



Tips for Home or School Best Educational Practices for Students with Severe & Multiple Disabilities

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These components refer to the practices that have been shown by recent research to improve an individual's ability to become an active and accepted member of society.

- 1. Functional, Age-Appropriate Curricula.** The curriculum for students with severe and multiple disabilities should stress skills that are chronologically age-appropriate, functional for the learner, and taught in a natural context. A functional approach, with a top-down philosophy, as opposed to a developmental-based curriculum (bottom-up) is crucial for greater progress of the student.
- 2. Inclusion with Peers without Disabilities.** Learners with severe disabilities need daily social interactions with their peers without disabilities to develop positive social skills necessary for acceptance into the community. The benefits of inclusion, both for learners with severe disabilities and for students without disabilities, are well documented, and emphasize the need for learners with severe and multiple disabilities to be educated in inclusive educational settings.
- 2. Community-Based Instruction.** It has become increasingly apparent that learners with severe disabilities need to acquire and maintain skills in the natural community environments where the skills are needed to avoid the difficulty of generalizing from an artificial setting to a more natural one.
- 3. Positive Behavioral Support.** Best instructional practices for students with severe disabilities emphasize a positive behavioral support approach to help individuals reduce problem behaviors, while they acquire more appropriate and functional behaviors. This type of positive instruction complements a functional, age-appropriate curriculum and community-based instruction, while it respects the rights of the learner to a humane and positive education.
- 4. Transition Planning.** Learners with severe and multiple disabilities (like students without disabilities) need to receive training that will enhance their opportunities to successfully make the transition from an elementary school program to a secondary program, and from school to working and living in their community. Since these students may have difficulty acquiring new skills quickly and adjusting to new environments, consideration must be given to developing comprehensive, longitudinal educational plans for each individual student. Transition planning should begin as early as in the elementary grades.
- 5. Parent Involvement.** Parents are critical to the educational process. Parents have valuable information and expertise to share with professionals. Increasing emphasis on parent and family involvement in educational planning creates a need to train educational staff to recognize factors affecting the family structure, needs of the family, and methods for working effectively with each unique family system.
- 6. Integrative Service Delivery Approach.** When support staff and educators combine forces to provide an integrative approach to service delivery, the learner benefits from a holistic type of intervention that does not segment him or her into isolated strengths and weaknesses. It is recommended that all staff responsible for a learner's education to work cooperatively to achieve common goals and objectives. The integrative service delivery approach makes use of support staff primarily as consultants to the primary teachers, but also incorporates the expertise of these individuals into the functional and daily scheduled activities for the learners.

