

ED371507 1990-00-00 Severe Disabilities. ERIC Digest #311. Revised.

ERIC Development Team

www.eric.ed.gov

Table of Contents

If you're viewing this document online, you can click any of the topics below to link directly to that section.

Severe Disabilities. ERIC Digest #311. Revised.....	1
WHAT IS MEANT BY "SEVERE DISABILITIES"?	1
WHAT ARE SOME TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH	2
WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF SEVERE	3
REFERENCES	4



ERIC Identifier: ED371507

Publication Date: 1990-00-00

Author:

Source: ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children Reston VA.

Severe Disabilities. ERIC Digest #311. Revised.

THIS DIGEST WAS CREATED BY ERIC, THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ERIC, CONTACT ACCESS ERIC 1-800-LET-ERIC
SEVERE DISABILITIES

WHAT IS MEANT BY "SEVERE DISABILITIES"?

The classifications of severe handicaps, severe/profound impairments, or multiple disabilities are less than precise. Children so labeled present a complex picture: they

might include those with diagnoses of mental retardation, schizophrenia, autism, or cerebral palsy. Further behavioral, sensory, or orthopedic problems may also be involved.

Mental retardation may be the central and single largest category represented in severe disabilities. The more severe the retardation, the greater is the chance for concomitant problems.

Children with severe disabilities used to be easily defined: they were those children excluded from school on the basis of extensive mental, physical, and/or behavioral impairments that were considered permanent in nature.

More recent efforts to define the population have emphasized the educational considerations rather than static deficiencies. For some students, severe disability may be a transitory condition during which the individual requires frequent care, supervision, and/or assistance.

Baker (1979) put it this way:

The severely handicapped individual is one whose ability to provide for his or her own basic life sustaining and safety needs is so limited, relative to the proficiency expected on the basis of chronological age, that it could pose a serious threat to his or her survival. (p. 60)

WHAT ARE SOME TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH

SEVERE DISABILITIES? Severely disabled individuals may exhibit one or more of the following behaviors:



* Self-mutilation.



* Ritualistic behaviors.



* Self-stimulation.



* Failure to attend or relate to others.



* Lack of self-care skills.



* Lack of verbal communication skills.



* Lack of basic physical mobility.

WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF SEVERE

DISABILITIES? Students with severe disabilities are now attending local schools. Some have been released from institutions, others from isolation at home, and still others have been identified at birth and served in early intervention programs. Whatever their avenue of approach, their arrival at school brings unique issues to the fore, including:



* The degree and quality of interaction between nondisabled and severely disabled students.



* The increasing importance of a multidisciplinary approach with input from occupational, physical, and speech/language therapists; nurses; audiologists; psychologists; social workers; and pediatricians.



* The need for a curriculum grounded in preliminary sensory motor stimulation and subsequent stress on five major areas: motor, self-help, communication, social/interpersonal, and cognitive skills.



* The growing importance of prevocational/vocational training and leisure skills development in the severely disabled student's life as he or she ages.



* The need for arrangements made within the classroom setting to provide for medication, dietary needs, and self-care requirements.



* The use of technological advances, specifically computer applications and electronic communication devices.



* The advent of community living arrangements and the resulting stress on programming for the greatest degree possible of independent living.

Severely disabled individuals do not learn as easily by incidental learning as do less disabled and nondisabled persons. Therefore, instruction in even the most basic skills must be carefully structured and planned.

REFERENCES

Baker, D. B. (1979). "Severely handicapped: Toward an inclusive definition." *JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE SEVERELY HANDICAPPED*, 1979, 4(1), 52-65.

Finnie, N. R. (1975). "Handling the young cerebral palsied child at home." New York: E. P. Dutton.

Haring, N. G., & Bricker, D. D. (Eds.). (1978). "Teaching the severely handicapped (Vol. 3)." Columbus, OH: Special Press.

Jegard, S., Anderson, L., Glazer, C., & Witold, A. (1980). "A comprehensive program for multi-handicapped children." Saskatoon, Canada: Alvin Buckwold Centre.

Orelove, F. P., & Sobsey, D. (1987). "Educating children with multiple disabilities: A transdisciplinary approach." Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Sailor, W., & Guess, D. (1983). "Severely handicapped students: An instructional design." Burlington, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Stainback, S., & Stainback, W. (1980). "Educating children with severe maladaptive behaviors." New York: Grune & Stratton.

Stainback, S., & Stainback W. (1985). "Integration of students with severe handicaps into regular schools." Reston, VA: The Council for Exceptional Children/ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children.

Van Etten, G., Arkell, C., & Van Etten, C. (1980). "The severely and profoundly

handicapped: Programs, methods, and materials." St. Louis: C. V. Mosby.

Walsh, S. R., & Holzberg, R. (Eds.). (1979). "Understanding and educating the deaf blind/severely and profoundly handicapped." Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

York, R. L., & Edgar, E. (Eds.). (1979). "Teaching the severely handicapped (Vol. 4)." Columbus, OH: Special Press.



RESOURCES



Association for Retarded Citizens



P.O. Box 6109



Arlington, TX 76005



817/640-0204





The Association for the Severely Handicapped



7010 Roosevelt Way, N.E.



Seattle, WA 98115



206/283-5055





ABLEDATA



Newington Children's Hospital



181 Cedar Street



Newington, CT 06111



203/667-5200





Center for Special Education Technology



The Council for Exceptional Children



1920 Association Drive



Reston, VA 22091



703/620-3660



800/873-8255





National Easter Seal Society



2023 West Ogden Avenue



Chicago, IL 60612



312/243-8400





TRACE Research and Development Center



S-151 Waisman Center



1500 Highland Avenue



Madison, WI 53705-2280



608/262-6966





United Cerebral Palsy Association



7 Penn Plaza, Suite 804



New York, NY 10001



212/268-6655



800/USA-1UCP

ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated.

This publication was prepared with funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, under contract no. RI88062007. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.

Title: Severe Disabilities. ERIC Digest #311. Revised.

Document Type: Information Analyses---ERIC Information Analysis Products (IAPs) (071); Information Analyses---ERIC Digests (Selected) in Full Text (073);

Available From: Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Dr., Reston, VA 22091-1589 (\$1 each, minimum order \$5 prepaid).

Descriptors: Curriculum, Definitions, Educational Methods, Elementary Secondary Education, Intervention, Severe Disabilities, Student Characteristics

Identifiers: ERIC Digests

###

—



[\[Return to ERIC Digest Search Page\]](#)