

MH3400: LESSON SUMMARY AND REQUIRED ASSIGNMENT HOW We Teach: Error-Free Learning - Part 3

INTRODUCTION AND BRIEF REVIEW: As helping professionals working with people with disabilities as well as others, we often need to help them learn ADL's, Adaptive Behavior/Social Skills and Communication. To do this, we need to have effective teaching skills. In this three part unit of the course, we are learning about a technique called ERROR-FREE LEARNING which consists of a number of teaching strategies which have proven to be effective. So far, in the two previous lessons, we have covered the following error-free learning strategies:

- Partializing the learning activity (i.e., breaking down an ADL task into a series of simple steps and repeating the process in the exact same order thus making it easier for our clients to learn.
- Introducing the learning activity (do NOT ask the client if they want to learn a particular skill. Instead make your introduction very brief and upbeat. Get them involved in hands on learning quickly)
- Practicing learning activities in the REAL situation whenever possible (it is easier for clients to learn a skill if they learn it in a real situation where the skill will actually be used. Think about how much more you would learn in this class if it were taught in an agency where you had the opportunity to work with actual clients.)
- Multisensory learning (hands on - involving more than one of the five senses in learning) works best because it increases retention of what is being learned.
- The importance of being CONCRETE rather than abstract. (Abstractions you take for granted, i.e., "dress neatly" or "dress appropriately for a job interview" may not be clear at all to the learner. We need to use examples, pictures, anything that will make abstractions more concrete for our clients.
- Using Role Play to teach certain adaptive behaviors/social skills.

What follows is the final lesson related to error-free learning. In this lesson, we will cover THREE additional error-free learning strategies:

- Redirection using Prompting-Creating INCENTIVES (rewards) for Clients to Learn: Task Specific Praise-Mnemonic Devices

A) Redirection using Prompting

Error-free learning involves teaching clients important skills WITHOUT calling attention to their mistakes. Instead, of pointing out a mistake, we REDIRECT the client to complete the task correctly. As was discussed in an earlier lesson, this tactic is beneficial in several ways. First of all, many clients have had difficulty learning in the past and therefore approach any new learning activity with anxiety and self doubt. Redirecting them so they can complete the task correctly helps build their self confidence and self esteem so that they approach this and future learning activities with a more positive outlook. In the process, the relationship

between client and professional is strengthened and by using redirection, you have also made learning easier because clients do NOT have to learn TWO things (what is wrong and what is right). They only have to learn what is right! So, how does redirection work? When a client makes a mistake, the professional does NOT call any attention to the mistake. Instead, the professional uses a technique called PROMPTING to cue the client how to complete the task correctly.

Lets say, for example, that you are teaching a six year old boy with an intellectual disability how to brush his teeth. He opens the tube of toothpaste correctly and then sticks the open end of the tube in his mouth. Using error-free learning, you do NOT say "NO, NO! You're supposed to put the toothpaste on the brush, not in your mouth!" INSTEAD, you might point to the brush, gently move the boy's hand that is holding the toothpaste tube toward the toothbrush and say "put a little toothpaste on your brush." When the boy puts the toothpaste on the brush, you reward him with praise for doing this part of the task correctly. You do NOT lecture him or call any attention to his "mistake."

A personal example of the importance of redirection in teaching communication skills: About ten years ago, I was supervising Kingsborough students at their internship which was held in a local day program for adults with developmental disabilities. Albie, a participant in the program, was a friendly young man of about 30 years old who had a fairly severe intellectual disability. In addition to his intellectual disability, Albie also had echolalia, a brain disorder which causes people to repeat the same phrase over and over (hence the "echo" in echolalia). One morning, I was sitting in the lobby of the program waiting for my students when Albie walked up to the person at the front desk and said: "What day is it?" The young man at the desk replied, "Hi Albie. It's Tuesday." Albie then looked at him and said "What day is it?" The young man at the desk looked a little annoyed and said: "Albie, we've talked about this. You should only ask me what day it is once." Albie looked at him hopefully and replied "What day is it?" The young man at the desk rolled his eyes, sighed and turned away from Albie who then looked very sad.

Albie then walked over to me and said "What day is it?" I replied, "it's Tuesday" and smiled at him. Albie smiled back and said "What day is it?" Because I knew that Albie's echolalia (compulsion to repeat words/phrases) was somewhat beyond his control and because I had been taught how to use redirection instead of pointing out what was wrong, I noticed that Albie had a small portable radio held by a string around his neck, I tapped on the radio and said, "What are you listening to?" Albie looked at me and said "What day is it?" So I tapped on the radio several times firmly and said "What do you like to listen to?" Albie looked at me and beamed. "Oldies!" he yelled. I replied "what musicians do you like

best?” “Elvis!” Albie said. And we proceeded to have a discussion about his favorite Elvis songs and other music he liked. Over the course of the semester, every time I came, Albie would seek me out for a chat. He would often repeat phrases over and over and I would use redirection. Albie eventually told me about most of the other participants at the program as well as telling me about the employees—who was nice and who was not. Albie was an outgoing young man who hungered for social interaction and conversation. Unfortunately, most of the employees at the program could not see past his echolalia and kept trying to change it by giving him lectures about not repeating things, rather than trying the simple and effective technique of redirection!

Five Types of Prompts: As explained above, when using error-free learning, we REDIRECT the client to complete the task or learning activity correctly rather than calling attention to errors the client made. PROMPTING is the method we use to redirect the client. There are FIVE types of prompts that can be used to redirect a client:

- 1) **VERBAL prompts:** Verbal prompts can be questions or instructions and are used to redirect the client who has made a mistake or to “nudge” a client who is not taking any action. For example, imagine you are teaching a client to wash their hands. The client is standing in front of the sink but is not doing anything. You might say: “What do you do now?” (Question) or you might say “Turn on the water.” (Instruction). Both of these are verbal prompts.
- 2) **GESTURE prompts:** Gesture prompts can involve cuing the learner by tapping, pointing or making a gesture that imitates a task. Using the same hand washing example from the previous paragraph, where the client is standing in front of the sink, the helping professional might tap on the faucet or point to the faucet to cue the learner to turn on the water. Or the helping professional might mimic the motion of turning on the water to cue the learner.
- 3) **MODELING prompts:** A modeling prompt is where the helping professional performs all or part of the task while the learner watches. When using modeling, the helping professional should make sure he/she has the learner’s attention, i.e., “I’m going to show you how to turn on the water. Watch me now!” It is important to cue the learner to pay attention because it is not possible to learn something without paying attention. (Think of a time when you were introduced to someone and didn’t really pay attention to what their name was. Five minutes later, you’re whispering to a friend, “what was his name?”) A modeling prompt should be immediately followed by “Now you turn on the water.” so that the client has a chance to practice (hands on, multisensory learning) the skill that was modeled.
- 4) **LIGHT PHYSICAL prompts:** With some clients, lightly touching their hand or arm to get them to learn to complete a task correctly works well. In the washing hands example used above, where the client is learning to wash his/her hands, a

light physical prompt might be used to move the client's hand toward the faucet and release the hand as soon as the client starts to turn on the water.

5) **FULL PHYSICAL prompts:** Full physical prompts are done when the learner is having a lot of difficulty completing an ADL task. In the hand washing example used above, a full physical prompt would be where the professional takes the client's hand in his/her own hand, holds the client's hand on the faucet and turns on the faucet.

Some important considerations when using prompting as a teaching technique:

-KNOW YOUR CLIENT: Clients are individuals and individuals learn best in different ways. For some clients, you will find that a verbal prompt works best. For others, modeling or light physical prompts may work best. Pay attention to how each client reacts to your prompts and use this information to choose the prompts that are most effective with a particular client so that you create the best possible learning opportunity for each client.

-COMBINING PROMPTS: The five types of prompts used in redirection and teaching can be used in combination. For example, when teaching a client how to wash his/her hands, you might say: "Turn on the faucet" while also pointing to the faucet.

-TESTING WHICH PROMPT TO USE: Some prompts are stronger than others. Tapping on the faucet to cue the learner to turn on the faucet is a **WEAKER** prompt than guiding the learner's hand to the faucet (light physical prompt) while saying "turn on the faucet." This, in turn, is a weaker prompt than placing your hand over the client's hand and turning on the faucet (full physical prompt) while saying "turn on the faucet." Since our main goal in teaching various ADL and other skills to clients is **INDEPENDENCE**, we want to **AVOID USING PROMPTS THAT ARE STRONGER THAN THE CLIENT NEEDS** so that we don't unintentionally undermine the client's independence.

To avoid overprompting and thereby undermining a client's independence, we use a process called **TESTING** the prompt. When teaching a skill or redirecting a client who had made a mistake, we want to start with a **WEAKER** prompt first. If that doesn't work, we gradually make the prompt **STRONGER** until the client is able to do the task (or part of the task) correctly. When we are teaching a client a skill which has several parts to it like handwashing, getting a glass of juice, making a sandwich, or toothbrushing, we will often find that a client is quite independent in doing parts of the task, but not others. In the handwashing example, maybe a client needs a full physical prompt when learning to turn on the faucet, but only needs a verbal prompt to get the soap and rub it on his/her hands.

-FADING prompts: Fading a prompt is similar to testing. Fading a prompt means that when you are teaching a skill or an ADL task, over time, you

gradually use weaker prompts to cue or redirect the client. This is because your ultimate goal is for the client to be able to do the task or practice the skill INDEPENDENTLY. So, again in terms of the hand washing example, let's say that you've been working with your client for a week on the hand washing skill. So far, your client has needed a verbal prompt plus a light physical prompt to turn on the faucet. You know that you should begin to fade this prompt in order for your client to become more independent, so you try fading the prompt by using just a verbal prompt OR just a light physical prompt to test whether the client has become more independent in this skill. The same strategy of fading the prompt should be used in each aspect of a task (i.e., turning on the faucet, using soap, rinsing hands, drying hands, etc.) in order to help the client to become more independent.

B) Creating INCENTIVES (rewards) for Clients to Learn: Task Specific Praise
I have recently received several assignments from students in this class where the student emphasized the importance of praising a client when he or she completes a task correctly. What this shows me is that many of you already instinctively know that praise (positive feedback) helps promote learning. The purpose of this section is to describe the most effective ways to use praise and occasionally other types of rewards to promote learning. Using task specific praise means that we REWARD a client for completing a task/behavior or part of a task/behavior correctly.

What is meant by TASK SPECIFIC praise: As was just stated, praise gives the learner a reward for doing something correctly, and a reward builds self confidence in the learner and makes it more likely that the learner will repeat the behavior in the future. Task specific praise is a type of praise that includes a statement about what the learner did correctly. This reinforces the learning. In order to understand the difference between praise and task specific praise, imagine you have been teaching a client how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for the past few days. Today, for the first time, the client is able to open up the peanut butter, take some on a knife and spread the peanut on the bread with only a verbal prompt. If you reward this behavior with praise, you might say: "Wow! Great job! I'm proud of you!" In contrast, the technique of task specific praise reinforces the learning by telling the learner exactly what they did right. So in this example, if you are using task specific praise, you might say: "Good for you! You opened up the peanut butter, put some on the knife and spread it onto the bread all by yourself! Great job!"

You do NOT have to give task specific praise every time a client does something right, but it should be done a fairly substantial part of the time. Giving task specific praise may feel awkward at first, but I strongly encourage you to practice this skill because it can be so helpful. In order to understand why, I encourage

you to think of a time when you got a paper back from one of your teachers and there was a grade on the paper but no comments. As a result, you had no idea of why you received the “A” or the “B” or the “C.” If you got an A, you knew that you did something right, but you weren’t sure what it was so you didn’t know what to do in the future to earn another good grade. This is why teacher’s comments are usually helpful and why task specific praise works well by letting the learner know specifically what they did right!

INTRINSIC versus EXTRINSIC rewards: As explained above, when we reward a learner for doing something correctly, this generally makes the learner want to repeat that behavior. There are TWO basic types of rewards: **INTRINSIC** rewards and **EXTRINSIC** rewards. Praise and task specific praise are examples of **INTRINSIC** rewards because they become part of a person’s self concept. To understand what this means, you have to understand that human beings are social animals. We learn about who we are in large part because of what others tell us about ourselves. For example, I think of myself as tall (I am just under 5'8"). Why? Because people have told me all my life that I am tall. I also think of myself as being a good bowler and being very ‘Brooklyn’ in the way I talk and act. Why? Because I have been told these things about myself repeatedly. When a person is praised, the words of praise become **INTRINSIC** because they are taken in and become part of a person’s self concept, i.e., “I can wash my hands all by myself.” Once this becomes part of a person’s self concept, the behavior is likely to be repeated even if the praise stops because now it has become part of who that person is.

EXTRINSIC rewards are tangible items offered as a reward for certain behavior. Parents sometimes offer children money or other privileges for good behavior. Extrinsic rewards work, but the desired behavior tends to stop as soon as the rewards stop because it generally does not become internalized as part of the learner’s self concept. Because of this, using **INTRINSIC** rewards (i.e., task specific praise) is generally more effective. However, you should remember that you may encounter some circumstances or some types of clients where giving extrinsic rewards is the most effective strategy.

C) Mnemonic devices: Mnemonic devices are memory strategies (or “memory tricks”) which can help people remember information. For example, did you ever learn the “Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally” memory trick as a way of remembering the order of mathematical operations you should use when solving a math equation? (The first letter of each word of the sentence “Please excuse my dear Aunt Sally” stands for Parentheses, Exponents, Multiplication, Division, Addition, Subtraction). **MUSIC** is a very important mnemonic device. Most four or five year olds know the entire 26 letters of the English alphabet in order. Just imagine if they had to memorize all these letters in order **WITHOUT** the alphabet

song! How many do you think could or would actually do this task? A task that is made so much easier by the alphabet song.

The point is, when appropriate, find ways to enhance client learning by using music and other mnemonic devices in order to help your clients learn!

REQUIRED ASSIGNMENT: Role Playing Error Free Learning

IMPORTANT: This assignment involves role playing with another person (it can be a child or an adult). If you are quarantined or are completely alone for some other reason and therefore can not do the following assignment, contact me (sednie@kbcc.cuny.edu) and I will give you an alternate assignment!

In order to complete this assignment, you will need to role play teaching a “client” an ADL skill using error free learning techniques. You will therefore need another person to play the role of the client, and you will need to instruct that person in advance to imagine that they do NOT know how to do the ADL task you will be teaching them. You should also tell them to purposely make some mistakes while doing the ADL task so that you can practice redirecting your “client” to do the task correctly using prompting. After you have completed the role play, describe what you learned by writing an ESSAY answering the questions listed below.

Part 1: Instructions for completing the role play part of this assignment:

- 1) Choose a person to work with that understands that, for purposes of this role play, they should pretend that they do NOT know how to do the ADL task you will be teaching and to make some mistakes while role playing with you in order to give you the opportunity to practice redirecting them using prompting.
- 2) Choose an ADL skill that you will be teaching. Some possible examples: handwashing, tooth brushing, getting a glass of juice, putting on a jacket, making a sandwich.
- 3) Remember to **PARTIALIZE** the task (i.e., break the task into specific steps) **BEFORE** you begin working with your “client” doing the role play.
- 4) When beginning the role play, **INTRODUCE** the learning activity quickly and enthusiastically! Do NOT ask the “learner” if they want to learn the task and do NOT give a long explanation. Instead, get the “learner” involved quickly within a few seconds.
- 5) When doing the actual role play of teaching your “client” the ADL task, remember to use the principles we’ve been learning about such as being concrete, prompting, redirection, task specific praise, mnemonic devices, practicing the learning activity in the real situation if possible.

Part 2: Write an ESSAY describing the results of this role play, answering the following questions:

-Describe how you **PARTIALIZED** the ADL skill you would be teaching before you began the role play.

- How did you INTRODUCE the role play to your “client”?
- During the role play, which of the teaching techniques (such as prompting, task specific praise, redirecting rather than saying “no,” using mnemonic devices, being concrete, using a multisensory learning strategy, etc.) did you find EASIEST to use? Explain, using examples.
- During the role play, which of the teaching techniques (such as prompting, task specific praise, redirecting rather than saying “no,” using mnemonic devices, being concrete, using a multisensory learning strategy, etc.) did you find HARDEST to use? Explain, using examples.
- Did you find yourself saying “no” when your “client” made an error rather than redirecting by prompting? Explain.
- Did you find it hard to remember to use task specific praise frequently during the role play? Explain.
- Did you find yourself over prompting (i.e., using prompts that were too strong) or did you remember to test with a weaker prompt first? Explain, giving examples.
- Did you use any mnemonic devices? If so, which ones? Explain.
- What did you learn about yourself and your teaching ability based on this exercise? What error free learning skills do you need to work on? Explain.
- What questions do you have about error free learning and the teaching process in general?
- Is there anything else I should have asked? If so, please include it in your essay.