

## Information for teachers

### Educational guidelines that can improve the academic skills of students with learning problems in the classroom

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A general definition of "curriculum" that one learns about during teacher training follows the lines of "All the activities planned and guided by the school, whether taking place inside or outside the school building". Teachers can also look at "What the school does, and how, when and why the school does what it does". Most teachers and ancillary school personnel recognise that all students are unique and different, and even those students with similar disabilities are different from one another and cannot be put into a mould. Students may have different degrees of hearing, sight, physical abilities, behaviour patterns, powers of concentration, and abilities to form relationships, as well as being at different levels of intellectual development and skill acquisition.

#### The Why

This is concerned with helping students acquire the basic skills and knowledge that are needed and required to function in today's society. They need to develop an understanding of their environment, to acquire some control over it, and they need to develop a degree of autonomy to act independently within it, with minimal support from those persons around them.

#### The What

The curriculum should not only focus on products, outcomes and specific skills that the student is expected to acquire. Developmental checklists are useful for giving information, but they are not the yardstick by which a teacher or a school should be judged as good and competent. Of importance and significance is the hidden curriculum, that is, all those things that are taught by those who come into contact with the students that are not written down in the curriculum. All the things that we think, say, do, and act upon in our daily lives that send out hidden messages to those we are in a position to influence.

#### The How

The how is perhaps the most vital part of the curriculum. It is how the student is handled, taught, communicated to and interacted with that

will affect his or her ability to develop autonomy and identity and to gain an understanding of objects, events and people in the environment. People familiar with the student can help him or her understand, interact, and communicate with those in the environment. All students can learn and this includes students with learning difficulties. Learning difficulties do not go away at the conclusion of the school day and return the following morning. They are not present just for the duration of the student's attendance at school or to present the class teacher with additional challenges. They can affect an individual throughout his or her entire life and can have an impact on a student's self-esteem, academic progress and classroom behaviour. Teachers, families and pupils by working together can improve a student's enjoyment of school and his or her ability to handle the work presented. Early identification, the careful selection of school subjects, positive support from those with whom the student has contact and adaptations and accommodations to the curriculum all lead to student success.

It is difficult to state when new activities, experiences and choices should be given to the student. Much depends on the readiness level and maturity of the student. However, challenges are needed in everyday lives and it is amazing how students face up to the challenges that are presented to them.

#### For more Information

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