allows students to develop a greater understanding of the lives of ordinary men, women and children, to appreciate the creativity of people in the past, to recognise that knowledge and expertise is something that is progressively built upon, and to examine instances of cause, effect, change and continuity. Examining artefacts is of particular benefit to students with mild general learning disabilities as it allows them to use all their senses. When choosing artefacts, consideration should be given to the fact that they must be handled by students and that they should relate to a wide range of human activities. Students with mild general learning disabilities should be given the experience of examining artefacts relating to their own lives. Old toys, items of clothing etc. will help them to understand their own development as well as helping them to understand the value of these items as sources of information. This focus on the students’ past is equally relevant at senior level.

Exemplar 11 in *Primary School Curriculum: History, Teacher Guidelines* suggests a framework for examining practically any historical artefact. This framework is also relevant and accessible to students with mild general learning disabilities. When using this framework the teacher should take into consideration the potential areas of difficulty of students as outlined in the communication and language section of these guidelines. Exemplar 12 suggests a range of activities for using artefacts. The following exemplar suggests how these activities might be differentiated to make them accessible to students with mild general learning disabilities.

Exemplar 3: History

Title: Modern to old

Level: Second to fourth classes

(Based on Exemplar 12: Activities and artefacts)

Students are asked to examine a modern object such as an electric kettle and to compare it with older models, for example an older electric kettle, a heavy kettle used on a solid fuel cooker, and a 'black' iron kettle traditionally used over an open fire.

They are asked to

- compare and comment on the suitability of design, given the technology of the day
- put the items in chronological order giving reasons for their chosen sequence.

Strategies may include

- informally assessing the level of knowledge the students already have relating to the object, for example do they know its purpose, do they have the vocabulary to describe its parts (spout, handle, flex, etc.), can they make appropriate comparisons in relation to capacity and weight?—allowing them time to acquire and practice new vocabulary
- asking them to identify major differences, then moving on to minor differences
- providing pictures of the different kettles being used in a modern kitchen and in a kitchen with an open fire, so that the students can comment on the suitability of the object as it was used at that time
- presenting pictures of kitchens from different times that do not have the kettles in them, and asking students to identify which model would have been used in which particular kitchen.

Objects and oral evidence

This involves asking someone who is familiar with objects to demonstrate their use. The exemplar suggests a butter-making churn.

Strategies may include

- assessing the students' awareness of where and how butter is made in modern times and doing some background work
- addressing language issues that might arise during the demonstration, for example churning, mixing, solid, liquid, etc.
- putting the activity in context by showing pictures from the period.

Exemplar 3: History

Lost luggage: all classes

This is an exercise that challenges students to examine all the available evidence and deduce as much information as possible from it.

For example, students are asked to establish as many facts as they can from the contents of a handbag, a case, or pockets in a piece of clothing.

Strategies may include

- dressing up games: *'Who am I? Am I a doctor, a garda, a nurse, etc.?'* with students justifying their answers
- using the students own bags: *'Who owns this bag? How do we know?'*—and then examining the evidence
- suggesting *'I'm going on a journey to the shopping centre/on a holiday to London—what do I need to bring in my bag?'*
- engaging students in the actual activity outlined in the exemplar, while the teacher records the deductions arrived at from the evidence by sketching a picture, or writing words so that the students can recognise and sequence established facts, and continue to move through the activity
- verbally guiding students through the activity, working from the very obvious questions, such as *'Do these belong to a man, a woman, a child?'*, to more speculative questions.

Archaeology: 3rd to 6th

Students should be made aware of the ways in which archaeologists learn about ancient societies.

Strategies may include

- direct teaching of vocabulary relating to archeology, (archeologist, dig, site, remains, evidence, etc.)
- direct or recorded experience of archeologist at work
- identifying sites in the locality that may be of interest to archeologists.

Exemplar 3: History

Pictures and photographs

Pictures and photographs can be used with students of all ages and abilities to develop their history skills. In particular they present opportunities to develop language, to compare and contrast periods of time, to sequence events over time, and to speculate and make deductions about eras, events and people. Pictures and photographs are particularly good sources for students with mild general learning disabilities as they can, for example, be easily placed on timelines and used as visual points of reference relating to particular eras. Exemplars 12, 13 and 14 in *Primary School Curriculum: History, Teacher Guidelines* outline different ways that pictures and photographs can be used. Although the content of these exemplars is already suitable for students with mild general learning disabilities the following issues should also be considered when using them.

- Put the picture in context for the students. Where is this place? When was the picture taken or painted? Mark the timeline with other images that complement the picture. Put the time in a personal context for the students if possible, for example *'when your granny was a little girl'*.
- Always begin by asking the students to consider the whole scene and then to focus on elements such as transport, buildings, clothes etc. one at a time.
- It may be more productive to spend a few short sessions examining a picture rather than one long one. In this way students with mild general learning disabilities get the opportunity to absorb new language and to practise using it at the beginning of each session. The steps outlined in Exemplar 13 could be used for a short lesson on a particular picture.

Pictures and photographs can be used to encourage the development of many of the skills relating to history.

- Sequencing photographs on timelines can develop concepts and language relating to time and chronology. This should begin with photographs of the students themselves, and extend to previous generations of their families. Students can then move to pictures and photographs concerned with particular eras. Pictures of the student's own place in previous decades or centuries are particularly beneficial.
- An understanding of change and continuity can be developed through photographs. This should start at a very simple level. Students with mild general learning disabilities activities should preferably begin with the personal and the familiar. Photographs of the student and his/her family at intervals of five years could be presented and compared to each other, and the students asked to note the changes. School photos taken at ten or twenty-year intervals could be compared and, as well as commenting on change, the students should also be encouraged to observe what has remained the same. Places familiar to the student, for example the area around the school or places around the student's home environment should also be used where possible.
- Although documentary evidence is dealt with in the next section, students should also come to understand that photographs and pictures are records of times past, and constitute evidence. Skills relating to evidence are therefore equally applicable when examining them.
- Pictures and photographs can also be a valuable study in themselves. A developmental study might demonstrate to the students how people have communicated through pictures from as far back as the Stone Age. Stone Age cave pictures, stone carvings, tapestry, oil paintings, drawings, photographs, home videos, can all be placed on a timeline. This activity has particular relevance for students with mild general learning disabilities, as it validates pictures and drawings as legitimate means of recording and communication.

Exemplar 3: History

Using the environment

The three subjects contained in SESE, history, geography and science, require students to engage in regular investigations and studies in the environment. Exemplar 15 in the *Primary School Curriculum: History, Teacher Guidelines* offers advice to teachers in relation to trails and guided work directives. This exemplar is also valid for students with mild general learning disabilities and should be read in conjunction with the advice in *Learning about the local environment* that is contained in the geography section of this document.

Documentary evidence

Examining simple documentary evidence is a method that can play an important part in both personal and local studies. It is also a method that can be used to investigate aspects of national and international history. The skills that may be developed through examination of documentary evidence include

- identifying and selecting information
- making deductions from information presented
- presenting information in different formats, for example graphs, diagrams, pictures, etc.
- comparing two or more pieces of evidence
- assessing the motives, feelings and perspective of the author of a particular document, for example a letter or a diary
- synthesising an account of some historical event from a number of pieces of evidence.

The *Primary School Curriculum* offers advice as to how documentary evidence might be made accessible to students. This advice, which addresses content, writing style in original documents, vocabulary and pictorial supports, is also relevant to students with mild general learning disabilities. However, as with all other aspects of the curriculum, these students learn best when new skills and content are introduced through situations that are personal to them. The following exemplar outlines a range of activities that will focus the students' attention on personal and everyday sources of documentary evidence. These activities should help the student with mild general learning disabilities to

- appreciate the importance of personal documentation as a source of information and also help them to decode it
- to understand the relevance of historical documents in providing information about the lives of people in the past
- develop important social literacy skills when examining personal documentation
- to enhance their sense of identity.

Examination of items from the student's own personal history should be carried out with senior, as well as junior students. When examining such documents the teacher should help the student to understand how information is organised in the document and also pose the following two questions:

- What is this document about?
- What information is in it?

Exemplar 4: History

Title: Additional activities relating to documentary evidence

Scrapbooks

Students can be encouraged to keep scrapbooks from a very young age and these should be continued at senior level. An annual scrapbook can document events such as birthdays, family celebrations, local community events, trips, and items that capture the student's personal interest locally, nationally or internationally. Encourage students to collect cards, bus tickets, admission tickets, leaflets, fliers, and newspaper cuttings to record events that are relevant to them or have captured their interest in some way. These items can be pasted into the scrapbook and dated. They should then provide a focus for discussion throughout the year. Encourage students to collect a number of items relating to one event and to compile an oral account of the event using the information gleaned from the items.

Class diary

This can be kept as a big book or as personal news copies, and referred to from time to time. Questions can be raised informally in the class that require students to consult the diary in order to

- clarify information and to establish when something happened
- re-live aspects of class life.

This will give students an understanding that diaries reflect reality in a person's life and they are personal. Older students can be encouraged to keep personal diaries and record events in pictorial or written form.

Membership/identity cards

All students at some stage will have experienced applying for membership of clubs, a library, or classes. Studying membership cards, students should be encouraged to

- look at the information on the card itself, for example what it tells us about the organisation/the activity/the person
- examine the process the student had to go through to get the card (whether there was any other documentation required, for example birth certificate/parent or guardian's signature)
- consider what membership means for the student
- examine a collection of cards and make deductions about a fictitious person in the kind of 'lost luggage' activity outlined in Exemplar 3.

Exemplar 4: History

School documents

Students can be introduced to school documents as evidence and examine information relating to themselves. They could examine

- their own attendance record over a number of terms or years
- past school reports
- certificates of achievement
- workbooks and projects from previous classes (helping students to appreciate the amount of progress they have made)
- old school newsletters
- accounts of sports days
- concert programmes
- school photographs.

Important personal documents

Understanding the importance of certain personal documents and the fact that they should be kept safely is an important social skill. The importance of a birth certificate, for example, and the fact that it is required to get other documents such as a passport should be indicated to older students. Senior students can also be made aware that providing personal documentation is often a requirement in society. This can be done through discussion or role-play around topics such as

- travel—obtaining a passport, visa, tickets
- driving—obtaining a driving licence, tax disc, insurance disc, learner plates.

Looking at newspapers

The Primary School Curriculum suggests old newspapers, particularly old local newspapers, as appropriate documents for use in the classroom. Students with mild general learning disabilities in senior classes should have experience of using current newspapers to access information such as television listings, advertisements, entertainment listings, and accessible news stories. The following activities will enable students with mild general learning disabilities to develop their historical skills when using current and old newspapers:

- using scrapbooks to build records of major events from newspaper cuttings, for example the Olympic Games, the All Ireland Final, the World Cup, the inauguration of a new president, which can be examined and discussed some months after the event and kept in the school and used as documentary references for students in later years
- comparing old and current newspapers in terms of content—what has changed, the number of TV listings, types of entertainment, photographs, advertisements, money.

Exemplar 4: **History**

Drama and role-playing

Drama is described in the history curriculum as an ideal methodology for teaching history. Through speaking and acting the role of an historical character, the students are enabled to

- empathise with characters from the past
- view situations in a broad context.

The drama guidelines in this suite of documents provide important information about using drama with students with mild general learning disabilities. These should be read in conjunction with the suggestions for drama and history as set out in the *Primary School Curriculum*.