



Accessing the Victorian Curriculum: Simulated Learning for Inclusion

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People with disabilities have the right to live independently and be included in their local community. Barriers to social inclusion have slowly been broken down with the deinstitutionalisation of people with disabilities in Australia, and a rights-based philosophy introduced. The United Nations new Sustainable Development Goals has set a clear goal for an increase in people with disabilities to be seen, heard and to participate in society along with their typical peers. This inclusive ideal is only achieved if the community is accessible to those living with disability, and community inclusive practices are taught from an early age. But how can community inclusion be taught when it is not explicitly inserted into the mandated Victorian Curriculum?

The STAR and Links Program developed by STAR Autism Support is the key to success for students with intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder in achieving independence and confidence in the community, and to engage with others in a wide variety of contexts. The program is newly aligned with the Victorian Curriculum, marrying the concept of inclusive education – students with intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder are finally achieving accessibility to the Victorian Curriculum in a way in which suits their individual needs: delivered using strategies based on years of autism research.

East Gippsland Specialist School uses this comprehensive curriculum to explicitly teach students skills in how to engage with others in their local community using evidence-informed strategies that sit under the umbrella of applied behaviour analysis. Discrete trial, pivotal response training and functional routines are the strategies used by teachers and support staff to scaffold primary aged students through to secondary and beyond, including transitioning to post-school options. Students, staff, families and community members work with each other in a collaborative partnership to achieve the common goal of purposeful inclusion in the community.

Globally, students with intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder could receive the education and skills they need in order to function independently as local, national and global citizens. Using this model over time, the STAR and Links Program at East Gippsland Specialist School has aided a change in altered social attitudes of a range of local community members of the regional town of Bairnsdale including families and business owners.

A simulated learning experience is demonstrated as a teacher uses motivation and other evidence-based techniques to inspire the student; simultaneously data is recorded, analysed and represented to illustrate student outcomes.