Keeping your special ed students engaged in classroom learning – especially those students who have autism, communication, visual or auditory processing issues -- can be a challenge. At Crotched Mountain, we have found that using a projector connected to an iPad in the classroom is a fun and easy way to stimulate educational and social learning opportunities for our students.

By connecting an iPad to a projector an instructor can mirror what appears on an iPad onto a large screen for all students to see. Special adapters are available and can be purchased for as low as $4.95. With the projector, one can present the material that most interests students and appeals to their different learning styles.
I have seven students in my classroom and I find that setting my room up in a horseshoe layout works best, with three students on each side, one at the end and the projector in the front of the room. I situate myself with the iPad in the middle of the U shape which allows me to easily control what is projected, encourage interaction and stay engaged with my students.

Here are some tips and techniques:

A Motivational Tool
My students have a hard time sitting for extended periods of time and have limited ability to interact with their classmates. Using the iPad projector and a speaker enables the students to see and hear well, and interact more easily as a group. In my experience, students are captivated by the visual stimulus of the larger image on the screen, as well as the sound and they are more eager to participate in class. Some have auditory processing disorder so increasing the volume to a manageable level helps them stay interested. We work with apps that address communication, social skills, numbers, sight words, video self-modeling, and other educational apps.

Student Choices
I use several teaching/learning approaches throughout the day to create meaningful lessons to avoid boredom and inefficient use of time, encouraging students to make their own choices throughout the lesson and ensuring that there are plenty of opportunities for the students to succeed. Using this multi-dimensional approach encourages students to communicate and participate at their individual level.

Teaching a 20-Minute Lesson
With access to virtually any type of lesson plan or video, the iPad and projector offer many options for learning. For example, my students are learning about diet, exercise and healthy eating, and I found excellent resources on the USDA website to share. My students also like BrainPOP and Scholastic News to learn about current events, money counting, telling time, identifying body parts... you name it, you can find a video that works with your students’ needs, abilities and interests. Sometimes I keep my students engaged during lessons by gently tossing them a soft ball that lights up and makes sounds when it’s their turn. They are then able to toss it to the next student for his or her turn. They get very excited when the ball comes their way!

Music and More
All of the students in my classroom are high school students, aged 17 to 21, and for them, listening to music is a huge incentive. My students get to “earn” songs they want to hear, after they have successfully completed a lesson. Each student has different tastes in music, some like popular Top 40 music, some like classical, some piano. With the use of the projector and iTunes, they can listen to the music and enjoy seeing the sound waves and colors from the song displayed on the screen – and they work harder to get to the music section of class!

I have been thrilled with the use of the projector and so are my students. They are able to attend for longer periods of time and are very intrigued with and motivated by the visual technology. Give it a try!

For more Teaching Tips and Strategies, visit www.cmf.org/tips

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