Beach Center on Disability
a resource for families and professionals

Research Highlights

Topic: Self-Determination

Agran, M., Blanchard, C., Wehmeyer, M., and Hughes, C. (2002). Increasing the problem-solving skills of students with developmental disabilities participating in general education. *Remedial and Special Education,* 23, 279-288.

BOTTOM LINE

Problem-solving skills of persons with developmental disabilities are cited as key factors in success at school, integration within the community, and enhanced self-determination. Even with this knowledge, problem-solving skills have not adequately been taught to those with disabilities. This article reports the results of a study in which four students with cognitive disabilities were taught problem-solving skills using the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction. Findings indicate this model can provide a successful way to teach problem solving skills to students with disabilities.

TIPS

- Incorporate problem-solving training into everyday activities. Students may practice these skills at school and at home, and will benefit from instruction in problem solving strategies when dealing with "real-life" problems.
- Goal-setting and problem-solving skills are important augmentative skills. Instruction in these areas will affect overall performance of academic and functional skills.

KEY FINDINGS

- Findings indicate that students with developmental disabilities and mental retardation can learn self-regulated problem solving strategies to achieve self-selected goals.
- Participating students' performance levels increased to 100 percent after instruction in using the model. All participants learned to use the strategies in a relatively brief period.

KEY FINDINGS cont.

- Student gains using the model exceeded teacher expectations, as measured by the Goal Attainment Scale.

- Results indicate that students had positive feelings about the model and their increased problem-solving abilities. Results indicate an immediate change for all individuals including increased appropriate touching, contributions to class discussion, and following directions.

METHOD

- Four middle school students having autism, cognitive disabilities, or multiple disabilities were chosen for the study. Target behaviors were selected for each student by the students, special and general education teachers, and parents.

- To achieve these goals, students followed the problem-solving model after receiving instruction. Teachers participated daily by providing students with three to five opportunities to practice their targeted behaviors and problem-solving skills.

- Behavioral data were collected daily for each student. Teachers reported their perceptions of student progress and problem-solving skills at the conclusion of the study. Students provided social validation information through a brief interview.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Agran, M., Blanchard, C., & Wehmeyer, M. (2000). Promoting transition goals and self-determination through student self-directed learning: The self-determined learning model of instruction. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 35, 351-364.

Agran, M., & Wehmeyer, M. (1999). *Teaching problem solving to students with mental retardation*. Washington, DC: American Association on Mental Retardation.

Wehmeyer, M. L., Agran, M., & Hughes, C. (1998). *Teaching self-determination to students with disabilities: Basic skills for successful transition.* Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

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