Including Students with Multiple/Severe Disabilities in the General Education Classroom

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Meaningful Participation

Every student has the right to actively participate in natural settings within their school and community. In education, inclusion means educating students with disabilities among their peers without disabilities to the greatest extent possible. Inclusion in the general education classroom provides all students the opportunity to participate, learn, and feel a sense of belonging within a group. It does not mean everyone must complete the same work in the same way. It allows for accommodations so that everyone is able participate to the greatest extent possible while using the general education curriculum.

Integration Options (Wolfe, P. & Hall, T., 2003)

- Unadapted Participation in the General Education Curriculum— same activities, same objectives, same setting
  - Can students complete the activities as written for the general education classroom?
  - Do one or more lesson objectives match the student's IEP?
- Adaptations to the General Curriculum—same activities, different (related) objectives, same setting
  - Can the student meet the lesson objectives with minor modifications (time, response mode)?
- Embedded Skills Within the General Curriculum—similar activities, different (related) objectives, same setting
  - Are there components of the activity that can be met by the student, even if not the central objective of the lesson, but that match an IEP objective?
- Functional Curriculum in the General Education Classroom— different activities, different (related) objectives, same setting
  - Are the class activities greatly unrelated to the student's IEP? Are there IEP objectives that could be met in the same setting?
- Functional Curriculum Outside General Education Classroom— different activities, different (unrelated) objectives, different setting
  - Are the class activities greatly unrelated to the student's IEP? Are IEP objectives better met in a different setting (require equipment, repetition, etc.)?

Peer Buddy Supports

Peer buddy supports can be used in any setting and with any activity. They are an inexpensive way to facilitate inclusion in the classroom and also to promote social inclusion of students with disabilities. Peer buddy supports can be used in a variety of ways:

- Writing if the student has physical limitations
- Assisting with academic work (reviewing a lesson or detailing instructions if needed)
- Assisting student with mobility (pushing wheelchair, sighted guide)
- Using student's mode of communication (e.g., voice output device, sign language, symbol boards)
- Help student keep attention directed toward the teacher
- Provide corrective feedback
- Be a positive role model
- Facilitate social interactions between student and peers

Technology

Technology is an important component of inclusion for many students with multiple/severe disabilities. Often, students require the use of communication devices that range from communication boards to voice output devices. It is important that teachers understand their forms of communication in order to actively communicate with the student.

- Become familiar and comfortable with a student's communication device. Talk with the family and other professionals to learn how to use it.
- Use the student's communication device to interact. This reinforces their skills on their device as well as their social skills.
- Develop pictures/symbols or record frequently used terms and phrases in the student's device to ensure their participation within the general education classroom.
- Use adaptation switches. They can be attached to most electronics and with one motion a student with physical limitations can activate many items with either their hand, foot, knee, elbow, or whichever body part they feel most comfortable using.
- Encourage the use of the computer (either with or without switches) for students who may have difficulty writing.

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RESOURCES

Classroom and Recreational Adaptations

Below are some suggestions for different classes and activities.

- Writing
  - Using adapted materials (large grip pencils)
  - Have a peer write for the student
  - Have student present material in another form (orally)
- Reading
  - Use audio books
  - Books on the computer (pages turn by activating a switch)
  - Peer reads or turns the pages of the book
- Computer
  - Using a switch to navigate programs
- Physical Education
  - Having a peer kick or hit the ball while another peer pushes or assists student along the bases or down the field
  - Student can activate stopwatch when peers are being timed in an activity
  - Using adaptive materials for different sports (rainspout when bowling)
- Lunch
  - Using adapted utensils to self-feed
  - Peer assists in getting food from lunch line
- Art
  - Using adapted brushes, pencils, markers, or making your own by wrapping tape several times around an item making it thicker and easier to grip
  - Peer can cut items and put glue down while student pastes them by pressing them down
  - Taping papers to table so they don't move around when trying to paint, draw, or color
- Music
  - Using instruments that can be strapped to the hand or other body part
  - Student can hold instrument while peer hits it (drums, cymbals) and vice versa
  - If using a recorded piece of music, student can use a switch to turn it on and off for the class
- Floor Activities/Table Activities
  - Use floor corner sitting chairs (students are at the same level as peers)
  - Use standers

Who We Are and Who We Serve

The **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center** (VKC) works with and for people with disabilities and their family members, educators and service providers, researchers, students, and policy makers. Faculty and staff engage in interdisciplinary research, training, service, and information dissemination and work in collaboration with local, state and national networks and partners. (615) 322-8240, toll-free (866) 936-8852, vkc.vumc.org

Disabilities, Religion and Spirituality

This program provides training to current and future religious and spiritual leaders and educators and supports individuals with disabilities and families as they give expression to their religion and/or spirituality. Activities include developing ecumenical educational materials, conducting research, and sharing best practices. vkc.vumc.org/vkc/religionandspirituality/

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

Provides free information, referral sources, and help with navigating services via phone, email, and website. Assistance is available to individuals of all ages, all types of disabilities, and all languages spoken. Its website includes a directory of more than 3,000 agencies searchable by Tennessee county, topic of interest, and other filters. Pathfinder is a project of the VKC and is partially funded by Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and other state agencies. (615) 322-8529, toll-free (800) 640-4636, TNPathfinder.org

Two Easy Ways to Take Part in Research

StudyFinder is a searchable database that lists current VKC studies. Studies seek people of all ages with and without developmental disabilities. See **vkc.vumc.org/studyfinder**. Research Match is a secure place for volunteers and researchers to connect. See **researchmatch.org**

Other Resources

- **TREDS Deafblind Project** equips families and educators with information needed to improve outcomes for individuals, ages birth-21, who are deafblind. www.childrenshospitalvanderbilt.org/program/tennessee-deaf-blind-project
- **Adaptive Equipment Resources**
  EnableMart, www.schoolhealth.com
  Tennessee Technology Access Project
  www.tn.gov/humanservices/ds/ttap.html
- Carter, Erik, Cushing, Lisa, Kennedy, Craig (2009). *Peer Support Strategies for Improving All Students' Social Lives and Learning.* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.
- Wolfe, P. & Hall, T. (2003). Making Inclusion a Reality for Students With Severe Disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 35(4), 56-61.

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