The first simulation the group will participate in is how it feels to have mental retardation and how people with mental retardation learn. I will give an index card to each student. I will ask each person to place the index card at her/his forehead. I will then direct each person, keeping the card on her/his forehead, to quickly write the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

When they have finished, I will have them look at their work and share it with the others in the group. I will explain to the group participants that the reactions they had to their work and their feelings about it should help them understand how a person with retardation feels when she/he is learning slower than others. Sometimes a person with retardation will try as hard as she/he can but it won't come out in right.

Then, I will ask the group participating to choose a partner and work in pairs, trying to help each other learn to write the numbers while keeping the cards at their foreheads. Allow people to guide their partner's hands, to draw in the air, to fold the cards for spacing, etc. Anything goes, as long as they work together.

At the end of ten minutes, working time, ask the children if any of them improved and what they and their partners did to foster that improvement. Have partners share their experiences with the group. I will ask the group participants the following questions: What was hardest about this activity? What made it easier? Did you ever feel like giving up? Why and when? Did you and your partner improve? Why did you think you did? Did you work out any plan that made this number writing easier? What did you do?

Based on the answers and reactions of the people to the above questions, I will explain that people who work with children with retardation often try to help them in this way.
When someone is slow to learn, it often helps to break a task into smaller, easier steps so that the person can master the task in manageable pieces. Certainly, children with retardation don't learn how to write numbers on cards at their foreheads! But we did this activity today so that you would get a feeling about what having retardation feels like and how frustrated a person might become when she/he is doing something that should be easy, but seems so hard to do.

I will explain that if partners were successful at this kind of number writing, it probably was because they broke the activity into tiny steps. They may have worked on one number at a time, or on spacing, or on reversing. And when they solved one problem, they moved on to another. I will point out that when they took it one step at a time, it was easier to do. I will remind them that when they work with a student who has mental retardation, to remember that if the person is not doing something well, it's not because the person is "stupid" or "crazy." It may be that the activity needs to be broken down into smaller steps so that the student can master them one at a time.