Engage and Motivate Students with Special Needs
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Trying to engage and motivate students with special needs can be a real challenge at times. Many of the students that I work with at Tutorwiz Education Centre are extremely frustrated with school. When they first come in the door they have very low self-esteem and self-confidence. However, it is absolutely vital to find a way to engage and motivate these students.

In almost all cases, I have found these children are very interested in using computer applications. However, simply sitting them down in front of a computer is not the answer. The first thing we must do is find out what interests the student. I accomplish this by interviewing the student prior to working with him or her. Once an area of interest is determined, I construct an action plan involving the use of several computer applications. I then propose this to the student by describing each of the steps involved.

The action plan must allow the student to be creative and result in a finished product. Allowing the student to showcase the finished product to his parents, teacher or classmates is a great motivator. Most importantly the action plan must include an element of fun.

I recently worked with a primary student who was fascinated with Thomas the Tank Engine. Prior to our first session I went to the library and found a Thomas book which was at his reading level. I then scanned the book into Kurzweil 3000. When the student arrived for the first session, I told him that I had a Thomas book for him to read and when he finished reading we would create a short story about Thomas and his friends. I asked the student to read the book one page at a time. When he finished reading a page I had Kurzweil read the page back to him. I find this technique reinforces what the student has read. Upon completion of the book, I brought up Smart Ideas. We used this application to create an outline of a simple story about Thomas and his friends. We then created a short story by using Microsoft PowerPoint. We retrieved pictures of Thomas and his friends from the Internet. On each slide we included one picture and the student wrote the appropriate text. Upon completion of the PowerPoint presentation I packaged the presentation and printed off a copy of all the slides. The student was very proud of his accomplishment. He could hardly wait to get home so he could show it to his parents and read it to them.

Although I have described using this technique with one student, I have also been able to adapt it to a class of 14 students at my computer day camps.

In summary, I have found the following steps are very effective in engaging and motivating special needs students:
- Select a topic of interest
- Create an action plan using computer applications
- Allow the student to be creative
- Create a finished product
- Enable the student to showcase the finished product
- Ensure that there is an element of fun

Using these steps as a guide, I am certain that you can create various lesson plans that will engage and motivate students with special needs.