

RESEARCH FINDINGS BRIEF

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Overview of RRTC's Purpose

The purpose of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) is to conduct a strategic program of research, training, technical assistance, and information dissemination focused upon educational supports that increase access and improve outcomes for persons with disabilities in postsecondary education programs and subsequently, in the labor force. Addressing this priority, the primary goals of the RRTC are as follows: 1) To identify the nature and range of educational supports 2) To identify new technologies that improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities; 3) To identify effective supports and models of support delivery that contribute to improved outcomes for students with disabilities; 4) To investigate methods by which the supports in postsecondary programs can be extended to the employment environment, including students with severe disabilities; and 5) To provide training, technical assistance and information to educational support personnel, public and private rehabilitation personnel, career placement specialist, and students with disabilities concerning the effectiveness of specific educational supports and models of delivery in improving postsecondary educational and career outcomes of the people with disabilities.

Topical Review: Secondary School Curricula Issues

AUDIENCE Secondary academic and vocational teachers, counselors, administrators, postsecondary school disability support providers, admission counselors, faculty members, researchers, and teacher trainers.

ISSUE

Supporting and teaching students with disabilities to learn rigorous, standards-based curriculum in secondary school is considered a complex and difficult issue for educators. This review examines three areas of significant issue thought to have an influence upon students' performance in secondary school and their subsequent access to and performance in postsecondary education.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How do students with disabilities in secondary school settings learn challenging academic curriculum?

How do secondary school teachers learn and use effective research-based instructional practices in order to help students with disabilities learn rigorous, standards-based curricula?

How do contextual factors in secondary school settings influence teaching and learning when addressing the needs of students with disabilities?

METHOD

The review paper examines information in the extant knowledge base regarding the research questions. Literature was gathered using computer-based searches of several electronic databases covering publications of the last twenty years. Information deemed pertinent to the research questions was systematically analyzed applying multi-vocal literature and participatory action research approaches.

KEY FINDINGS

How students learn challenging academic curriculum

- Use of problem based learning, constructivist classrooms and multiple intelligence's theory seem to help students with disabilities learn challenging academic curriculum.
- Use of a variety of instructional supports, such as curriculum modification strategies, meta-cognitive approaches, graphic organizers, and "thinking maps" seem to support students with disabilities in learning challenging academic curriculum.
- Addressing individual student learning and behavior needs while teaching challenging curriculum to students with disabilities is not well understood in secondary school settings.

How teachers learn and use research-based practices

- Teachers seem to learn best when they are engaged in concrete tasks, grounded in inquiry, reflection, experimentation -- collaborative and interactional, and involved with sustained, ongoing, and intensive activities.
- Schools with the highest ratings of reform indicators use mentoring or coaching to transfer new skills, action research to experiment and refine new practices, local learning networks, and individualized faculty growth plans.

How contextual factors influence teaching and learning?

- Existence of a school-wide or whole school philosophy that values the achievement and participation of all students is integral to success.
- Alternative scheduling and reconfigured schools can have an effect upon academic achievement.
- Student ability grouping and tracking harms students with learning and behavior difficulties and does not encourage student mastery of challenging curriculum.

IMPLICATIONS

- There is a need for educational researchers to focus on teaching and learning in secondary schools and to further explore ways to address individualized needs within challenging academic curriculum.
- There is a need for extensive personnel development with secondary school staff following the best practices in adult learning theory.
- There is a need for students with disabilities to become involved with and contribute to decisions about their own learning.

REFERENCE

Stodden, R.A., Stodden, N.J. & Gilmore, S. Review of Secondary Curricula Issues and Impact Upon Access and Participation of Youth with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education.(Submitted for publication to *Exceptional Children*, April 2000)

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