**Explicit Instruction for Students with Disabilities**

Students without disabilities often make intellectual leaps as they are learning. Their background experiences interact with the instructional situation and they apply the new information intuitively. The teacher points them down a specific path and they take off running. Teachers can count on this happening with many of their students, and find that they may not have to elucidate every step in a learning process. Students figure them out for themselves. This almost never happens with students with disabilities. In contrast, these students may become stuck on one aspect of a problem, needing explicit help in taking the next small step in the learning process. Instead of being able to make leaps, they must rely on solid bridges built by observant teachers to help them make steady progress.

Students with disabilities may also become lost in a discussion or presentation in a general education classroom. Issues with attention, language, reading, math, or emotions can cause them to miss much of the incidental information that is imparted by teachers and fellow students. Instead, important information must be given to them directly and explicitly. This need for explicit instruction can arise in social, procedural, or academic areas as demonstrated in the examples below.

|  |
| --- |
| Examples of Explicit Instruction |
|  |
| Social Example |
| *Amy was not a popular student in the third grade classroom. The other girls complained that she was bossy, selfish, and a tattle-tale. Amy told Mr. Allen that they were mean to her, and was often in tears at the end of recess. Mr. Allen reviewed the information in her file about the emotional aspect of her learning disability and observed her interactions with her classmates. Amy stood watching a group of girls who were playing jump rope, appearing to be fearful at first; but then she moved toward them quickly and grabbed the rope. The game disintegrated and the group came complaining to you. Mr. Allen decided that Amy needed explicit instruction in asking to be included in a game. He talked to her and the two of them role-played procedures such as asking for a turn, offering to hold the rope, etc. He supported Amy emotionally as she tried the new approaches, discussed what worked well and what didn’t, and helped her to try again. Eventually her skills improved and she became a socially appropriate member of the class.* |
|  |
| Academic Example |
| *Marcus loved biology lab. He loved working with a partner, being able to stand up and move around the room when he needed to, and seeing the individual parts of the plants and animals. He appeared to be well behaved and focused during all the labs. The trouble was, he was failing biology because of low grades on lab assignments. Ms. Oliver watched him carefully for a few days and saw that, while he appeared to be doing the lab work as assigned, was actually totally lost. He became involved in the task but never transferred the information from the experiential to the conceptual level, from the specific to the general. The other students seemed to make that transfer easily, but Marcus did not. So Ms. Oliver developed a graphic organizer that helped him make the connection between his activities in the lab and the concepts in his textbook. After he completed the organizer she talked to him about what he had done and made sure that he has understood the big picture. He did much better on the next test, and as she continued to have him complete the organizer for each lab, he was able to pass the course.* |
|  |
| Procedural Example |
| *The eighth grade students were required to complete a social studies project, but Mrs. Parr, the special education teacher, knew that assignment would be a major challenge for John. John had good ideas and was interested in history, but he had a very difficult time organizing anything. His locker and backpack were a mess, and he continually lost assignments. He seemed to have no concept of deadlines, with most of his work being turned in late after Mrs. Parr and his mother nagged him. This project, involving several research steps and a final paper, might never get done. John’s general education teacher discussed the process they needed to follow, but Mrs. Parr knew that John needed more support. She talked to him about his interests and helped him decide on a topic. Then she and he developed a list of the steps he would have to complete, with a due date for each step. She helped him place the list just inside his notebook, and every day she checked with him on his progress, requiring proof that each step was completed on time. At the end of the month John, his teacher, and his mother were all proud of the result of his efforts.* |

In each of these examples, the teacher had to be more explicit in passing on information to her students who had disabilities. What could have appeared to be personality, attention, or motivational problems were in fact difficulties caused by their disabilities. They did not absorb the social, procedural, and academic that was either implicit (in Amy’s case) or insufficiently explicit for their needs. They needed to be told, and shown, exactly how to achieve their goals. In the cases of John and Marcus, visual representations helped to move them to the next level of organization and understanding. With Amy, role playing and practice were used to make the techniques explicit. All three were also given support from a teacher who knew their strengths and weaknesses and carefully monitored their progress.