

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Access to the General Curriculum

Wehmeyer, M. L., Lattin, D. L., Lapp-Rincker, G., & Agran, M. (2003). Access to the general curriculum of middle school students with mental retardation: An observational study. *Remedial and Special Education, 24*(5), 262-272.

BOTTOM LINE

Including students with mental retardation in the general education classroom provides them with greater access to the general curriculum. The results of this study show that when students with disabilities are in general education settings, they are more likely to participate with the general education curriculum but less likely to engage in activities linked to a standard that is on grade level, especially if they have a severe disability. In the general education classroom, curricular modifications can be used to increase access for students with mental retardation. According to IDEA '97, all students should participate and make progress in the general curriculum.

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TIPS

- Plan the general curriculum with principles of universal design for learning (see [CAST](#)) in mind so that students with mental retardation can work toward goals within a general curriculum context.
 - Provide students with mental retardation access to the general classroom and use curricular modifications to adjust the content and curricular adaptations such as symbols, pictures, concrete objects, charts, or other aids to assist in comprehension of big ideas within the general curriculum lessons. Other adaptations may include presenting information in graphic form, use digitized text so that font size and color can be adjusted, and use audio- and video-based delivery mechanisms.
 - Teach students with mental retardation strategies to enable them to learn more effectively within the general curriculum. Such strategies include “learning-to-learn” and may involve teaching different rehearsal strategies and adapted writing and memory strategies.
- Develop standards that are open-ended to allow students to express their knowledge or skills in varying ways.
- Develop standards that are open-ended to allow students to express their knowledge or skills in varying ways. Also allow students to respond using diverse means such as conventional written, video, computer, and audio formats. With open-ended standards all students can show progress within their Individualized Education Program (IEP) as federal law requires.

KEY FINDINGS

- Those students enrolled in a general education classroom worked on tasks linked to a standard during 90% of the intervals while only 50% of those not in general education classroom worked on tasks associated with district standards.
- IEP objectives are more likely to be worked on outside of the general classroom.
- Students with intense support needs were less likely to be engaged in activities related to the general curriculum compared with students having limited support needs.
- Students with intense support needs used curriculum adaptations much more than students with limited support needs. However, very few adaptations were used, and these adaptations were not extensive.

METHODS

- At two public schools, thirty-three middle school students with mental retardation were observed for the study.
- Students were divided into two groups: those with access to the general education classroom and students who did not have access to the general classroom.
- Students were observed in their natural classroom context for at least eight 15-minute observation sessions. The class content (i.e history) and the presence or absence of peers without disabilities was also recorded for each session.
- From school records, demographic data were collected. Student IEPs listed current goals and objectives and if state assessments with accommodations had been taken.
- Trained observers recorded information about classroom-based activities that represented a student's access to and involvement in the general curriculum.
- Analysis of Variance by levels of support (limited or intense supports) was conducted to look at all of the student behaviors together. The researchers also looked at the impact of different classroom variables within the population of students observed.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

- Center for Applied Special Technology. (1999). *The National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum*. Retrieved May 21, 2002, from http://www.cast.org/initiatives/national_center.html.
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- Wehmeyer, M. L., Lance, G. D., & Bashinski, S. (2002). Promoting access to the general curriculum for students with mental retardation: A multilevel model. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 37, 223-234.
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