THE SECRET TO ACCELERATED LEARNING FOR STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

Some of the largest obstacles that teachers of students who are blind or have low vision are:

- Insufficient student engagement
- Repeating a lesson with a student, again and again
- No parental support
- Too difficult to demonstrate progress at IEP meetings

Insufficient student engagement

How often have you found yourself frustrated that no matter what you try, your student just won't engage with your teaching?

Your student isn't motivated to focus on the lesson, much less practice in the resource room, general education classroom or at home. You find yourself dealing with behavior issues rather than focusing on the goals and objectives that were agreed upon at the IEP meeting.

Repeating a lesson with a student, again and again

Your gut tells you that the student is not practicing anything you taught. It feels like you are making no progress, week after week. It's like Groundhog Day – every session feels like a repeat of the last one. And you see no end in sight.

No parental support

Parents are either too stressed with work, family or the pandemic to provide the support and encouragement that your student needs. Without parental support, your student isn't practicing at home, and isn't making the progress you know they could.

Too difficult to demonstrate progress at the IEP meeting

You've seen your student make progress in their IEP objectives while working with you, but those skills aren't immediately generalized to the classroom or home. That is hard to reflect in a progress report. Parents don't understand that it is a gradual process. This can lead to parents losing confidence in your approach and potentially diminishing their cooperation.

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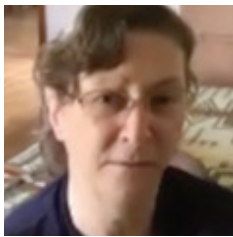
STUDENTS DON'T ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL

While some of these obstacles can be mitigated through your dedication to your student, your long hours, and your hard work, there are long-term negative consequences. Students may not achieve their maximal educational potential, they may not pursue fulfilling careers and they may miss out on their ideal adult life experience.

HOW ARE SMART TEACHERS FIXING THIS?

Some teachers are using technology and education research to augment their efforts, and they are seeing amazing results. Students are engaged and motivated. IEP meetings are constructive. Parents are involved.

Research has found that gamified learning can impact engagement, motivate target behaviors and drive innovation (Kapp, 2012):

- **Gamification in education may optimize the brain's processing of new information.**

  This may be facilitated by the general aspects of gamified lessons, with the audio-visual presentation, minimized bites of schematized information, short time lapses, and often repetitive patterns.

- **Gamification in education can improve motivation and engagement.**

  Game elements such as immediate feedback and earning badges for completing the challenges successfully are strongly influential on increasing the students' drive in engaging in these games even within the walls of a classroom.

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For students with disabilities, structure and explicit instruction in the game are key elements associated with effective instruction (Israel et al., 2015).

ObjectiveEd provides this type of structured reinforcement learning games for students who are blind or have low vision.

Using a web-dashboard, you configure a game to match the Goals and Objectives of your student's IEP, and then the student plays that game on a device such as an iPad or iPhone. You monitor student's progress in acquiring those skills on that web-dashboard and copy progress charts into the student's IEP Progress Report.

As a student plays the skill-based game, your teaching is being reinforced. Teachers report that students are engaged to learn, and their lessons can be targeted at areas where extra help is needed. Students play the accessible games independently, at home, in class or in the resource room.

At the IEP meeting, using the digital data collected as the student plays the games, you can show charts and graphs of the student's progress to the parents and other IEP team members.

Kapp, K. M. (2012). What Is Gamification? In *The Gamification of Learning and Instruction: Game-Based Methods and Strategies for Training and Education* (pp. 1–23)

Israel, M., Wherfel, Q. M., Pearson, J., Shehab, S., & Tapia, T. (2015). Empowering K–12 students with disabilities to learn computational thinking and computer programming. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 48*(1), 45-53.

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