

The Educational Profile of Students with Williams Syndrome

Students with Williams syndrome have a unique educational profile, with widely disparate strengths and weaknesses. However, the effective utilization of their personal strengths and their innate ability to access technology can go a long way to help improve success in more challenging areas and allow access to age-appropriate curriculums with their same-age peers.

Reading/Writing

- Can generally learn to read well with intensive phonics instruction
- Able to hear & distinguish a wide variety of sounds
- Struggle to create the "mental movie" when reading
- Often have large & colorful vocabularies
- Difficulty understanding pragmatics
- Actual composition skills surpass handwritten output

Social Studies/Science

- Emotional connection to materials helps with remembering facts & concepts
- Very social; invested in the world they live in

Math

- Math skills are often very limited
- Systematic Instruction can improve outcomes
- Difficulty with abstract reasoning
- Need deliberate instruction in relational concepts/language - including:
 - > serial order
 - > temporal concepts
 - > quantitative concepts
 - > spatial concepts
 - > comparative adjectives

Students need social support because...

- They deserve legitimate friendships with their peers but lack the skills to build them
- they have difficulty with pragmatic language skills
- They have difficulty understanding sarcasm, irony, metaphor etc.
- Their desire to please may lead them to "follow" poor examples from other students

Students with WS learn best with...

- CONSISTENCY
- Structured instructional routines
- Clear & realistic expectations
- Social stories/scripts; visual schedules
- Technology – students are often very effective users
- "Chunking" of material into manageable parts
- Audio & dynamic visual supports
- Rhyme, rhythm & cadence
- Music &/or performing
- Specific praise

Be aware that students with WS...

- Generally have very weak visual spatial skills (especially visuospatial construction)
 - > impacts drawing/art/maps, as well as fine & visual motor areas
- Poor handwriting – often require use of an "alternate" pencil (computer, label maker etc)
- May be very participatory - want to please
- May be hypersensitive to certain sounds
 - > Can lead to obsessions and/or fears
- Often have expressive and receptive language challenges
 - > "delayed" processing/needs wait time
 - > Struggles with multi-step directions
- Often appear to understand more than they actually do
- May struggle with attention and focus, but are not necessarily hyperactive
- Often have difficulty modulating emotion
- May have high anxiety (often related to loud sounds (fire drills, alarms, whistles, power tools, balloons)

The unique profile of students with Williams syndrome may challenge your skills. The extraordinary gifts of students with Williams syndrome will brighten your day and reward your efforts!