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Helping Harold  
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Okay, so “Harold” is a pseudonym for a dear, kind-hearted, young man. He’s just one of those kids who always has a smile on his face. And this kid loves, loves, loves sharing stories with me anywhere from visiting North Carolina to searching for a new puppy.

Harold’s mother passed away a few years ago, because of a heart attack. Dad is out of the picture. So the eldest of the family, one of his four older sisters, takes care of him. And if those circumstances weren’t difficult enough, Harold has also been struggling through school with his own learning disability.

### Harold’s Needs

Harold has a learning disability. As a matter of fact, he’s almost straight out of a textbook. He has “dysfunctions in processing information typically found in language activities” (Friend, 2006). Consequently, he’s in one of the two reading classes that I teach in addition to taking his regular English class. Academically, his greatest needs are to become proficient in reading and writing.

He exhibits strong interpersonal skills. He gets along with just about everybody in class, yet he does tend to be caught up in his own thoughts quite often showing a significant level of intrapersonal skills. Some of his other strengths are his ability to draw and his adequacy in math.

### Support

At our school, we have layers of support personnel, materials, programs, and electives to assist with inclusion. For instance, some students like Harold with a learning disability (LD) may take a resource class. Harold is in five regular education classes including my reading class, which is an elective that is not exactly a resource class. The sixth class he takes is a resource English class.

The guidance counselors for students with special needs are an immeasurable lifeline for those students. They help develop and update students’ Individualized Learning Plans (IEPs).

Each teacher of a student with an IEP gets a copy of the plan, so we can understand and accommodate the child's needs.

### Planning

Planning instruction for Harold involves an assigned seat somewhere in the middle of the first two rows. He works best if he's close to the front of the room with fewer distractions and less strain hearing directions or reading the board. Oftentimes, I help Harold get started on his work and I grade based on how many correct answers he gets out of the questions he answers, if he runs out of time.

### Successes And Challenges

Confidence is remarkable for a struggling student, especially a teenager. One of Harold's numerous successes is his confidence. Even if he's been incorrect a time or two, he will still continue to participate. He's really quick to ask for clarification about assignments. Because he usually stays on top of his responsibilities, he consistently ends up with a high C or a low B in my class.

Now one of our challenges is that he gets lazier than the average teen, slipping away from tasks. Presumably, he's daydreaming. Dr. Deshler lists challenges like that one, many of which I've dealt with first-hand that involve special needs (Laureate Education, Inc., 2004). Unfortunately, a large challenge that Harold faces is how his ability measures up to these.

### Conclusion

I feel blessed to be in a position where I can help students like Harold. He's just a sweetheart, well-received by his peers, but only with a few solid friends. Now he does differ from many of his peers. I mean sometimes when he's looking me in the eye, something else is going on in his head. We're off on two, different tangents. It takes him a little longer to master a new concept than most guys his age.

Regardless, Harold is incredibly personable; therefore, he has rarely has any qualms about asking for help. His friendly demeanor can get us off-task. He's just filling a void with positive adult interactions. With an overcrowded reading class that varies in ability, I regret times when I must give more attention to the class as a whole and less attention to Harold. Also, I fear the unfair disadvantage for students like Harold, who struggle with higher-order thinking, may become quite the obstacle.

## References

- Friend, M., & Bursuck, W. D. (2006). *Including students with special needs: A practical guide for classroom teachers* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Laureate Education, Inc. (Executive Producer). (2004). Program 1: Introduction. *Designing curriculum, instruction, and assessment for students with special needs*. Baltimore: Author.