

## The ‘language-friendly’ primary classroom: Improving curriculum accessibility for students with language difficulties.

To summarise this background information, students with oral and written language difficulty often do not have the skills needed for the proficient understanding and learning of the academic curriculum. They may find new vocabulary and terminology overly complex, and the rate of delivery and amount of information presented at any one time too demanding. They may be challenged with processing and retaining information, also with demonstrating their knowledge through oral and written expression. Students with language difficulty may not even attempt a task if they think they cannot successfully undertake and complete it.

Making the curriculum more accessible to students with additional language-based learning needs aims to:

- Reduce the likelihood of failure by increasing opportunities for the students’ academic achievement.
- Increase the students’ classroom engagement in all oral and written language-based activities.
- Address the impact of disengagement and failure on students’ behavior and mental health.

Teachers are often wary of adjusting the way they present curriculum content. They may be concerned that they are not fulfilling curricular directives or that they are being unfair to other students with no additional learning needs. However, in this program, increased accessibility to the curriculum is brought about through teachers applying instructional language modification techniques to their regular teaching practices, and not by making changes to the curriculum content. Additionally, curriculum accessibility involves having realistic expectations of what each student can achieve, and the amount of support needed for the task, thereby giving the targeted students the right tools to become more able learners.

Most importantly, teachers’ use of instructional language modification strategies has been found to improve curriculum access for the benefit of entire classes, not just targeted students (Starling et al., 2012).

## The modification of teachers’ oral and written instructional language

Primary teachers spend more time with students each day than any other professional, and they are therefore key team members when addressing the effective management of students with language difficulty. Teachers’ oral and written language is a fundamental part of teaching and learning. As previously described, students with language difficulty are challenged in processing, retaining, analysing and expressing their knowledge of language-based curriculum content.

Teachers can therefore have a significant impact on the learning abilities of students with language difficulties in their classes. One way to achieve this is by teachers making modifications to their oral and written instructional language, in ways presented in this program.

The LINK-UP Program coaches teachers in three main types of instructional language modification techniques, summarised as follows:

