

# **National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASET)**

## **THE PRACTICAL TEACHER**

***This Month's Topic:***

### **Winnowing the Internet: Websites for Teachers of Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities**

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#### **Abstract**

This article discusses the sometimes-tedious task of locating online resource information pertinent to students diagnosed with moderate to severe disabilities. The authors propose that teachers of such students value Web libraries or lists of relevant Web sites in order to avoid time consuming and frustrating Internet searches. Based upon surveys of preservice and inservice teachers, a list of 50 Web sites relevant to teachers of students with moderate to severe disabilities is provided.

## **Winnowing the Internet: Websites for Teachers of Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities**

There are a multitude of professional terms used to label and identify disabilities. Examples include the categorical disabilities used within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (P.L. 108-446), the disabilities recognized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1972 (P.L. 93-112), and the conditions described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - IV (American Psychological Association, 2000). Such terms aid professionals in conceptualizing and communicating about disabling conditions (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2009).

The term moderate to severe is a cross-categorical education label that is neither included in federal law nor used in publications by the American Psychological Association. The term, however, has been adopted in some regions (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2011; Kentucky Department of Education, 2012; University of Southern Maine, 2012) and by some authors (Johnston, Reichle, Feeley, & Jones, 2011; Browder & Spooner, 2011; McDonnell, Hardman, & McDonnell, 2003) to designate a group of disabilities. This group can include the disabilities of moderate to profound intellectual impairment, autism, multiple-disabilities, and sometimes emotional disturbances. As a group, the functioning abilities of those diagnosed with moderate to severe disabilities can be quite broad: the cognitive, adaptive, and communicative aptitudes cover a wide spectrum. The common variables shared among those with moderate to severe disabilities include their needs for a relatively high level of education and related service supports as well as supervision (Hamill & Everington, 2002).

Students with moderate to severe disabilities represent 1% or less of the total school age population (McDonnell, Hardman, McDonnell, 2003). When compared to students with mild or high incident disabilities (e.g., specific learning disabilities, speech and language impairments), it could be said that those with moderate to severe disabilities constitute a minority. A consequence of this minority status is that information, resources, and materials directly related to those with moderate to severe disabilities are not always as abundant or easily accessible as those, which are directed towards students with mild disabilities. Educators may have to do extensive research to locate worthwhile information or materials directly related to students with moderate to severe disabilities. Often times such teachers end up modify the information or materials that they come across in order to make them more suitable (Snell & Brown, 2011).

General and special education teachers use the Internet for a variety of reasons, some of which include accessing the most current information, saving time in locating facts and resources, and communicating with others (Serim, 2012; Koch & Serim, 1996). The Internet has changed the way and ease with which most teachers conduct research. No longer is it necessary to browse through hardcopy catalog files, wander through book stacks, or thumb through endless journals or catalogs to locate information. It's now possible to enter a search term into a browser and be directed towards literally hundreds of online sites with related information. Not unlike winnowing wheat from chaff, these hundreds of sites can be overwhelming when checking their contents and attempting to verify the quality of the information they share (Guha, 2003). For example, entering the search term moderate/severe disabilities into the Google search engine results in over 1,910,000 results. Entering the same term into the Bing search engine results in over 15, 100,000 hits. Such plentiful results can be daunting to a busy teacher.

In order to avoid time consuming and frustrating Internet searches, teachers value Web libraries or lists of relevant Web sites (Koehler, 2007). The accompany list of 50 Web sites pertain to teachers of students with moderate to severe disabilities. The list was compiled through surveys completed by graduate-level preservice and inservice teachers (N=21) who were in the process of earning moderate to severe special education certification at a 4-year public university in California. The survey participants were asked to evaluate 83 Web sites (74 researcher identified and 9 survey participant identified) over a 10-week period. The survey consisted of six-point Likert-scale items. The variables to be evaluated included: applicability to teachers of students with moderate to severe disabilities; applicability to family members of children or youths with moderate to severe disabilities; utility; and overall quality. Results were coded into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software in order to determine the Web sites with the highest frequencies and percentages. As the Internet is an entity that continually changes, the authors have vetted information on the availability, currency, and content of the Web sites found to be most appealing. The resulting 50 Web sites are reported alphabetically and within thematic categories.

## **Advocacy, Family Supports, and General Information**

### **Title: Access Able Travel Source**

URL: <http://www.access-able.com>

Description: Provides a variety of information concerning national and worldwide travel and access for those with disabilities.

### **Title: Building the Legacy: IDEA 2004**

URL: <http://idea.ed.gov/>

Description: Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, the site provides useful and understandable information on Parts B and C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

### **Title: Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education at Syracuse University**

URL: <http://www.thechp.syr.edu>

Description: Works toward the full and equal participation of all college students with disabilities, including those with significant impairments. The site includes information on full inclusion as well as resources and links to other sites.

### **Title: Family Voices**

URL: <http://www.familyvoices.org>

Description: A national organization that provides information and advocacy for families of children and youth with special health care needs and/or disabilities.

### **Title: Institute on Disability**

URL: <http://iod.unh.edu>

Description: Operated from the University of New Hampshire, this site offers publications and projects geared towards parenting, schooling, working and living inclusively within communities.

### **Title: National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities**

URL: <http://www.nads.org>

Description: Provides information about: disabilities in children and youth; programs and services for infants, children, and youth with disabilities; IDEA, the nation's special education law; No Child Left Behind, the nation's general education law; and research-based information on effective practices.

**Title: Parents with Disabilities Online**

URL: <http://www.disabledparents.net>

Description: Shares parenting aids, networking information resources, and links directed to parents with disabilities, persons with disabilities who are planning to become parents, and nondisabled partners of those with disabilities.

**Title: Special Olympics**

URL: <http://www.specialolympics.org>

Description: An international organization that advocates for, sponsors, and organizes recreation and sporting activities for those with disabilities.

**Title: Supplemental Security Income**

URL: <http://www.ssa.gov/ssi/>

Description: A federal income supplement program for individuals with disabilities. The Web site includes general information, eligibility requirements, and additional resources.

**Title: TASH**

URL: <http://www.tash.org>

Description: An international human rights organization that promotes the full inclusion and participation of children and adults with significant disabilities in every aspect of their communities. TASH sponsors regional and international conferences as well as publications.

**Title: Wrightslaw**

URL: <http://wrightslaw.com>

Description: Contains information for parents and educators about special education law, education law, and advocacy for children with disabilities. The Web site publishes a free online newsletter, provides links to other sites, announces trainings, and offers books and DVDs.

## **Curricular and Instructional Supports**

**Title: Autism Teaching Tools**

URL: <http://www.autismteachingtools.com>

Description: Contains information for parents and professionals on instructional materials, supplies, books videos and strategies pertinent to teaching those diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders.

**Title: edHelper.com**

URL: <http://www.ehelper.com>

Description: Includes lesson plans, games, leveled reading books, and instructional strategies that address a variety of curriculum areas. Suggested accommodations and modifications pertinent to students with disabilities are included. Membership is an option.

**Title: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Education Place: Resources – Graphic Organizers**

URL: <http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/>

Description: Offers 30+ models of graphic organizers. Free downloads are available for use with students. The site also includes graphic organizers in Spanish.

**Title: Lessonplanz.com**

URL: <http://www.lessonplanz.com>

Description: Includes lesson plans, articles, thematic units and suggested learning activities for students in preschool through grade 12. There is not a dedicated section for special education. An online newsletter is available.

**Title: Moneyinstructor.com**

URL: <http://moneyinstructor.com>

Description: Worksheets, lessons, and activities for teaching money skills, personal finance, money management, business education, career and job skills, economics, and life skills are available on this site. Free limited memberships and full paid memberships are available.

**Title: The Teachers' Guide**

URL: <http://www.theteachersguide.com>

Description: Offers free resources including lesson plans, thematic units, book activities, children's songs, SMARTBoard templates, and more.

## **Disability Specific Organizations**

**Title: Autism Society of America**

URL: <http://www.autism-society.org>

Description: Provides information on the diagnosis, treatment, education, and supports needed for those with autism spectrum disorders. This national organization has chapters throughout the United States.

**Title: Autism Speaks**

URL: <http://www.autismspeaks.org>

Description: Web site for the nation's largest autism science and advocacy organization that is dedicated to funding research into the causes, prevention, treatments and a cure for autism; increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders; and advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. Information on a variety of topics related to autism is available.

**Title: Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation**

URL: <http://www.cpisra.org>

Description: Provides information on sponsored sporting events as well as information for enhancing sports and leisure opportunities for those with cerebral palsy and related neurological conditions. The Web site is for an international membership organization.

**Title: Association for Persons with Developmental Disabilities and Mental Health Needs**

URL: <http://www.thenadd.org>

Description: Provides professionals, policy makers, and families with education, training, information, and publications on mental health issues related to persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities. Members have access to publications, DVDs, and CDs at lower rates.

**Title: National Association for Down Syndrome**

URL: <http://www.nads.org>

Description: Provides information about Down syndrome through a discussion forum, online information, sponsored conferences, products, and publications. Membership to the association is not mandatory.

**Title: National Down Syndrome Society**

URL: <http://www.ndss.org>

Description: Provides general, specific and advocacy information about Down syndrome. The site also includes resources such as information on contacting the organization's helpline.

**Title: United Cerebral Palsy**

URL: <http://www.ucp.org>

Description: Offers information, resources, and networking opportunities concerning those with cerebral palsy. The sponsoring organization is an advocate for the rights of persons with any disability and is one of the largest health charities in the U.S.

## **Medical and Health Related**

### **Title: American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: Facts for Families**

URL: [http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts\\_for\\_families/facts\\_for\\_families](http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/facts_for_families)

Description: Provides concise and up-to-date information on mental health issues that affect children, teenagers, and their families. Information is available in multiple languages.

### **Title: The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools**

URL: <http://healthinschools.org>

Description: Supports students' health and provides information on important school health issues including school health services.

### **Title: Medicare**

URL: <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10043.html>

Description: Web site for the nation's health insurance program for people age 65 or older. Certain people younger than 65 can qualify for Medicare, however, including those who have disabilities. General information and contact information is provided.

### **Title: MedicineNet**

URL: <http://medicinenet.com/script/main/hp.asp>

Description: Provides a search engine to a variety of articles and postings related to medical and nutritional issues.

### **Title: Susan's Sex Support Site**

URL: <http://sexsupport.org>

Description: A personal site that addresses sexuality and those with disabilities. The site includes links to a search engine, blog, and other informational resources.

### **Title: WebMD**

URL: <http://www.webmd.com>

Description: Provides general information on health and medical conditions, medications, nutrition, disabilities, parenting, and healthy living.

## **Merchandise, Supplies, and Materials**

### **Title: Adaptive Clothing Showroom**

URL: <http://www.adaptiveclothingshowroom.com>

Description: Specializes in adaptive and conventional clothing for children and adults including a variety of specialty items.

### **Title: Attainment Company**

URL: <http://www.attainmentcompany.com>

Description: Provides a variety of curriculum and instructional materials as well as resources related to teaching students with moderate to severe disabilities.

### **Title: Constructive Playthings**

URL: <http://www.cptoy.com>

Description: Specializes in educational toys, materials, and furniture for young children. Constructive Playthings conducts business on-line and by way of telephone, fax, and mail orders. It also has brick and mortar stores in 8 states.

### **Title: Lakeshore Learning Materials**

URL: <http://www.lakeshorelearning.com>

Description: A distributor of instructional materials, supplies, and toys for early childhood through grade 6. Lakeshore has brick and mortar stores in 22 states. Orders can also be placed on-line, via telephone, through mail or by fax.

### **Title: Pro Ed**

URL: <http://www.proedinc.com>

Description: A publisher and distributor of books, journals, assessments, and curriculums. Pro Ed has a wide range of materials, many of which are applicable to professionals working with those who have moderate to severe disabilities.

### **Title: Professional Fit Clothing**

URL: <http://www.professionalfit.com>

Description: Sells special needs and adaptive clothing, eating, and dressing aids; clothing protectors; and wheelchair products appropriate for adults and children.



**Title: Scholastic**

URL: <http://scholastic.com>

Description: A publishing and distributing company specializing in educational materials. Scholastic has materials for diverse populations including teachers, parents, children, and administrators that address a wide variety of topics. Products include books, instructional programs, toys and games, magazines, and software.

## **Paraeducator/Paraprofessional Information**

**Title: National Clearinghouse for Paraeducator Resources**

URL: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/CMMR/Clearinghouse.html>

Description: Sponsored by the University of Southern California, the site includes information, articles, and links concerning the efficacy, role responsibilities, and career ladders of paraeducators.

**Title: Paraeducator Training**

URL: <http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/paraprep/>

Description: Sponsored by the University of Vermont, this site contains information to improve the training of paraeducators in order to meet the needs of children with disabilities, especially those who are included in general education classrooms.

**Title: Project PARA**

URL: <http://para.unl.edu/index.lasso>

Description: Based out of the College of Education and Human Sciences Department of the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, the Web site presents historical information on it's research, online training as well as a guide for administrators.

## **Professional Organizations**

**Title: American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD)**

URL: <http://www.aamr.org/>

Description: Provides information on intellectual and developmental disabilities, organization training opportunities, publications, links, and membership. This is the Web site for the oldest and largest interdisciplinary professional organization.

**Title: Council for Children with Behavior Disorders**

URL: <http://www.ccbd.net>

Description: A division of the Council for Exceptional Children that provides educational information, advocacy, professional development, and research concerning children and youth the emotional and behavioral disorders.

**Title: Council for Exceptional Children: Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities**

URL: <http://www.daddceec.org>

Description: Provides educational information, advocacy, professional development, and research information concerning children and youth with developmental disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, autism, and related disabilities. The site includes position papers and newsletters.

**Title: Council for Exceptional Children: Division for Physical, Health and Multiple Disabilities**

URL: <http://web.utk.edu/~dphmd/>

Description: Provides educational information, advocacy, professional development, and research concerning children and youth with physical and/or health related disabilities.

**Title: National Association of Special Education Teachers**

URL: <http://www.naset.org>

Description: Supports preservice and inservice special education teachers. Members have access to a variety of resources including PowerPoint presentations, audio lectures, and publications.

## **Technology**

**Title: Able Data**

URL: <http://www.abledata.com>

Description: Provides information on assistive technology and rehabilitation equipment available from domestic and international sources. The Web site also includes resources and links.

**Title: Assistivetech.net**

URL: <http://www.assistivetech.net>

Description: Contains information on assistive technology products. Products and devices can be searched by function, activity, or vendor.

**Title: Assistive Technology Training Online Project**

URL: <http://atto.buffalo.edu>

Description: Operated by the State University of New York at Buffalo, the Web site contains information, tutorials and resources related to assistive technology.

**Title: Closing the Gap**

URL: <http://www.closingthegap.com/>

Description: Focuses on assistive technology by providing resources, training opportunities, a bi-monthly magazine, webinars, and an annual conference.

**Title: International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication**

URL: <http://www.isaac-online.org/english/home>

Description: Provides information on augmentative and alternative communication, training opportunities, and organization publications. The Web site allows access to the newsletter of this international membership organization.

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