

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

The Journal of Social Studies Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jssr

Social studies instruction for students with mild disabilities: An (updated) progress report[☆]



Timothy Lintner^{a,*}, Gerda Kumpiene^b

^a University of South Carolina Aiken, 471 University Parkway, Aiken, SC 29801, United States

^b University of South Carolina, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Accepted 30 March 2017

Available online 26 April 2017

Keywords:

Social studies

Instruction

Disabilities

ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, there has been a marked increase in the number of students with mild disabilities who receive social studies instruction in the general education classroom. This research uses the seminal 1994 Passe and Beattie study as a comparative referent to examine current instructional strategies used to teach such students. The current study sought to answer: What instructional practices do contemporary general educators use to teach social studies to students with disabilities? And have these practices changed in twenty-years? Comparative and comparison results are provided with suggestions to differentiate social studies instruction to meet the learning needs of students with mild disabilities.

Copyright © 2017, The International Society for the Social Studies. Published by Elsevier, Inc.

Introduction

During the last several decades, federal legislation has impacted the field of special education ushering in significant changes in the areas of identification practices and resultant services for students with disabilities. Arguably the most important and sweeping piece of federal legislation was the 1975 passage of the Education of the Handicapped Act (P.L. 94–142) which mandated that students with disabilities be provided a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The result was a growing philosophical and practice-based movement in which students with disabilities were increasingly educated with their non-disabled peers in general education settings.

Since the implementation of P.L. 94–142, the number of students with mild disabilities who access the general education curriculum has continued to increase. Currently, roughly 87% of students with mild disabilities receive the majority of instruction in the general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). This poses major challenges for content-area educators—including social studies—who are now responsible for the academic instruction of all students, including students with mild disabilities.

The broad category of mild disabilities typically comprises learning disabilities, emotional or behavior disorders, and intellectual disabilities, while some authors also include communication disorders and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder in addition to the above mentioned disability categories (Steele, 2007; Taylor & Larson, 2000). Learners with mild disabilities comprise the largest group of students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in the age category of 6 through 21 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013) and have the highest prevalence rates in schools. Roughly

[☆] This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: tlintner@usca.edu (T. Lintner), Gerda.kumpiene@gmail.com (G. Kumpiene).

three-quarters of all school-aged students receiving special education services are learners with mild disabilities ([National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2014](#)). Students with mild disabilities typically exhibit the following characteristics:

- Experience deficits in updating and monitoring working memory processes, inhibition of responses, shifting between tasks or mental sets ([Danielsson, Henry, Messer, & Ronnberg, 2012](#); [Kaufman, 2010](#)); planning, organizing, prioritizing, shifting strategies, and self-monitoring ([Meltzer, 2007](#); [Meltzer & Krishnan, 2007](#)).
- Demonstrate limited knowledge of concepts ([Prater, 2007](#)).
- Possess difficulties with both short-term and long-term memory ([Carter, Prater, & Dyches, 2008](#); [Van der Molen, Van Luit, Jongmans, & Van der Molen, 2007, 2009](#)) and struggle with developing and using strategies to store and retrieve information and solve problems ([Prater, 2007](#)).
- Struggle with maintaining on-task behaviors, planning and directing goal-directed actions, following instructions, completing assignments, and organizing tasks ([Carter et al., 2008](#); [Harris, Reidy, & Graham, 2004](#); [Kaufman, 2010](#); [Prater, 2007](#)).
- Exhibit difficulties with decoding, text comprehension and composition, writing mechanics ([Gajria, Jitendra, Sood, & Sacks, 2007](#); [Graham, Harris, & Larsen, 2001](#); [Jitendra, Hoppes, & Xin, 2000](#); [Cain, Oakhill, & Bryant, 2004](#); [Stagliano & Boon, 2009](#); [Williams, 2005](#)), math facts, rules, and concepts, ([Carter et al., 2008](#); [Geary, 2004](#); [Montague, Enders, & Dietz, 2011](#); [Swanson & Sachse-Lee, 2001](#)).
- Struggle with building and maintaining social relationships, understanding and applying social rules, solving problems, problems with self-competence (i.e., self-knowledge, self-evaluation, sense of personal control) ([Carter et al., 2008](#); [Jones, 2000](#); [Stein & Krishnan, 2007](#)). Such issues often manifest through low motivation, decreased engagement with school, and increased retention and drop-out rates ([Biederman et al., 2004](#); [Carter et al., 2008](#); [Reschly & Christenson, 2006](#)).

Select characteristics have impacted student achievement in the social studies classroom, particularly in the areas of reading and writing ([De La Paz, Morales, & Winston, 2007](#); [Hughes & Parker-Katz, 2013](#); [Ciullo, Falcomata, & Vaughn, 2015](#)). Considering that in social studies classroom students are routinely exposed to significant amounts of information and tasks that require efficient reading and writing skills, lack of mastery in these areas place students with mild disabilities at a greater risk for academic failure ([Bulgren, Graner, & Deshler, 2013](#)).

Early research into the relationship between social studies and students with mild learning disabilities ([Curtis, 1982](#); [Guerian, 1992](#); [Hickey & Braun, 1990](#); [Ochoa & Schuster, 1980](#)) was both limited and limiting and offered only a handful of strategies to consider when designing responsive and engaging instruction for all students. Though well intentioned and certainly informative, such research provided instructional suggestions rather than evidence-based practices. Yet more importantly, early research failed to address the rise of inclusive practices and the concomitant effect it had on social studies instructional design and delivery. Simply, the research failed to ask: How do general educators adapt their instructional practices to meet the learning needs of students with mild disabilities in the inclusive social studies classroom? This seminal question would be answered by a groundbreaking research study that would benchmark the relationship between social studies instruction and students with mild disabilities.

In 1994, Jeff Passe and John Beattie published “Social Studies Instruction for Students with Mild Disabilities” in the highly respected, peer-reviewed journal *Remedial and Special Education*. The authors argued that many of the instructional practices used to teach social studies, namely the overreliance on the textbook and the lecture, reading, group discussion approach, likely do not meet the learning needs of students with mild disabilities. As many students with mild disabilities struggle with processing the often overwhelming amount of verbal information—presented via lecture—note-taking and organization of content become problematic. The authors noted that the social studies curriculum should include more problem-solving opportunities for all students, though such inquiry-based opportunities are often felt inappropriate for students with mild disabilities. Passe and Beattie lamented that “the nature of the social studies classroom and the orientation of the social studies teachers tend to be more focused on delivering the curriculum content than on the needs of the student” (1994, p. 288). The premise of their research was to ascertain, in light of the nascent rise of inclusive practices, how K-12 social studies educators modify instruction to address the unique learning needs of students with mild disabilities. The findings from their national survey were partitioned into four meta-categories: classroom adaptations; instructional constraints or limitations; the comparative performance of students with mild disabilities in the social studies classroom; and the importance, or emphasis placed upon social studies for students with mild disabilities.

Premised on the survey and interview results, [Passe and Beattie \(1994\)](#) concluded that the most commonly used classroom adaptation to address the learning needs of students with mild disabilities was peer tutoring. Such tutoring was often informal and relied on the teacher asking a neighboring student to assist the student with mild disabilities. Assistance typically consisted of reviewing previously taught content. Teachers interviewed felt that the peer tutoring of (review) content positively impacted the academic performance of students with mild disabilities.

Respondents identified structured or special seating arrangements as another frequent accommodation made for students with mild disabilities in the social studies classroom. Here, students with mild disabilities were purposefully placed near “helpful” peers as to promote and enhance positive social interactions.

In an effort to make the social studies content easier and, hence, more accessible to students with mild disabilities, participant teachers provided different assignments. Such modifications included the elimination of difficult questions (typically found at the end of the chapter), reducing the amount of writing required in answering select questions and, in

some instances, providing students with mild disabilities an alternate test format; one which asked fewer questions and/or facilitated memorization in lieu of application and analysis. Some teachers occasionally excused students with mild disabilities from homework.

Recognizing that students with mild disabilities struggled with reading, teachers sought to provide social studies textbooks that were easier for students to read. Often such alternate textbooks were scaled for different grade levels and covered different material.

Pertinent to instructional constraints or limitations, social studies general educators felt that insufficient time and materials limited their ability to adequately prepare for and instruct students with mild disabilities. Such constraints led to a general sense of uncertainty in exactly how to do so. Respondents indicated that the achievement in social studies of students with mild disabilities was generally below that of their non-disabled peers. Yet given this perceived underachievement, general educators resoundingly believed that the emphasis placed on social studies should be equal for both students with and without mild disabilities.

These findings provided an invaluable early glimpse into the practices and perceptions of teaching students with mild disabilities in the K-12 social studies classroom. Yet much has changed since 1994. Between 1992–2012, the number of students with mild disabilities who receive content-area instruction in the general education classroom has risen nearly 32% (U. S. Department of Education, OSEP, 2012), a dramatic increase which resulted in proven, positive, and sustained academic and social advances for students with mild disabilities (Heyward, 2013; Smith, Palloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 2012). Increased access to the general education curriculum coupled with the rise of standardized testing and accountability measures has had a profound effect on the field of social studies, particularly instructional design and delivery. However, such changes have left many social studies educators increasingly overwhelmed, underprepared, and often unable to create engaging and appropriate social studies for all students (Neumann, 2013; Vogler & Virtue, 2007; Winstead, 2013). Moreover, although the expectations for teachers to provide effective evidence-based instruction in social studies classroom have increased, many have not received appropriate training in addressing the needs of students with mild disabilities (Nevin, Cohen, Salazar, & Marshall, 2007; Urban, 2013).

Responding to the rise of inclusive practices and its resultant impact on social studies design and delivery, this study uses the original work by Passe and Beattie (1994) as a conceptual and methodological springboard by offering a contemporary and comparative analysis of how elementary and secondary educators design instruction to meet the learning needs of students with mild learning disabilities in the inclusive social studies classroom.

Methods

This contemporary study is a modified replication of the original mixed methods research approach used to examine how social studies educators address the educational needs of students with mild disabilities. The survey instrument used by Passe and Beattie (1994) (included in their appendix) allowed the current authors to closely replicate the methodology used in the original study. This study adhered to the original research design with the following exceptions:

- Both surveys were sent to K-12 general social studies educators in five states, though the representative states were dissimilar (West Virginia, New York, New Mexico, Virginia, and Texas in the original study; California, Idaho, Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina in the comparative study).
- In the original study, surveys were sent to targeted districts via postal mail with responses received in the same format. In the comparative study, an electronic survey was used for both survey dissemination and collection.
- The original study garnered 142 participant responses, with 17 follow-up interviews conducted. The comparison study garnered 134 participant responses and 14 follow-up interviews. Of these, 76% were elementary, 10% were middle level and 14% were secondary educators. (Such disaggregated data was not included in the original study).
- The original response items to Question 4 (“Which of the following types of students are assigned to your classroom?”) offered three selections: Learning disabled; Emotionally handicapped; Educable mentally retarded. Not only are these terms—with the exception of Learning disabled—absent from contemporary terminology, they offered respondents limited descriptors of student characteristics. This study provided a more expansive array of mild disabilities characteristics a teacher may expect to find in his/her social studies classroom (i.e. Emotional/Behavioral Disability; Speech or Communication Disability; Learning Disability; Hearing Disability; Visual Disability; Physical Disability, Autism; and Traumatic Brain Injury). Such descriptors reflect current terminology used within the field of special education and represent a broader range of characteristics that are common to students who have mild disabilities.
- Building off of Question 4, this research sought to uncover the prevalence of such student characteristics by asking, “What type of disability is most common in your social studies classroom?” Respondents were provided the same array of responses as presented in Question 4. This question was absent from the original study.
- Over the past two decades, the field of special education has capitalized upon the growth and resultant ubiquity of technology (Bryant & Bryant, 2012; Obiakor, Bakken, & Rotatori, 2010). To capture what types (if any) of technology social studies educators use to address the learning needs of students with mild disabilities, this study asked the following open-ended response question: “If you provide audio/visual assistance for students with mild disabilities, please list those you use.” This question was absent from the original study.

In the comparative study, a thirteen question electronic survey was sent to individual schools in five different states (i.e. California, Idaho, Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina). State selection was initially based on purposive sampling (Johnson & Christensen, 2014) where the authors had professional access to districts and schools in the five identified states. Four elementary, two middle and two high schools were represented. The survey was originally sent to the principal who subsequently forwarded it (via email) to his/her faculty. Participation was voluntary and all survey results were anonymous, unless the respondent chose to provide his or her name. The survey was distributed to all faculty at the four elementary schools. Only designated social studies faculty at the two middle and two high schools received the survey. The school principal did not have access to the results of completed survey. In all, 218 electronic surveys were sent. One hundred thirty four were returned, equating to a 62% response rate. Of the 134 respondents, 14 stated they would participate in additional interviews.

Results

When asked to identify a range of disability categories typically represented in their social studies classrooms, 80% of participants indicated that students with learning disability, speech or language impairment (64%), and emotional/behavioral disability (56%) are most often assigned to the social studies classroom. Survey results reveal that students with hearing impairment (18%) and traumatic brain injury (7%) were least likely to be included in social studies classrooms.

The most common form of disability or impairment found in the social studies classroom was learning disability (53%), followed by mild cognitive disability (18%), speech and language impairment (15%), emotional/behavioral disability (10%), with autism (2%) and visual impairment (2%) being the least common.

Participants indicated that 87% of students with mild disabilities access social studies content in the general education classroom. While in the general education classroom, 9% of students with mild disabilities receive in-class support from a special education co-teacher. Three percent of students with mild disabilities do not receive social studies instruction in the general education classroom. One percent of students with mild disabilities are present in the general education classroom but do other activities en lieu of social studies.

When benchmarking the academic achievement of students with mild disabilities, 48% of respondents indicated their achievement was below the class average. Thirty-seven percent indicated that achievement was comparable to the class average while 11% felt achievement was well below the class average. Four percent of respondents felt that the academic achievement of students with mild disabilities was either above or well above the class average.

When asked to identify what provisions they make for students with mild disabilities, 74% of respondents indicated they provide special seating arrangements. Such arrangements typically consisted of sitting “up front” (e.g. near the teacher or the white/SMART board) or being paired with another student. Fifty-four percent have access to some form of adult tutoring, typically a non-certified para-professional and/or adult volunteer. Forty-two percent of respondents ability group students based on academic performance. Other forms of accommodations included differentiating assignments (29%); providing audio-visual assistance (in the form of visual representations and videos; microphones, audio textbook, large-print text, magnifying device, audio enhancement speaker system) (22%); providing different reading material (17%), peer tutoring (18%) and providing alternate tests (9%). Other, less frequently noted provisions included sending tests/assignments to the special educator; read text passages orally to the student; providing copies of notes; assigning different (extended) homework or project due dates; providing extra time on test and/or assignments; repeated directions; and verbal assessments.

The greatest obstacle in providing special provisions for students with mild disabilities was insufficient time (18%) and insufficient material (14%), followed by pedagogical uncertainty (10%); social studies being untested at the school district and/or state level (3%), and the belief that social studies is unimportant academic subject to students with mild disabilities (2%). Time restraint was less of a perceived hindrance for educators at both the middle and secondary level (20% combined) when compared to their elementary colleagues (72%).

Seventy-five percent of respondents indicated that just as much curricular emphasis should be placed on social studies for students with mild disabilities as compared to their non-disabled peers, while fifteen percent of study participants felt that more or much more emphasis should be placed on social studies for students with mild disabilities. On the other hand, ten percent of educators stated that less or much less emphasis should be placed.

Comparative analysis and discussion

An outcome of this project was to provide a contemporary analysis of how elementary and secondary educators design instruction to meet the learning needs of students with mild learning disabilities in the inclusive social studies classroom. Yet the goal of the study was to compare perceptions and practices over time. Simply, has the rise in inclusive practices over the past two decades altered the way(s) in which general educators both perceive—and teach—social studies to students with mild disabilities?

The authors of the original study partitioned their results into four general categories: classroom adaptations; instructional constraints or limitations; the comparative performance of students with mild disabilities in the social studies

classroom; and the importance, or emphasis placed upon social studies for students with mild disabilities. The contemporary study will articulate results using the same four categorical pillars found in the original study.

When comparing classroom adaptations made for students with mild disabilities in the social studies classroom, some striking disparities emerge. The original study revealed that peer tutoring was the most common adaptation provided (42%). The contemporary study revealed a stark decline in its use (18%). Though peer tutoring has been found to be an effective strategy in increasing the academic performance of students with mild disabilities in the social studies classroom (Mas-tropieri, Scruggs, & Marshak, 2008), contemporary educators questioned its impact. Respondents felt that it offered little tangible academic results for students with mild disabilities. A fourth grade teacher concluded that, “I initially thought my other students could teach these [students with mild disabilities] better than I could. They could relate to them better. This was not the case at all.” Often, the non-disabled peer perceived the pairing to be “burdensome” or “unfair.” Though contemporary educators relied less on peer tutoring, they utilized more adult tutoring (54%) than their comparative peers (40%). As noted in the original study, and affirmed here as well, the effectiveness of any form of tutoring is dependent upon the ability of the peer—either a classmate or an adult volunteer—to present the content in a way in which students with mild disabilities understand. If the goal of the tutor is to assist with memorizing the 13 colonies, the opportunity for students with mild disabilities to work with others may be beneficial. If the goal is to understand the concept of sovereignty as it relates to the burgeoning independence of the colonies, leaving this in the hands of an unqualified tutor—fellow student and/or para-professional alike— may be of questionable benefit to students with mild disabilities.

The greatest disparity over the past twenty years is the degree to which contemporary general educators provide special seating arrangements for students with mild disabilities in the social studies classroom. The proclivity of this accommodation has risen from 41% in 1994 to 74% contemporarily. Recent survey respondents routinely pair a student with mild disabilities with a non-disabled peer. Pairings are often made for academic (e.g. the ability to receive immediate assistance), social (e.g. fostering positive social interactions between students), and/or behavioral, whereby sitting a student with mild disabilities next to a “good” classroom peer, they will “learn” how to behave. Respondents also stated that they frequently seat students with mild disabilities towards the front of the room so, as one teacher stated, “they can be closer to the action.” Though enhancing academic and social skills are both commendable objectives, the proximity of students with mild disabilities to their peers or to the front of the room has negligible impact on their ability to organize, interpret, and apply social studies content. Some twenty years ago, Passe and Beattie (1994) astutely noted that, “It does not matter where [students with mild disabilities] sit if they have to read an incomprehensible textbook at their desks” (p. 230). Unfortunately, an overwhelming majority of contemporary social studies educators continue to use this accommodation with apparently little reference to its impact on the academic performance of students with mild disabilities.

The survey results also illustrate a comparative marked increase in the use of ability grouping. Almost half (42%) of all contemporary respondents group students by ability in their social studies classroom compared. This is compared to 20% two decades ago. The philosophical premise of in-class grouping has been challenged (Marks, 2014; Oakes, 2008), and its impact on academic achievement (Matthews, Ritchotte, McBee, 2013; Thomas & Feng, 2014) and student self-perception (Clarke, 2014; Ireson & Hallam, 2009) are mixed at best. Research has also noted that classroom teachers find ability grouping difficult to structure and often create factions among students based on perceived abilities (e.g. the “group” they are in) (Kim, 2012; Missett, Brunner, Callahan, Moon, & Azano, 2014).

If ability grouping is ethically questionable, and fails to produce consistent academic and social benefits for all students, then why do so many educators use it to ostensibly benefit students with mild disabilities in the social studies classroom? Interviewees stated that it was in fact easier to design targeted instruction for ability grouped students, including students with mild disabilities. “I’m able to match resources to academic ability and need,” stated a middle school educator. Another reason given focused less on academics and more on environment. A high school teacher stated, “My students who struggle know they struggle. They also know the other students in the class who struggle. They are much more comfortable working with ‘similar students’ than working with the sharpest kids in the class. Its all about comfort and acceptance for [my students with mild disabilities].” Though ability grouping can create a sense of comfort in the social studies classroom, it may also have the dubious effect of lowering academic expectations, particularly for students with mild disabilities. Such expectations, recognized or not, profoundly affect the quality of instruction such students may receive in the social studies classroom.

When providing classroom adaptations for students with mild disabilities, both surveys were generally consistent in providing different assignments (31% in the original study; 29% in the comparative study) and different reading materials (21% in the original study; 17% in the comparative study). A handful of teachers provided alternate reading material, either a lower-level textbook or a teacher-created document. A second grade teacher stated, “I often take the grade-level textbook and paraphrase it. I’ll type it up and print it out for [my students with mild disabilities]. It takes time, but it makes social studies easier for them to read and to understand.”

Though providing modified or alternate reading materials is a common strategy, particularly in the social studies classroom, (Harmon, Katims, & Whittington, 1999), it alone does not provide students with mild disabilities the comprehension strategies needed to be successful in the social studies classroom (Bulgren et al., 2013; Hughes and Parker-Katz, 2013). Though certainly well-intentioned, such “alterations” to assignments and reading materials may lead, as noted in the original study and supported here, to students with mild disabilities not only learning different content than their classroom peer, but not being expected to analyze, comprehend, and apply this content.

Survey results were consistent in identifying the lack of time as the greatest constraint to providing instruction to students with mild disabilities in the social studies classroom. This was followed by lack of resources and a pedagogical uncertainty in how to design instruction for students with mild disabilities. Though the original research offered little insight into the relationship between time and resource constraints and social studies instruction, several interviewees in the contemporary study provided rich and descriptive insights. A common lament of the majority of elementary teachers interviewed for this study was the amount of instructional time allotted to math and reading, often to the detriment of social studies. A third grade educator noted, “My district is placing a huge emphasis on math and reading. When all is said and done, I have about 25 minutes a day to devote to [social studies]. Its real hard to differentiate instruction for my diverse learners, who need social studies taught to them in different ways when I only have 25 minutes.” Several contemporary interviewees registered frustration at not having the materials necessary to teach social studies to students with mild disabilities. Though specific material type was not asked in this (nor the original) survey, an elementary teacher illustrated how the lack of time dictates her use of resources which, in turn, impacts students with mild disabilities.

After math and literacy, I have about 30 minutes left for social studies. What can I do in 30 minutes? What I want to do and what I can do are two different things. I want to use more hands-on manipulatives, more visual aids, more creative ways of teaching. I know this will benefit all of my students. But, with 30 minutes, I'm forced to rely on the textbook. Reading from the textbook. Referencing the textbook. Taking notes from the textbook. Simply horrible for my students with disabilities. This isn't quality instruction – my students know it and so do I.

What is troublingly consistent is the underperformance of students with mild disabilities in the social studies classroom. [Passe and Beattie \(1994\)](#) noted that 66% of respondents felt that students with mild disabilities performed below or well below the class average in social studies. Some twenty years later, 59% of contemporary respondents agreed. Yet when asked if the same emphasis (i.e. expectations) should be placed on social studies for students with mild disabilities compared to their in-class peers, both survey groups (67% for the original study; 75% in the contemporary survey) agreed. It seems there is a clear disparity between expectation and performance.

[Passe and Beattie \(1994\)](#) argued that when two-thirds of students with mild disabilities underperform in the social studies classroom, something is instructionally amiss. This contemporary survey confirms their belief. Simply, the majority of students with mild disabilities struggle with social studies. Yet the instructional options used by educators in both surveys – particularly special seating arrangements, adult tutoring, and ability grouping—have not, for over twenty years, met the learning needs of students with mild disabilities. The (hopefully) unintended byproduct of these ineffective instructional options is the persistent lowering of expectations. Though there are numerous instructional accommodations educators can make for students with mild disabilities, based upon the low performance of such students, the accommodations addressed here are of questionable benefit. What [Passe and Beattie](#) surmised twenty years ago still rings true today, “The system is not working as it should” (1994, p. 230).

The question then begs, how can we “make it work” for students with mild disabilities in social studies classrooms? We argue that there needs to be purposeful, target and sustained professional development for both pre -and in-service educators. We advocate for a two-pronged model whereby educators are familiarized with the characteristics that students with mild disabilities often display in the classroom (knowing your student), followed by modeling of the evidence-based instructional practices that address the unique learning needs of these students (knowing how to teach your students). Districts and teacher-training colleges and universities must partner to assure that every teacher in every classroom is armed with the understanding of and the tools to teach all students, including students with mild disabilities. If we are going to increasingly ask general educators to teach students with mild disabilities, particularly in the social studies classroom, we must provide them with the knowledge and skills to do so properly.

Armed with this knowledge and skill, we challenge social studies educators to incorporate strategies that move beyond (or exclude) the textbook and allow students to access the content in different ways. By using films, videos, music, art, plays and skits, students with mild disabilities, who often struggle with reading and writing, can approach the content in ways that provide opportunities to succeed, rather than continued opportunities to struggle. Simply sitting students with mild disabilities in the front of the class or providing them with a well-intentioned but unqualified peer or tutor will not increase their understanding of the social studies content. Providing them multiple means of accessing the content coupled with multiple means of demonstrating their understanding of the content will. By doing so, educators will strive to increase and ultimately level the academic expectations of students with mild disabilities in the social studies classroom.

Conclusion

With the rise of inclusive practices, more students with mild disabilities are accessing content in the general education classroom. With this increase, general educators have been challenged to meet the learning needs of such students, particularly within the social studies classroom. Though more students with mild disabilities are accessing the social studies content than ever before, what remains constant is that, over the past twenty years, the instructional practices used have been of questionable benefit. Though the frequency of select practices may have changed, their ability to increase understanding of an engagement with the social studies content for students with mild disabilities has not.

Though the future of social studies instruction for students with mild disabilities is hard to predict, what is assured is that such students will continue to access social studies content in the general education classroom. It is therefore imperative that general educators create unique and relevant learning opportunities for students with mild disabilities that increase engagement and enhance expectation. Students with mild disabilities have been waiting for such opportunities for over twenty years. Unfortunately, many still wait.

References

- Biederman, J., Monuteaux, M. C., Doyle, A. E., Seidman, L. J., Wilens, T. E., Ferrero, F., Morgan, C. L., & Faraone, S. V. (2004). Impact of executive function deficits and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) on academic outcomes in children. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 72(5), 757–766.
- Bryant, D. P., & Bryant, B. R. (2012). *Assistive technology for people with disabilities* ((2nd ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Bulgren, J. A., Graner, P. S., & Deshler, D. D. (2013). Literacy challenges and opportunities for students with learning disabilities in social studies and history. *Learning Disabilities Research Practice*, 28(1), 17–27.
- Cain, K., Oakhill, J., & Bryant, P. (2004). Children's reading comprehension ability: Concurrent prediction by working memory, verbal ability, and component skills. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96(1), 31–42.
- Carter, N., Prater, M. A., & Dyches, T. T. (2008). *What every teacher should know about making accommodations for students with mild to moderate disabilities*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Ciullo, S., Falcomata, T., & Vaughn, S. (2015). Teaching social studies to upper elementary students with learning disabilities: Graphic organizers and explicit instruction. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 38(1), 15–26.
- Clarke, M. (2014). Dialectics and dilemmas: Psychosocial dimensions of ability grouping policy. *Critical Studies in Education*, 55(2), 186–200.
- Curtis, C. K. (1982). Teaching disabled students in the regular social studies classroom. *History and Social Science Teacher*, 18(1), 9–16.
- Danielsson, H., Henry, L., Messer, D., & Ronnberg, J. (2012). Strengths and weaknesses in executive functioning in children with intellectual disability. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 33, 600–607.
- De La Paz, S., Morales, P., & Winston, P. M. (2007). Source interpretation: Teaching students with and without LD to read and write historically. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 40(2), 134–144.
- Gajria, M., Jitendra, A. K., Sood, S., & Sacks, G. (2007). Improving comprehension of expository text in students with LD: A research synthesis. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 40(3), 210–225.
- Geary, D. C. (2004). Mathematics and learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 37(1), 4–15.
- Graham, S., Harris, K. R., & Larsen, L. (2001). Prevention and intervention of writing difficulties for students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research Practice*, 16(2), 74–84.
- Guerman, G.R. (1992). *Improving instruction for students at risk: Using history -social science textbooks*. Retrieved from (<http://www.eric.ed.gov>).
- Harmon, J. M., Katims, D. S., & Whittington, D. (1999). Helping middle school students learn with social studies texts. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 32(1), 70–75.
- Harris, K. R., Reidy, R. R., & Graham, S. (2004). Self-regulation among students with LD and ADHD. In B. Wong, & D. L. Butler (Eds.), *Learning about learning disabilities* (pp. 167–196). London, UK: Academic Press.
- Heyward, W. L. (2013). *Exceptional children: An introduction to special education* ((10th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Hickey, M.G., & Braun, P. (1990). *Social studies and the disabled reader*. Retrieved from (<http://eric.ed.gov>).
- Hughes, M. T., & Parker-Katz, M. (2013). Integrating comprehension strategies into social studies instruction. *The Social Studies*, 104, 93–104.
- Ireson, J., & Hallam, S. (2009). Academic self-concepts in adolescence: Relations with achievement and ability grouping in schools. *Learning and Instruction*, 19(3), 201–213.
- Jitendra, A. K., Hoppes, M. K., & Xin, Y. P. (2000). Enhancing main idea comprehension for students with learning problems: The role of a summarization strategy and self-monitoring instruction. *The Journal of Special Education*, 34(3), 127–139.
- Johnson, R. B., & Christensen, L. B. (2014). *Educational research: Qualitative, quantitative, and mix methods* ((5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jones, C. J. (2000). *Curriculum development for students with mild disabilities*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, LTD.
- Kaufman, C. (2010). *Executive function in the classroom: Practical strategies for improving performance and enhancing skills for all students*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Kim, Y. J. (2012). Implementing ability grouping in EFL contexts: Perceptions of teachers and students. *Language Teaching Research*, 16(3), 289–315.
- Marks, R. (2014). The dinosaur in the classroom: What we stand to lose through ability-grouping in the primary school. *FORUM: For promoting 3-19 Comprehensive Education*, 56(1), 45–54.
- Mastropieri, M. A., Scruggs, T. E., & Marshak, L. (2008). Training teachers, parents, and peers to implement effective teaching strategies for content area learning. In T. Scruggs, & M. Mastropieri (Eds.), *Advances in learning and behavioral disabilities* (pp. 311–329). Bingley, UK: Emerald.
- Matthews, M. S., Ritchotte, J. A., & McBee, M. T. (2013). Effects of schoolwide cluster grouping and within-class ability grouping on elementary school students' academic achievement growth. *High Ability Studies*, 24(2), 81–97.
- Meltzer, L. (2007). Executive function difficulties in different diagnostic groups: Challenges of identification and treatment. In L. Meltzer (Ed.), *Executive function in education: From theory to practice* (pp. 73–75). New York: Guilford Press.
- Meltzer, L., & Krishnan, K. (2007). Executive function difficulties and learning disabilities: Understandings and misunderstandings. In L. Meltzer (Ed.), *Executive function in education: From theory to practice* (pp. 77–105). New York: Guilford Press.
- Missett, T. C., Brunner, M. M., Callahan, C. M., Moon, T. R., & Azano, A. P. (2014). Exploring teacher beliefs and use of acceleration, ability grouping, and formative assessment. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 37(3), 245–268.
- Montague, M., Enders, C., & Dietz, S. (2011). Effects of cognitive strategy instruction on math problem solving of middle school students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 34(4), 262–272.
- National Center for Learning Disabilities (2014). The state of learning disabilities: Facts, trends and emerging issues. 3rd edition. (<https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2014-State-of-LD.pdf>).
- Neumann, J. (2013). Teaching to and beyond the test: The influence of mandated accountability testing in one social studies classroom. *Teachers College Record*, 115(6), 1–32.
- Nevin, A., Cohen, J., Salazar, L., & Marshall, D. (2007). Student teacher perspectives on inclusive education. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education. New York. February 25.
- Oakes, J. (2008). Keeping track: Structuring equality and inequality in an era of accountability. *Teachers College Record*, 110(3), 700–712.
- Obiakor, F., Bakken, J. P., & Rotatori, A. F. (2010). *Current issues and trends in special education: Research, technology, and teacher preparation*. Bingley, UK: Emerald.
- Ochoa, A. S., & Schuster, S. K. (1980). *Social studies in the mainstreamed classroom*. Boulder, CO: Social Science Educational Consortium.
- Passe, J., & Beattie, J. (1994). Social studies instruction for students with mild disabilities: A progress report. *Remedial and Special Education*, 15(4), 227–233.
- Prater, M. A. (2007). *Teaching strategies for students with mild to moderate disabilities*. Boston: Pearson.

- Reschly, A. L., & Christenson, S. L. (2006). Prediction of dropout among students with mild disabilities: A case for the inclusion of student engagement variables. *Remedial and Special Education, 27*(5), 276–292.
- Smith, T. E. C., Palloway, E. A., Patton, J. R., & Dowdy, C. A. (2012). *Teaching students with special needs in inclusive settings* ((6th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Stagliano, C., & Boon, R. T. (2009). The effects of a story-mapping procedure to improve the comprehension skills of expository text passages for elementary students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal, 7*(2), 35–58.
- Steele, M. (2007). Teaching social studies to high school students with learning problems. *The Social Studies, 98*(2), 59–63.
- Stein, J. A., & Krishnan, K. (2007). Nonverbal learning disabilities and executive function: The challenges of effective assessment and teaching. In L. Meltzer (Ed.), *Executive function in education: From theory to practice* (pp. 106–132). New York: Guilford Press.
- Swanson, H. L., & Sachse-Lee, C. (2001). Mathematical problem solving and working memory in children with learning disabilities: Both executive and phonological processes are important. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 79*, 294–321.
- Taylor, H. E., & Larson, S. M. (2000). Teaching elementary social studies to students with mild disabilities. *Social Education, 64*(4), 232–235.
- Thomas, E., & Feng, J. (2014). Effects of ability grouping on math achievement. In *Proceedings of the third grade students. Paper presented at the Georgia Educational Research Association Annual Conference*. Savannah, GA, Oct. 17.
- United States Department of Education (2013). *35th annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Retrieved from (<http://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/2013/parts-b-c/35th-idea-arc.pdf>).
- United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2012). *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database*. Retrieved from (<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12?050.asp>).
- Urban, D. J. (2013). *Toward a framework of inclusive social studies: Obstacles and opportunities in a preservice education program* (Dissertation). Columbia University (ED 553514).
- Van der Molen, M. J., Van Luit, J. E. H., Jongmans, M. J., & Van der Molen, M. W. (2007). Verbal working memory in children with mild intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 51*(2), 162–169.
- Van der Molen, M., J., Van Luit, J. E. H., Jongmans, M. J., & Van der Molen, M. W. (2009). Memory profiles in children with mild intellectual disabilities: Strengths and weaknesses. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 30*, 1237–1247.
- Vogler, K., & Virtue, D. (2007). “Just the facts, ma’am”: Teaching social studies in the era of standards and high-stakes testing. *The Social Studies, 98*(2), 54 (48).
- Williams, J. P. (2005). Instruction in reading comprehension for primary-grade students: A focus on text structure. *The Journal of Special Education, 39*(1), 6–18.
- Winstead, L. (2013). The impact of NCLB and accountability on social studies: teacher experiences and perceptions about teaching social studies. *The Social Studies, 102*(5), 221–227.