



Cindy's Corner

Creating a Tangible Timeline

For most of us, September is the beginning of the school year, the perfect time to set up a tangible timeline to chronicle the coming year (*Measurement*). Think of a timeline as an organized alternative to posting things on your bulletin board or refrigerator door! Designing a concrete timeline can be lots of fun. Just hang a length of clothesline, or rope in a convenient place, with easy access, perhaps a hallway, along a wall in the classroom, on a porch, or in a bedroom. As events occur, think of ways to represent them on your timeline. Hang whatever you feel is meaningful, e.g., school programs, holiday decorations, doctor's appointments, spelling tests and awards. Attach them with ribbon, clothespins, Velcro, or whatever you have handy. Ideally the progression of posting should go from left to right, but if you have space constraints, need to adapt it for wheelchair positioning, or hand preference, it's fine to sequence postings from right to left.



Most classrooms have a combination of learning styles and mediums. Let your timeline reflect this by incorporating multiple mediums to make it accessible for all your students. Use a combination of large print, Braille, Mayer-Johnson pictures, tangible objects, and voice out-put devices. You don't need to overthink what to use for tangible symbols, use them thoughtfully, but do have fun with them. Be creative, e.g., hang a beginning abacus to mark introduction to an abacus, a giant spider for reading Charlotte's Web, an old door knob to mark the day a student learned to open a door, a bathing suit to represent summer camp. Voice out-put systems (available through assistive device catalogues) are excellent ways to incorporate auditory feedback into your timeline. For example, record holiday music to mark holidays, honor Martin Luther King Day with excerpts from his "I have a Dream" speech, and record student-specific accomplishments, e.g., "On the 21st day in January, David learned to use two symbols to make a choice for the first time!" I found our class timelines to be good ways to create a sense of community in the classroom and provide positive reinforcement; peer reinforcement can be very effective!



Create markers to clearly differentiate each month along the timeline. Luckily, most months have holidays, which makes it easy to find tangible symbols to represent them (try holiday themed decorations, or cookie cutters with holiday themed profiles). Use a consistent backing (e.g., cardboard) to mount the monthly markers. This will provide a clear division of months and distinguish them from the tangible symbols used to mark events.

Do the same with the seasons (weather is a popular option for making seasonal tangible symbols). Think of ways to differentiate seasons from months by using a different size, shape, color, or textured backing.

You have multiple options on how to integrate the timeline into your classroom routine. Customize it to fit your needs. Make the timeline accessible for students to explore freely, or designate a specific time each week to review it. Put things on the timeline the day they occur, or have a collection box to save things for a designated time. Let your students review the timeline independently, or guide them down the timeline as you provide a narrative. Use language support strategies as needed, e.g., open-ended sentences ("In April, I went to the _____."), phonemic cueing ("In June, I will gr_____ graduate."), sentence expansion and rephrasing. Work on following simple directions, such as "Reach up and touch."



Time is often an abstract concept for children with visual and multiple impairments. As parents and educators, we work hard to break the concept of time down into manageable steps, something tangible, that they can reach out and touch to better understand. We are always looking for better ways to achieve this. I found the idea for a timeline while searching for ways to compile an alternate assessment portfolio for 8th grade History. It was suggested as a way to chronicle developments in ancient civilizations. But how much more meaningful for students with multiple impairments, if we use direct experiences to tangibly sequence a school year.



My first timeline was a random hodge-podge of events, with lots of little glitches, like sagging down to the floor with excess weight, but it was the perfect complement to adaptive schedules and calendars; the logical next step in teaching time concepts. It provided a concrete way to demonstrate how months sequence into a year, and illustrate the concepts of this month/last month/next month. It also provided a tangible way to teach the concepts of past/present/future.

Note: When you come back to the classroom in the fall, physically take down the timeline from the year before (with your students assistance) to symbolize that last year is over; it's in the Past. It's time to put up things for this year.

Have fun with your timeline!