

Accessible Learning for all Students: Incorporating Assistive Technology into Mainstream Programs

Students with disabilities have historically been removed from the mainstream in order to utilize adaptive and assistive equipment and/or devices. In many school systems, only the most severely handicapped students have had access to any adaptive or ergonomic equipment. With the advent of inclusion, students with disabilities of all kinds now receive increasingly more of their academic instruction and educational services within the mainstream. Removal of these students from their mainstream classes in order to use specialized equipment tends to be disruptive and inconvenient. Moreover, with the inclusion of students with physical disabilities into mainstream classes, regular education teachers and special educators alike have become cognizant of accessibility issues relative to all learners. The emerging rubric of “Universal Design” : the design of products an environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible without the need for adaptation or specialized design, also contributes to this developing awareness of accessibility factors.

An alternative model to the removal of mainstream learners to use specialized equipment has been developed within the Lexington Public Schools under a Massachusetts Department of Education Lighthouse Technology Site Grant. “Mobile Learning Stations” have been created to be used flexibly in classrooms, learning centers, libraries, computer labs and resource rooms by all students. Employing mobile, ergonomic and adaptive/assistive technology, these learning stations are designed to be compatible with, and similar to conventional, pre-existing computer configurations. In this way all students can have access to assistive hardware and software within the mainstream on equipment which is inconspicuous and compatible.

Mobile learning stations can incorporate a wide array of assistive devices such as alternative input devices (keyboards, mice), large screen and large print options, text and web reader software and voice recognition software. These stations need to be “customized”

- to reflect the needs of the students to be served;
- to be as inconspicuous as possible;
- to be compatible with the existing network and hardware; and
- to be durable yet mobile.

The presentation will focus on a process by which assistive technology learning stations can be designed to meet system/school/student needs, how these mobile units can be integrated into mainstream programs, and how the technology is utilized to support curriculum units. Beginning with a needs assessment, plans can be developed to construct the most appropriate learning station for each environment.

Presenter Information

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