Technology And Special Education Essay, Research Paper

Technology and Special Education

We live in an era where computers are used in most people s everyday life. Technology has achieved remarkable progress and with this knowledge it s time that important issues are addressed. Homelessness, abortion, taxes, and welfare reform are a few examples of the humanitarian issues I m talking about. But, the most important issue is education. Because everything we do begins with learning. We learn from our parents and siblings but, more importantly, the education we receive in school is where the learning really begins. We must place emphasis on programs in our Exceptional Student Education programs (more commonly referred to as Special Education) in our country. These programs are imperative for the enhancement and achievements of students in special education.

Exceptional Student Education or Special Education is instruction that is specially designed to meet the unique needs of children who have disabilities. This is done at no cost to the parents. Special education can include special instruction in the classroom, at home, in hospitals, or other institutions. Over 5 million children ages 6 through 21 receive special education and related services each year in the United States. Each of these children receives instruction that is specially designed:

to meet the child’s unique needs (that result from having a disability); and

to help the child learn the information and skills that other children are learning ( Questions often asked by Parents about Special Education Services, 1999).

It s time that more consideration is given to exceptional students who have disabilities and/or medical conditions that prevent them from performing to society s standards. We must educate every one of these individuals and use any and all resources that are available to help them to grow to be an independent individual. We need to educate our exceptional students by today s standards as well as educate for tomorrow s living. The answer is computer technology.

One of the most difficult challenges faced by teachers today is educating students who have physical, language, or learning disabilities to achieve outcomes, or standards, expected of all students. Nationally, there is a strong push for higher standards of learning. As states and schools implement these standards, they face the challenge of ensuring that they include all students, particularly students with disabilities who are often excluded from these types of educational initiatives. Language arts or learning to communicate effectively in written format is one of the most critical prerequisites for school success. It is also one of the most demanding tasks that students, with or without disabilities, are asked to undertake. As a consequence, many children with developmental disabilities experience significant difficulties learning to read and write. For those same students, obtaining an equal education in mathematics is hampered by the lack of adapted math curricula (Metheny, Rick, 1997).

The most important factor in deciding a child s educational needs are his/her parents. After all, parents know what his/her child s needs are and they are the best source for the teachers in order to develop an effective Individualized Education Program (IEP). Effective special education programs plan for student transition. Transition should not be a concept reserved only for older students. Transition is a process and includes moving from one program to another, such as: early childhood to elementary school; elementary to middle; high school to postsecondary; or special class to less restrictive setting. What is taught and how it is taught is the crux of effective education. Effective special education includes making decisions about instructional content that reflect the longer-term goals for the student and promote his/or maximum achievement and integration (McLaughlin, Margaret, 1993).

Parents need to know and must seek advice from sources to find out what individual education program is appropriate to their own particular instance. This is where parents and the education process need more structuring. If you re a parent, as I am, of a disabled child you may already realize that an IEP is mainly decided by the parent, the child s special education teacher, and others who are directly involved. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and IEP are programs that work together. This law was enacted to ensure that all children with disabilities would have a free, appropriate public education available to them that would meet their unique needs (General Information About Disabilities, 1996). IDEA is the law that guides how schools deliver special education and related services to students with disabilities ( HELPING STUDENTS DEVELOP THEIR IEPS, 1995).

With all the technology available many of our exceptional students may be able to live a normal or almost normal life if given the tools and instruction they need to develop. We must focus our attention on these individuals and make sure that all resources available to them be implemented. Expanded keyboards, motorized wheelchairs, mouth wands that activate computer systems, voice controlled computers are only a few of the technological advances that are changing the way we educate students with disabilities. These are some of the hardware equipment available while there are many software programs available to serve people with disabilities. It s common knowledge that students who can t read or write don t try to strengthen these skills but tend to avoid any situation that requires that skill. This same principle applies to arithmetic. The software programs are too many to mention but include programs that can be effective in productivity, organization, writing assistance, and cognitive skills.

Fiscal responsibility, budget constraints, the list of reasons for a limited material budget goes on and on. There are solutions and resources inside and outside the classrooms that allow you to obtain the software you need for the students you serve. Some available options include freeware programs which are internet sites where other teachers have posted single switch programs at the sites listed were created using HyperStudio or IntelliPics. These switch programs are free and cover a wide variety of curriculum areas. To use HyperStudio or IntelliPics programs on any computer, a HyperStudio or IntelliPics player is needed. These players are free and can be obtained from Roger Wagner and IntelliTools (Pellerito, Fred and Molly Mead, 1997). There are also many agencies that will provide technology to students and schools who meet fundability standards. These funds are available to those who apply and ask for your child to be evaluated to see if it meets with his/her individual needs. Most software is written for the Apple II series of computers, which is the computer available in most schools.

The changes are just beginning. The computers of the future will be faster, smaller, and more portable. They will be activated by the human voice and, in due course, will have handwriting-recognition systems capable of reading even the worst illegible writing. Also, the prospect of virtual reality systems that enable people to move through artificial visual environments and intelligent software programs that understand an individual s information needs. These and other technological developments will help those with disabilities live and work more independently in society. Once again, I must stress the importance of implementing these programs in our Exceptional Student Education Programs and inaugurate these programs in our grade schools to those individuals whose criterion needs have been established. It s up to us, as parents, caretakers, teachers, educators of all kinds, and medical personnel to assess an IEP appropriate for a person s disability and address their specific needs.

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