

# Introduction to Teaching Students With Learning Disabilities

**Mark** is a fifth grader with a learning disability. His school performance illustrates a pattern common to many students with learning disabilities: persistent difficulty learning to read. Now Mark can read third-grade material reasonably well, but he still has problems comprehending what he has read. His spelling is a little better than his reading, but his handwriting is still very messy and immature. Mark spends most of his time in a general education classroom with his neighborhood peers. His teacher describes him as “likable and very interested in learning.” She says that Mark’s classmates sometimes complain about his frequent asking of questions and that they “now and then” avoid him during independent activities, free time, and recess. She is working with Mark to help him improve his peer relations. Mark is earning passing grades in math, science, and social studies with assistance provided by general and special education teachers (e.g., taped texts, modified tests, and a homework buddy).

*Puzzling* is a term teachers sometimes use to describe Mark. Some people say students like Mark have hidden disabilities because their strengths in some areas often mask or hide learning problems in others. Perhaps you know a person who is quite bright but who has trouble mastering skills that come

## 6 Teaching Students With Learning Disabilities

easily to others. Students who have these difficulties are sometimes identified as having learning disabilities. They may not learn in the same ways or as easily as their peers. They may have special needs that sometimes pose problems in large classes in which most students perform reasonably well with minor assistance. Often teachers are challenged to modify instruction so that students who learn differently from the majority of the class still receive the assistance they need. The Bringing Learning to Life box below describes how Mark's teachers made an accommodation that helped him succeed.

### **Bringing Learning to Life: Helping Mark to Read Using Taped Texts**

Mark's teachers have found that tape-recording passages from textbooks is an effective way to help him compensate for his learning disability. They conducted an informal assessment to determine if Mark learned best with or without the text in front of him as he listened to the tape. He did better just listening.

Mark's teachers chose the material to be recorded and then prepared the tapes. In some cases, they recorded only key sections of the text; in others, they recorded entire chapters and passages. Sometimes they added tips to the tapes to encourage Mark to review the material after critical sections or to remind him to take notes on important parts of the lessons. One time, they added comprehension questions to provide practice recalling facts during the lesson. Mark reported that this was very helpful. Whenever possible, the teachers had classmates do the taping during independent work times.