

Chapter 6

Low Tech Used to Promote Inclusion of All Students

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is not a new practice; however, schools continue to work diligently to make it happen. By law, students with disabilities should be educated in the least restrictive setting with access to their non-disabled peers as much as possible throughout the school day. One way to ensure that this can happen is to provide access to the needed supports. Those supports do not need to be an adult. Also, the supports for students with disabilities do not need to be expensive. Using low tech assistive technology, teachers can help all students reach their level of independence within the general education setting. With the implementation and teaching of visuals, students will not need to rely on adults for success. Visual supports are a low to no cost, low tech assistive technology that can be implemented with little effort yielding maximum results for students with disabilities in inclusive settings within the school environment. This chapter discusses various low tech assistive technology that is of little to no cost to the teacher through the use of visual supports.

INTRODUCTION

Under the federal guidelines outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 2004), assistive technology (AT) is defined as “any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability.” Assistive technology aids students with disabilities

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in achieving outcomes similar to their non-disabled peers (Puckett, 2005). With assistive technology that can be of no cost or low cost to teachers, all students can learn in an environment where they can participate and be engaged.

In addition, in 1988, Congress passed the Technology Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act (P.L. 100-407) which aimed to increase access, availability, and funding for assistive technology for all individuals with disabilities (Bausch, Mittler, Hasselbring, & Cross, 2005). This act was amended in 1994, 1998, and again in 2004 to which it was named the Assistive Technology Act of 2004. The goal of this Act is to ensure funding for the use of assistive technology for people with disabilities who need the resources. This act was established to provide ways for people with disabilities to be able to participate in education, employment, and daily activities for their entire life span to be more independent (Bausch, Mittler, Hasselbring, & Cross, 2005).

Numerous literature reviews have been conducted on the use and effectiveness of Assistive Technology for people with varying disabilities. Results from those studies indicate that there are barriers in accessing technology. Some frequently reported barriers were the cost of Assistive Technology and the lack of funding (Boot, Dinsmore, & MacLachlan, 2018). In addition, the barriers included teachers' knowledge and training on implementing assistive technology in their classroom (Walter & Yanhui, 2021). Despite the benefits of using no cost and/or low cost technology, they are under-utilized for people with mild and moderate disabilities in inclusive settings.

This under-utilization can be seen in the data taken from students' Individualized Education Plan (IEP). There is a question on student's IEP that asks as to whether the student require assistive technology devices or services or not. Often times this box is checked as no. However, there are many students who do use and require assistive technology devices or services. What comes to mind of teachers and families is high tech needs. However, if a student uses visual supports specific to their needs, such as pictures to communicate, schedules, first/then boards, choice boards, to name a few, then that box should be checked yes for that student. Assistive technology can include the use for low tech assistive technology and technology that is of no cost or low cost as well. Low tech devices, or equipment, implemented correctly, can make a significant difference for students in their learning and communication. This increase in learning and communication often leads to placements in the least restrictive settings for students with disabilities. Many of the top evidence-based interventions include the use of low tech assistive technology in managing the classroom and setting it up for success for all students.

Assistive technology can benefit students in independence and performance in academics as well as in social interactions. Below is a figure taken from Syriopoulou-

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