

Part 1

Getting Organized

Teaching Notes

Unit 1: Developing a Personal Study Plan

Objectives:

This unit shows resource program and special day class students how to create a study schedule that will allow them to manage and organize their time more efficiently. Students make realistic predictions about how much time they need each day to complete their assignments, and they use this data to create an appropriate study strategy.

Basic Lesson Plan

Student Book pages 4-20

Appendix page 108 - My Weekly Schedule

page 109 - My Study Schedule Contract

1. Students read the introductory anecdote—**THE DAILY HOMEWORK BATTLE**. They list and evaluate each maladaptive behavior and attitude that is described and make predictions about the consequences of the student's *modus operandi*.
2. In the section entitled **THINKING AND PLANNING AHEAD**, students estimate their weekly study requirements in each subject and compute their required daily study time. Guidance will be required during this estimation activity, especially in the case of students whose analytical thinking and critical judgment are off-base.
3. Students follow a *nine-step procedure* for creating an effective personal study schedule. Using the "Sample Study Schedule" as a model, they then create their own "Weekly Study Schedule".
4. Students read and sign a "Personal Study Schedule Contract" that commits them to a minimum two-week trial of their schedule before they make adjustments.

5. Students examine the issue of reasonable versus unreasonable study breaks when doing homework. A general “study break formula” is suggested. For some students this formula is realistic. For others with significant learning deficiencies and concentration deficit the formula can serve as a goal. Students then complete a true/false exercise that encourages them to review and consider what they have learned about planning, scheduling and time-management.

The Residual Effects of Learning Problems

The emotional, behavioral, and academic implications of learning problems are self-evident. Learning disorders are a primary source of marginal academic performance, inefficient thinking, and counterproductive behavior. Students that struggle to read accurately, comprehend the content of their textbooks, express their ideas verbally and in writing, solve math problems, recall information, and follow instructions are clearly at a profound competitive disadvantage. This disadvantage may persist even after their underlying perceptual processing deficits have been ostensibly remediated.

Emotionally and academically vulnerable children will do whatever they can to protect themselves from feeling worthless and incompetent. Many will attempt to hide their learning deficiencies by procrastinating and acting irresponsibly. These youngsters usually present as being unmotivated and resistant. For many discouraged learners, the unconscious mindset is "If I don't really try, I can't really fail."

Parents and classroom teachers who have a marginal understanding of the implications of learning disabilities may conclude that the self-defeating conduct is the *source* of the struggling child's academic problems. This conclusion is flawed. Most counterproductive behaviors and attitudes are *symptoms* of imprinted negative associations with learning. Even extreme and seemingly willful irresponsibility usually reflects an unconscious defensive response to persistent feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness, and despair.

Students who are enmeshed in a daily battle to survive scholastically rarely possess the objectivity to recognize that their self-protecting conduct actually calls attention to the deficiencies they're attempting to hide. Their instinct is to protect themselves, and from the vantage point of academically defeated students, procrastination, irresponsibility, and lack of motivation may appear to be their only recourse. The primary concern of many of these children is "*how do I get through today without letting everyone see how dumb I am?*"

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The consequences of struggling students entrapping themselves in an elaborate system of defense mechanisms and compensatory behavior can be life-altering. Defended children who are convinced that they cannot succeed are at risk for shutting down in school. Acquiescing to marginal achievement, they simply lower their educational and vocational expectations and aspirations and then retreat into a psychologically protective comfort zone.

The antidote is to provide students who learn differently with the essential study habits and learning skills they need to prevail scholastically. To master and internalize these academic survival skills, students require focused, systematic instruction, on-going feedback, and repeated opportunities to practice.

Self-Discipline

To handle the mainstream academic curriculum successfully, students in special education programs must be taught how to manage their time efficiently, meet deadlines, and complete their work. Those who do not acquire these self-regulation and planning skills are destined struggle in their mainstream classes.

Behaviors and Attitudes that Signal Planning Deficits:

- **Procrastination**
- **Difficulty establishing short- and long-term goals**
- **Difficulty establishing priorities**
- **Inadequate time management**
- **Inadequate preparation**
- **Incomplete assignments**
- **Late assignments**
- **Chronic disorganization**
- **Inattention to details**
- **Irresponsibility**
- **Flawed judgment**
- **Repeated miscalculations**

In some instances, chronic planning deficits may be attributable to ADD/ADHD. In other instances, students may be unfocused and disorganized because they have failed to internalize a basic cause and effect principle: *Success in any demanding endeavor requires careful planning, preparation, and execution.* Academically deficient students rarely perceive the obvious link between their late, sloppy, incomplete, or inaccurate assignments and the poor grades that result from their careless and cavalier attitudes about their obligations and responsibilities.

Chronically irresponsible students can be masterful at defending and rationalizing their counterproductive behavior. The classic excuses typically include:

- "The work is boring or stupid."
- "I am trying! But my teacher is unfair."
- "I forgot...."
- "My teacher didn't tell us it was due today."
- "My teacher didn't explain this."
- "Don't worry. I'll get it done."
- "My teacher said that doing it this way was OK."
- "My teacher didn't assign any homework today."

These rationalizations and evasions allow marginally-performing students to avoid taking responsibility for their maladaptive attitudes and behaviors. By blaming and making excuses, they attempt to convince themselves and others that everything is OK. This illusion invariably shatters when report cards are sent home.

With systematic instruction and sufficient practice, most special education students can acquire more productive time-management skills. They can be taught how to plan ahead and budget their time more efficiently. This is the critically important first step in preparing them for successful integration into academically demanding mainstream classes.

Activities and Exercises

The Daily Homework Battle

Student Book page 4

This exercise underscores how time management and organization are linked by fundamental cause and effect principles. The anecdote describes a child who is clearly having

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difficulty managing his time and responsibilities. Students critically analyze and assess Joshua's maladaptive behavior and make predictions about what is likely to happen. This evaluative procedure, which is used throughout the program, is designed to encourage them to think critically about their own behavior.

Thinking and Planning Ahead

Student Book page 9

In this exercise, students learn the procedures for developing an efficient study plan. The activity introduces the "nuts and bolts" of productive time-management. Students are guided to a key insight: They can make their lives easier by planning ahead.

The first step in designing a personal schedule is for students to estimate the amount of daily study time in each subject that is required for Joshua, the student described in the introductory anecdote, to do a first-rate job. Students estimate the weekly time required to get a good grade on a Friday vocabulary quiz and then divide this time by 4 (Monday through Thursday) to determine the average daily study time that's required. You will obviously want to examine carefully this time-averaging procedure with your students. For practice, you might have them use the same procedure to determine the average study time they need to spend each evening in at least one other subject area before having them do the remaining math computations math on their own. Students with significant learning differences are likely to require more assistance and supervision. The questions at the end of the exercise are designed to reinforce the cause and effect link between the efficient use of time, careful planning, and improved school performance. This linkage is repeatedly underscored throughout the program.

Making Your Own Study Schedule

Student Book page 12

Students are now ready to create a personal study schedule. In this exercise, they apply the planning procedures they have learned in analyzing their own personal study requirements, and they practice a nine-step procedure for creating a schedule tailored to their personal needs. They estimate the average amount of time they must study every evening in each subject and transfer these projected time requirements to a daily study schedule. The steps are clearly enumerated, but students may require additional explanations and demonstrations. It is

recommended that you photocopy extra practice copies of the "Study Schedule", in case the student makes mistakes in coloring and coding their schedule.

My Personal Study Schedule Contract

Student Book page 18

After having developed a reasonable and practical study schedule, students are asked to sign a "contract." This contract, which commits them to use the schedule for two weeks before making adjustments, encourages on-going use of the schedule until the time-management habits are imprinted. After two weeks of experimentation, students fine-tune their schedule and use this revised schedule for four weeks before making further revisions.

The objective of this unit is to help students discover that schedules are not an adult conspiracy designed to make their lives miserable. Ideally, students will discover that using a schedule does not have to be painful, boring, restrictive, or unfair.

Study Breaks

Student Book page 18

The frequency and duration of study breaks are issues that should be examined and discussed. Your students' attitudes may be radically different than your own, and you should encourage them to share their views in a non-judgmental context. Students who must continually struggle to learn and those who have ADD/ADHD are likely to have very painful associations with homework and studying. These students are also likely to do everything possible to avoid the associated pain. This would include chronic procrastination and taking excessive study breaks.

Ideally, your students will come to the realization that they must exert self-discipline if they are to study productively. You might want to suggest the described study break formula, assuming, of course, that you concur with it. If you don't, feel free to modify the formula. Urge your students to integrate the formula into their personal study plan. They might experiment with the formula to see if it "works" for them. The final exercise--**WHAT I HAVE LEARNED ABOUT SCHEDULES**--encourages students to think analytically, critically, and strategically about the issues and procedures that were introduced in the unit.