

Supporting Students With Disabilities in Schools

Curation Project - Katharine Merrell
INTE 6720, University of Colorado - Denver
March 7, 2021

Background and Methodology

The current school system in the United States does not always serve all students equally well as many parents and students can attest. Some students thrive in the classroom, while others struggle mightily in the same surroundings and with the same teaching methods. The social model of disability recognizes these inequalities as flaws in society and its expectations, rather than in an individual. The social model of disability seeks to create adaptations in the environment to mitigate those difficulties to improve the experience and capabilities of a person with disabilities in a particular setting (Sobsey & Scorgie, 2017). Seeking additional educational services and support can be a daunting prospect for many caregivers and/or students at all levels of education. Recognizing the students that would benefit from these services and how to best provide or support them effectively can be intimidating for educators. Fostering effective collaboration and communication among multiple stakeholders is sometimes an even more imposing proposition. This list of resources is created to provide suggestions of finding expertise on how to create more inclusive learning situations for students of varying abilities in the classroom setting.

In a search of the academic library at University of Colorado - Denver, the search string “support parents students special needs,” and limited to the most recent five years of publication provided immediate and relevant results, primarily in the form of online books. (Fiore & Fiore, 2018; Lutzker et al., 2018; Sobsey & Scorgie, 2017) These books are primarily written for the benefit of educators as resources to support their work with students with disabilities and their

families. They may also be helpful for family members interested in a more in-depth exploration, or while they are working with educators and advocates.

To find more broadly applicable and publicly available results, search engine results from the phrase “support organizations parents education” produced a list of national organizations that provide free research information, news, advocacy, and assistance across a broad spectrum of disabilities, locales, and ages. In the list below, I include a particular emphasis on learning disabilities, as they can be less frequently recognized and diagnosed than some more visible and better-known disabilities. For parents or educators interested in further information about specific diagnoses or disabilities, effective search terms may include “parent support + _____ (preferred diagnosis/area of concern).” A more natural language approach such as “why does my child/student...” or “strategies to help with...” can be both easier to generate and helpful for a layperson trying to better define their own concerns or interests.

Resources

Fiore, D. J., & Fiore, J. A. (2018). *Partners for special needs : How teachers can effectively collaborate with parents and other advocates*. Routledge.

http://aurarialibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1640909&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_73

This is a book written by a married couple with a combined nearly fifty years in the field of education. It was created primarily for teachers, especially pre-service educators, about the history, legal considerations, and characteristics of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). This resource focuses on the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach to accommodating and challenging all students to facilitate achievement and inclusion throughout the classroom.

LDOnline. (2021). *LD online:All about learning disabilities and ADHD*. Retrieved February 28, 2021 from <http://www.ldonline.org/>

This website is packed with information about learning disabilities. Its visual design could use improvement as it looks compressed. Text does not flow across the width of a screen. Some of the text color choices also provide insufficient contrast for good legibility. It has settings to increase font size, but only within a few preset options. The website includes a wealth of articles, multimedia, and strategies, including a section of information written in Spanish so it is worth a visit despite its design flaws.

Learning Disabilities Association of America. (n.d.). *Support. educate. advocate*. Retrieved February 27, 2021 from <https://ldaamerica.org/>

Do you or a loved one have a learning disability, or wonder if you might? This organization's mission is "to create opportunities for success for all individuals affected by learning disabilities through support, education, and advocacy" ("About Us" page). The site shares diagnosis information and support, policy and advocacy updates, as well as many resources for parents, students, and teachers to improve scholastic experiences and outcomes. It also has a more user-friendly design than LDOnline.

Lutzker, J. R., Guastaferrro, K. M., Koegel, L., Koegel, B., Koegel, R., Durand, V. M., Clarke, S., Strauss, J., McIntyre, L. L., & Brown, M. (2018). *A guide to programs for parenting children with autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disabilities or developmental disabilities : Evidence-based guidance for professionals* (K. Guastaferrro & J. Lutzker, Ed.). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

http://aurarialibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1692547&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_Cover

This book summarizes a collection of formal programs designed for parents and caretakers to learn how to better support children with intellectual and developmental disabilities through behavior management and skills learning. It is composed in fairly academic language, so probably best used in a team setting, with parents and experts exploring options together. One novel aspect is the order in which programs are organized. In this book, programs are described with the first entries having the largest quantity and most rigorous level of supporting evidence and proceeding through lower levels of research to the less-studied, but still promising options at the end of the book.

Sobsey, D. & Scorgie, K. (Ed.). (2017). *Working with families for inclusive education : Navigating identity, opportunity and belonging*. Emerald Publishing Limited.

http://aurarialibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1431244&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_255

The authors of the essays that make up this book have extensive personal experience and credentials in various aspects of working with folks of varying abilities. The author list includes multiple authors that identify as members of the disability community, or parents and siblings of students with disabilities. Essays vary from easy-to-read narratives to more complicated academic studies. Topics explored include both success stories and situations that demonstrate further room for improvement.

Special Education Guide. (2021). *Support and resources for parents and teachers*. Retrieved February 28, 2020 from

<https://www.specialeducationguide.com/pre-k-12/tools-and-research/support-and-resources-for-parents-and-teachers/>.

Scroll past the commercial links at the top to reach the list entitled “Support Organizations for Families.” This list contains dozens of links to advocacy and support groups with a wide variety of areas of focus. Some address special education needs and questions in general, while others are divided into subtopics such as “communication disabilities” and “brain/spinal cord injuries.” After the family resources, there is a smaller but still considerable list of teacher resources, including professional organizations, idea clearinghouses and teacher guides. Scroll fatigue could be an issue on this website, but it makes an excellent starting point for non-experts to connect with resources and people with similar interests/needs.

Understood for All. (2021). *For learning and thinking differences*. Retrieved February 28, 2021 from <https://www.understood.org/>

Understood For All is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting all people that learn and think differently. The site includes information for families and educators. Additional features include portals for young adults seeking to be more involved in their own decisions and employers interested in creating a more inclusive environment for employees with visible and invisible disabilities.

National Institute of Health. (2018) *What are some signs of learning disabilities?* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/learning/conditioninfo/signs>

As learning disabilities are frequently regarded as “invisible” disabilities, this is a short introduction, including some frequent symptoms and specific descriptions of a few common ones. It may be helpful for caregivers and educators new to the concept, or trying to better understand a child’s difficulties with academics or behavior at school. It includes few suggestions for intervention and accommodation, but can be useful for someone seeking to identify symptoms that merit further evaluation by a professional.