

Blended Learning for Students with Learning Disabilities

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Introduction

Educational technology was first introduced in the 1920s in classrooms with a simple radio (Repairs 2021). In 1963, the Vocational Education Act funded technology for schools to utilize its resources. Special education students on the other hand just started utilizing technology a little over 20 years ago. Technology hasn't been in special education classes despite the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (I.D.E.A) noting that technology should be considered and supported when planning for educational programs for students with disabilities (Edyburn 2013). The topic of my research is to have SpEd students/students with learning disabilities utilize technology and create their own ePortfolio so they can have control of their own learning.

Students with learning disabilities can benefit from a blended learning environment when they can utilize technology and its resources. Blended learning is when traditional face-to-face learning is combined with some sort of electronic that ties the learning altogether. Blended learning could be used for control to experience different objectives and learning styles, convenience to where they can learn any and everywhere, and also for easy scaling (Naba 2023). As general education students are gaining more access to technology and districts providing students with Chromebooks and router boxes for internet access, special education students should be able to have the same opportunity to work on a Chromebook and grasp the concepts of utilizing technology. Special education children would benefit from technology from the number of resources they can utilize. Resources include but are not limited to text-to-speech, assistive listening tools, FM systems for children who are hearing impaired, Sip-and-Puff systems for children who have mobility challenges, etc (Primack 2020).

The purpose of my study is to NOT limit what students with learning disabilities can and can not do. I am 100% against putting stipulations on any student, and I feel they can develop a growth mindset by creating a significant learning environment for all learners to be able to express their choices, and ownership, use their voice, and create something authentic, also known as COVA. This review will explore literature that shows how special education students can benefit from technology when it's combined with blended learning. It will also explore how inclusion programs will benefit students with learning disabilities by blending them with students without disabilities. How can creating ePortfolios enhance the growth mindset of students with learning disabilities

Review of the Literature

This literature defines my topic because it shows how different educators utilize technology inside the classrooms. I want educators to know that students with learning disabilities can perform the same task as students without disabilities it just takes some modifications and special accommodations.

Special Education Classrooms

Almost a hundred years ago, special education students received little to no education and/or (Brighthub 2015). Fast forward to 2020, there are over 7.3 million special education students aged three to twenty-one who received services such as transportation, speech therapy, physical therapy, and more. Special education classes first started in 1972 when legislation established the right to education for all handicapped children. Special needs students and students with learning disabilities deserve the right to be taught and to learn just like all other students.

Special education students stay in the same classroom all day long. For almost eight hours a day, five days a week, students are with the same teachers and students. Special education classes can have up to sixteen students, however, most parents of students with special needs prefer inclusive classrooms making special education classrooms have a lower student count that allows teachers to focus on providing them with proper education (Smogorzewska et al. 2019). On the other side, general education students get to have lunch in the cafeteria, have library days, participate in parades, and get to participate in specials such as art, p.e., and music. Special education students are so secluded in their classrooms that most schools even provided classrooms with restrooms already inside the classroom (Tsai 2016). The more secluded special education students become, the shyer and fewer communication skills they develop. Ronski and Sevcik (1988) stated that children with disabilities should receive equal partnership and exchange, however, the interactions and partnerships are reduced compared to general education students. Inclusion programs are a great way for all students to work on communication and play skills while also getting the chance to interact with other students.

Blended Learning

The Vocational Education Act was passed in 1963 which funded technology use in schools. Ever since then, technology has expanded more than just a simple desktop or a flip phone. Students of the new generation have all types of technology, whether it's laptops, cell phones, watches with the internet, or gaming systems. With all the technology use, educators came up with blended learning to help students utilize technology in the classrooms and at home. Blended learning is when traditional face-to-face learning is combined with high-tech eLearning. In blended learning classrooms, students use technology such as Chromebooks or tablets to access resources (Kundu

et al. 2021). According to Pape (2010), blended teaching helps educators find a more engaging way to teach and get students to participate (p. 22). There are tons of online resources to help students learn material they are struggling with and be more engaged in lessons their teacher teaches (Admin 2021). Online resources such as IXL allow teachers to personalize lessons and worksheets, and FunBrain is a site that allows students to practice different skills through games. Another great site I like to utilize for my students is Starfall. With the low-cost membership, it teaches students basic phonics.

The use of technology in schools has not only been about engagement but has also resulted in educational outcomes such as academic achievement, perseverance, and persistence (Kundu 2021). Although blended learning and the use of technology are growing in general education classrooms, it has not quite been implemented in special education classrooms.

Special Education & Technology. Congress launched Technology-Related Assistance for I.D.E.A. purposely to secure the funds that children with disabilities need to use technology-related equipment (Nepo 2017). The purpose of this launch was to make sure students with learning disabilities are able to learn with all the tools and resources they will need to succeed. If special education students start to utilize Chromebooks and tablets, they will become more engaged and utilize its resources. A few resources for special education students include but are not limited to assistive technology such as hearing aids and motorized wheelchairs, programs such as IXL N2Y, and Do2Learn, and plenty of others educators have been researching lots of ways to implement technology in special education classrooms. For example, robots have been proven to aid learning and communication for children with autism (Le et al. 2015). Researchers and educators have argued that technology used by special

education students might revolutionize the learning process and others have conducted studies investigating the use of technology by SpEd students (Qahmash 2018). Tablet devices have been noticeably used by special education students. Tablets have amazing instructional applications, are lite and easy to navigate, and make the tablet more inclusive in providing lots of curriculum and instruction scenarios (Shah 2011).

Parent Engagement. Parents being engaged in their child's learning has been proven to influence students learning, keep them engaged with their learning, and motivate them to finish school (Bond 2019). When parents are involved with their child's learning, it motivates the student to finish school and make good grades. Parent engagement is especially important for special education students. Students with disabilities need more attention and learning even outside of school, and who knows the student better than their parent or guardian? As a parent, they are expected to model the behaviors and learning values from birth (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). When special education students begin to use technology at school and in their homes, they will more than likely need assistance from parents to help and support them with applications/ resources.

There are a few problems that can arise with parent engagement with their children using technology. One would be if parents are even able to navigate through technology or how much they know of it. Most older generations weren't focused on using technology and high-tech devices, so how do we expect the parent to help if they don't know what they are doing (Hohlfeld et al. 2010)? Schools can provide an after-school session for parents and can teach them the basics of using technology. Another problem could be if parents can afford technology equipment (such as Wi-Fi or an internet router) for their children (The COVID-19 Pandemic Has

Changed Education Forever. This Is How 2022). Most students with special needs are from low-income families, so what can schools do to help these families who can't afford the equipment? Since COVID hit in early 2020, most students' learning has become online. Newer schools that have appropriate funding, are passing out Chromebooks and tablets to their students. They also have given out internet routers to families who didn't have or were unable to afford internet. If all schools had the proper funding and help from the community, all districts would be able to provide students with technology tools when needed. Student learning is important to educators, and if that requires districts to spend extra money for their students then that's what needs to be done.

Inclusion Classrooms. In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) was passed that requires all public schools that are receiving funding must provide equal access to children who are special needs/ have a disability (Jameson, McDonnel, Johnson, Riesen, & Polychronis 2007). Unfortunately, despite laws and rules, a lot of public schools still do not provide equal opportunity. With appropriate documentation and accommodations, Inclusion and Resource classes are also an option. Inclusion is a program that allows special education students to learn in the same environment as general education students. The SpEd student can sit and learn with the general education class while being able to participate and communicate. In the inclusion classroom, there is one special education teacher or paraprofessional and a general education teacher. These two teachers use different models of co-teaching to provide a lesson that can benefit all students with and without a disability (Smogorzewska et al. 2019). Inclusion programs began in the 1990s when special education students gained access to schools in their area (Brighthub 2015). Educators began researching ideas on how to include special education students in general education classes.

According to Rodrigues & Garro-Gil (2015), a question by most educators was “Which is the best place for students with special needs?” (p. 1323 - 1327). Educators didn’t know whether to include special needs students in general education classes or create a separate environment for just those students. All SpEd students should be educated in their least restrictive environment (LRE) meaning the child should be successful in the classroom with or without accommodations. Separating special needs students from general education doesn’t help them develop social skills or play skills. Inclusion programs solved both problems in the 1990s. Studies have shown that when special education students get to interact and play with gen. Ed. students, their play skills increase (Jameson, McDonnel, Johnson, Riesen, & Polychronis 2007). Meaning the students will learn more about turn-taking and getting along with class-aged peers. Inclusion programs are a great way for SpEd students to work with general education students on blended learning assignments. The general education student could teach and guide the SpEd student on how to use technology and Chromebooks/tablets. Inclusion programs are about developing play skills, social skills, and turn-taking. Students with learning disabilities are used to working with the same peers every day, but that doesn’t mean they are learning the proper play skills and turn-taking (Dembo & Gibson, 1985). Having these students work together will support this program and have positive feedback on the student’s goals and grades.

An article called Education and Treatment of Children stated how inclusion settings have been increasing over the past few years and how these programs benefit both special and general education students (Jameson, McDonnel, Johnson, Riesen, & Polychronis 2007). Although there is a lot of positive feedback on Inclusive programs, professionals still have doubts about how to develop a proper lesson plan for SpEd and Gen.Ed. students. Educators wouldn’t want to teach a lesson too hard for SpEd students but then it is too easy for Gen.Ed. students. When both SpEd

and general educators go over these lesson plans, they must consider the accommodations and modifications of all students with IEP goals. Meaning that developing these lesson plans will take longer but will benefit all students to succeed. Even though full-inclusive programs are a while away, it is still benefiting the students who require a little extra attention and help.

Conclusion

Special education students deserve the same rights to education as all other students. This literature review shows how technology and inclusive classrooms can benefit students with learning disabilities. They deserve to go out of the classroom and get to communicate and participate with other students and staff around them. Having these students utilize technology can not only benefit their learning, but also they get to use the incredible resources along with it. Blended learning is a way that parents can also become engaged in their child's learning. Special education students can use inclusion programs to learn how to use technology from general education students and then have their parent's supervision when working at home. Blended learning and inclusive programs benefit students with learning disabilities by helping them succeed in their learning.

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