Supporting Students With Mild Intellectual Disabilities

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This teaching guide is intended primarily for teachers of students with mild intellectual disabilities (MID) from Kindergarten to Grade 8, but may also be useful for secondary level teachers. Its primary purpose is to provide a better understanding of the students and their characteristics as well as to offer instructional strategies for working with these students. This document is intended for use by all teachers, and should also be accessible to a range of other personnel directly involved with students with MID.

The ideas and approaches included in this guide will act as a springboard, encouraging further development of appropriate instructional strategies for working with students with MID.

This guide is also effective for use with all students, especially for those presenting characteristics similar to the characteristics of students with MID. ©
About the Guide

This teaching guide has been developed to assist teachers in meeting the needs of students with MID. It can be used in mainstream classes and other educational settings.

Drawing on the most recent research and current best practices, this guide seeks to support schools and teachers in developing successful experiences for students with MID. It is consistent with and is to be used in conjunction with the Ontario Ministry of Education documents and resources. This guide:

– offers advice on school and classroom planning
– emphasises a student-centered collaborative approach
– supports the creation of Individual Education Plans (IEP)
– demonstrates how learning can be differentiated
– suggests a variety of teaching approaches and methods
– provides examples of good practice

Using the guide

Students with MID have many common characteristics. Teachers can select materials from the guide that are appropriate to each student’s individual learning profile.©

Furthermore, the document Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12 is the foundation used as context for teaching the student with MID.

SYMBOLS IN THE DOCUMENT

This guide contains symbols that highlight its main concepts and that make it easier to use.

1️⃣ effective instructional strategies

2️⃣ definition of a word in an educational context

3️⃣ observable classroom behavior

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Context

Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12 shares in the vision that unites all of the following Ministry policies and initiatives (detailed information is available at the links provided):

- Aboriginal Education Strategy  
  www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/
- Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy  
  www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.html
- Ontario Leadership Strategy  
  www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/actionPlan.html
- Parent Engagement Policy  
  www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/policy.html
- Safe and Accepting Schools  
  www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/safeschools.html
- Healthy Schools  
  www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/healthyschools.html
- Student Voice  
  www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/students/speakup/index.html

In addition, the process and approaches outlined in Learning for All support the goals identified in the Ministry’s resource document 2010 School Effectiveness Framework: A Support for School Improvement and Student Success. K-12.

The integrated process of assessment and instruction presented in Learning for All supports school boards both in their implementation of the framework and in the development of their Board Improvement Plans for Student Achievement (BIPSA).©

As the 2009–10 lead board projects found, Learning for All provides an overarching approach that assists in:

- aligning and focusing initiatives at the Ministry, board and school levels;
- building capacity to help improve student learning on an individual level as well as in schools and school systems;
- strengthening both students’ and teachers’ sense of efficacy with respect to improving student achievement;
- reinforcing the understanding on the part of teachers that every student progresses along an individual learning and growth continuum, from Kindergarten to Grade 12;
- the use of planning tools for assessment and instruction to support student learning;
- bringing about an educational culture based on individual and collective ownership of the learning and achievement of all students.

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**Students with MID**

**WHO ARE THEY?**

Students with MID are not easily distinguished from their peers. Their learning needs are often difficult to define due to the multiplicity of factors that can contribute to their learning profile. Their challenges are often identified once they have started school, when they show a slower pace of learning progress than others of their age group. Like their peers, they have a wide range of learning styles, varied interests and the need for affirmation and success. The limitation of a student’s intellectual potential is often the determining factor characterizing this student as having MID.

Depending on the educational jurisdiction, criteria for MID will often state that the student is functioning approximately 2–4 years behind or 2–3 standard deviations below the norm, or has an IQ under 70–75.

Students with MID have significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, learn new skills as well as reduced ability to cope independently. These students’ adaptive behavior skills may be significantly below average. Adaptive behavior includes conceptual, social and practical skills that people learn so that they can function in their everyday lives.

**WHAT ARE THE TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS?**

Challenges faced by students with MID may include some or all of the following:

- Delays in academic achievement
- Delays in conceptual development
- Limited ability to generalize
- Difficulty expressing ideas and feelings
- Limited attention span and retention
- Underdeveloped sense of spatial awareness
- Difficulty responding to new situations
- Difficulty coping independently
- Difficulty with social functioning

**WHAT ARE THE DEMOGRAPHICS?**

Current estimates place the number of persons with intellectual disabilities, which includes MID and developmental disabilities, at about 2.5% of the population. Of these, the majority fall into the category of mildly intellectually disabled (MID). Within Ontario, both the English and French populations show a similar percentage. (Bennett, 2013, p. 37)
Understanding MID

The term “mild intellectual disabilities” (MID) is not a diagnosis, but rather an identifying expression under which many different types of students fall. There are a number of ways in which students are identified as having MID. Probably the most common is the result of an administered IQ test. Individuals will usually have a reported IQ between 55 and 70, which is consistent with about 2% of the population. An IQ level below this is usually consistent with a developmental disability.

To support the identification of students with MID, other standardized tests may also be used. These include adaptive behavior tests, which evaluate an individual’s practical and social skills, or academic tests, which evaluate academic achievement.

However, the most effective way for a teacher to evaluate a student is usually by observation. Although there is a wide range within the identification of MID, most students will show lower academic achievement, particularly in subjects that require reading, math, or memory skills, and difficulties with understanding and reasoning. These students may also have trouble with concentration, motivation, judgment and planning skills.

Students who have MID have the potential for academic, social and financial success, and can gain the skills necessary to be independent adults.

Definitions

The following definitions permit us to understand the different aspects of what characterizes students with MID. The common aspect of the following definitions is that students with MID have deficits or limitations that affect their performance.

The Ontario Ministry of Education defines mild intellectual disabilities as learning disorders characterized by:

a) an ability to profit educationally within a regular class with the aid of considerable curriculum modification and supportive service;

b) an inability to profit educationally within a regular class because of slow intellectual development;


Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), MID is defined as:

“... significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.” (United States Department of Education, 2010)

The American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities gives the following definition:

“Intellectual disability is characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills. This disability originates before age 18.” (http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/children_disability_rights.pdf)
**Terminology**

Depending on the region, different terms are used when referring to students with MID. These students are referred to as follows:

- Students with cognitive disabilities
- Students with mental retardation
- Students with general learning disabilities
## BACKPACK

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