The Uniquely Abled Academy® Replication Guide

Element 6 – Provide Resources for Instructors

Element 6.3 - Instructional Notes

Publication Date: September 6, 2023

Instructional Formats

As much as possible, instruction is provided in a flexible format to meet the needs of each student. The following is a list of possible instructional formats:
- **Whole group** – Instruction provided to the whole class at once.
- **Small group or individual instruction** – Instruction provided to a decreased number of people, often closer proximity of student to teacher.
- **Pull Out** – Students with unique individual needs are "pulled out" of the main class for individual tutorial.
- **Push In** – Specialists who work with individual students or small groups of students within a larger group.
- **Field Trips** – Students travel to an offsite location to see first-hand an exhibit, go on a tour, etc.

It has been found that a maximum class size of about 15 seems to work best. That way no student "gets lost" and the instructor can be aware of what is going on in each student. Teaching assistants (who understand CNC operation and some of the accommodations needed) are valuable for the Pull Out or Push In.

Instructional Methods

While it is likely that the Host Organization has already established instructional methods, this section is included for those who wish for more information on the topic.

Ideally a Uniquely Abled Academy utilizes research-validated teaching methods, including direct and explicit instruction. "[Explicit and Direct Instruction](#) (EDI) is a strategic collection of instructional practices based on teacher-centered direct interaction philosophy"

The method uses applied behavior analysis principles, and involves conveying goals, linking with previously learned material, utilizing examples, and providing immediate performance feedback compared to pre-defined criteria, among other things. Explicit instruction is a developmentally appropriate method in which students are actively engaged in the learning process. Every lesson is learned completely and correctly. The goal is errorless learning, so that students learn without confusion or frustration. ([Explicit Instruction: A framework for Meaningful Direct Teaching, Goeke, 2008](#))

Consistent with research recommendations and the requirements of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, part of the Workforce Investment Act, participants would receive vocational training not based on their diagnosis, but rather based on an individualized assessment that identifies their strengths as well as their rate of progress, priorities, concerns, and interests. This assessment would be informal, experiential, and longitudinal in nature, and include self-evaluations, staff observations and performance data on simulated and real-world projects. Because work often takes place in social settings, and people with autism usually have problems with social skills and tend to be isolated in adulthood, program participants would receive training individually, as well as in small groups, depending on their individual needs.

Methods of instruction, materials and activities build on participants' strengths and are enjoyable and interesting, to maximize motivation and learning.

Accommodations and modifications in curriculum content and work projects allow for flexible opportunities for success to enhance participants' comprehension and learning, decrease frustration and failure, and foster an internalized investment in learning work ethic, technical skills, and overall work performance. These may include techniques such as social stories, visual cues, and schedules, specific visual or auditory instruction, slowed or accelerated pace, breaking work up into smaller pieces, breaks, private work rooms and self- managed behavior tracking charts. Clearly defined short- and long-term goals, predictable routines, and rules for collaborating on work will be followed, to provide participants with a foundation and scaffold upon which to build new vocational skills.

In order to assist them in the ultimate goals of obtaining and keeping employment, the Uniquely Abled Academy curriculum should also provide explicit instruction in common work and social skills that are known to be vulnerable in people with autism (see Element 5: Provide a Job Readiness Curriculum). These skills include problem solving, collaboration, adapting to new situations, generalization, self-evaluation, planning and organizing, setting priorities and decision making, etc. The philosophy, program progression and curriculum components ideally are solidly based on the recommendations of reputable researchers and best practice in the fields of autism intervention and vocational rehabilitation (Mesibov, 1984; Ozonoff and Miller, 1995; Klin and Volkmar, 2001).

The following is a more complete list of instructional methods that can be used in the Uniquely Abled Academy vocational training program. Each of the following methods have been proven effective in building a foundation upon which those with autism are able to master new social and vocational skills:
- **Direct, explicit instruction with visual aids** – Instructors provide face-to-face teaching of everything to be learned with visual aids.

- **Task analysis and chaining** – Instructors break skills to be learned into smaller pieces, teach them separately and combine the pieces back together as they are mastered. Used for complex or lengthy procedures that are not easily taught all at once.
- **Demonstration and modeling** – Students observe while the instructor shows what is to be done and how. Good for skills that can be imitated and learned by watching.
- **Guided practice and coaching** – Instructors help students to correctly apply a previously taught skill, step by step.
- **Discussion** – Back and forth communication between instructor and student(s).
- **Reading and Answering Questions** – Learning from written information.
- **Incidental Teaching** – Teaching a necessary concept or skills as it comes in the natural course of events. Also called "Embedded Instruction" or "Teachable Moments".
- **Examples and Patterns** – The concept is revealed by looking at multiple examples and identifying the patterns. Requires nonverbal reasoning.
- **Stories** – Instructors illustrate a concept via a personal or professional story. Requires inference.
- **Social Stories™** – Short written or picture narratives that illustrate social requirements or the unwritten social expectations and rules.
- **Periodic review** – Instructors review previously learned material with students in order to maintain learning. Can be done as often as is necessary. Can be done via instructor or student led reviews, quizzes, games, compare and contrast graphic organizers, critiques of a correct and/or incorrect example.
- **Role plays** – A skit or play in which two people act out a social concept or skill to be learned.
- **Video modeling** – Students watch a DVD of a skill or concept being demonstrated.
- **Video self-modeling** – Students watch a DVD of themselves modeling a skill or concept.
- **Positive reinforcement** – Specific, positive feedback that is designed to engender repeat performance, is personally meaningful and gives student information about what they did well.

The following table provides a brief overview of how instructional methods may be selected and how instruction may be conducted, depending on the stage of learning being undertaken. These can be modified based on the individual learning style and the accommodations needed by students. Decisions about how to teach particular subject matter are made by the program's teachers.

Phases of Learning	Level of Difficulty	Student Learning	Instructional
Knowledge/Skill Acquisition	Easiest, Most Concrete Level	How to, Rote Learning, Memorization	Modeling, Demonstration, Prompting, Correcting Errors
Fluency, Automaticity	Somewhat harder	Accurate, Efficient and Effortless Use of Skills, Knowledge, & Abilities	Timed Drill and Practice, Incremental Rehearsal, Repetitious Exercises, Phase Drills
Generalization	Somewhat harder	Practice Using Skills, Knowledge, & Abilities in Varied Contexts	Provide Practice in Varied Contexts
Evaluation	Harder and More Abstract	Compare and Contrast, Pros and Cons against Criteria	Provide opportunities, examples, and visual organizers
Synthesis	Abstract Level	Incorporating previous and new Skills, Knowledge, & Abilities and using in a novel way	Provide opportunities and examples