

assistance. As you read the following definitions, remember that a disability label can only provide general guidelines about a student. Labels are a form of shorthand that professionals use. However, no label can accurately describe a student. Your responsibility is to understand your students with disabilities in ways that extend beyond what any label communicates so you can help them reach their potential.

Categories of Disability in Federal Law

When we say that students have disabilities, we are referring to the specific categories of exceptionality prescribed by federal law. Each state has additional laws that clarify special education practices and procedures, and the terms used to refer to disabilities in state laws may differ from those found in federal law. For example, although federal law specifies the label *emotional disturbance* for some students, in some states, the term *behavior disorder* or *behavioral and emotional disability* is used. Similarly, although IDEA uses the term *mental retardation*, some states use the alternative *cognitive disability* or *intellectual disability*. Check with your instructor for the terms used in your state. According to IDEA, students with one or more of the following thirteen disabilities that negatively affect their educational performance are eligible for special education services. These disabilities also are summarized in the Professional Edge on the next page.

● **Learning Disabilities** Students with *learning disabilities (LD)* have dysfunctions in processing information typically found in language-based activities. They have average or above-average intelligence, but they often encounter significant problems learning how to read, write, and compute. They may not see letters and words in the way others do; they may not be able to pick out important features in a picture they are looking at; and they may take longer to process a question or comment directed to them. They also may have difficulty following directions, attending to tasks, organizing assignments, and managing time. Sometimes these students appear to be unmotivated or lazy when in fact they are trying to the best of their ability. Aaron, described at the beginning of this chapter, has one type of learning disability, but many other types also exist, and no single description characterizes all students with LD. Learning disabilities are by far the most common special need: Slightly less than 50 percent of all students receiving special education services in public schools in 2002–2003 had a learning disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b).

● **Speech or Language Impairments** When a student has extraordinary difficulties communicating with others for reasons other than maturation, a *speech or language impairment* is involved. Students with this disability may have trouble with *articulation*, or the production of speech sounds. They may omit words or mispronounce common words when they speak. They also may experience difficulty in *fluency*, such as a significant stuttering problem. Some students have far-reaching speech or language disorders, in which they have significant problems receiving and producing language. They may communicate through pictures or sign language. Some students' primary disability is a speech or language disorder, and they may receive services for this. For other students with disabilities, speech/language services supplement their educational services. For example, a student with a learning disability also might receive speech/language services, as might a student with autism or traumatic brain injury. In these instances, speech/language services are often considered a related service, as defined earlier in this chapter.

● **Mental Retardation** Students with *mental retardation (MR)* have significant limitations in intellectual ability and adaptive behaviors. They learn at a slower pace than do



What are the responsibilities of general education teachers for educating students with significant disabilities? Why is it important to ensure that these students are welcomed at their schools?

Research Note

Dunn, Chambers, and Rabren (2004) found that students with learning disabilities are less likely to drop out of school if they perceive that (1) a connection exists between what they are learning and life after high school, (2) someone in school is trying to help them, and (3) at least one class in high school is helpful to them.

other students, and they may reach a point at which their learning levels off. Although the federal listing of disability categories does not distinguish between students with mild mental retardation and those with more significant intellectual disabilities, many state listings do. Most individuals with this disability can lead independent or semi-independent lives as adults and can hold appropriate jobs. Because the term *mental retardation* can be very stigmatizing, the alternative term *intellectual disability* is becoming more common. In this text, the two terms are used interchangeably. Angela, one of the students you met in the introduction to this chapter, has an intellectual disability.

● **Emotional Disturbance** When a student has significant difficulty in the social-emotional domain—serious enough to interfere with the student’s learning—an *emotional disturbance (ED)*, also sometimes called an *emotional and behavior disorder (EBD)*, exists. Students with this disability may have difficulty with interpersonal relationships and may respond inappropriately in emotional situations. That is, they may have trouble making and keeping friends; they may get extremely angry when peers tease or play jokes on them; and they may show little or no emotion when it is expected, such as when a family pet dies. Some students with ED are depressed; others are aggressive. Students with ED display these impairments over a long period of time, across different settings, and to a degree significantly different from their peers. Students with emotional disabilities are not just students whose behavior in a classroom is challenging to address; rather, they have chronic and extremely serious emotional or behavioral problems.

● **Autism** Students with *autism*, sometimes referred to as *autism spectrum disorder* because of its many variations, usually lack appropriate social responsiveness from a very early age. They generally avoid physical contact (for example, cuddling and holding), and they may not make eye contact. Problems with social interactions persist as these children grow; they appear unaware of others’ feelings and may not seek interactions with peers or adults. They may have unusual language patterns, speaking without inflection, repeating what others say, or repeating something heard on television over and over. To feel comfortable, they may need highly routinized behavior, such as a formalized procedure for putting on their clothes or eating their meals. Some students with autism have above-average intelligence; others have intellectual disabilities. The causes of autism are not well understood, and the best approaches for working with students with autism are still emerging.

Asperger syndrome, usually considered a type of autism, is receiving increased attention among professionals. Individuals with this disorder usually experience difficulty in social interactions and communication, and they often have a very narrow range of interests. However, with appropriate supports and teacher understanding, students with Asperger syndrome can be highly successful in school.

Thomas, one of the students you met at the beginning of the chapter, is identified as having autism. You can learn a little more about autism by reading the Case in Practice in which teachers meet to problem solve regarding another student with this disability.

● **Hearing Impairments** Disabilities that concern inability or limited ability to receive auditory signals are called *hearing impairments (HI)*. When students are *hard of hearing*, they have a significant hearing loss but are able to capitalize on residual hearing by using hearing aids and other amplifying systems. Students who are *deaf* have little or no residual hearing and therefore do not benefit from traditional devices that aid hearing. Some students with hearing loss may be assisted through the use of advanced technology such as a cochlear implant, a small, complex electronic device implanted

Video Homework Exercise

Go to the Homework and Exercises section in Chapter 1 of MyEducationLab to watch a video that illustrates the diversity of persons with disabilities.



Some students with autism have above-average intelligence; others have intellectual disabilities.



A *primary disability* is one that most adversely affects a student’s educational performance. A *secondary disability* is an additional disability that also affects a student’s education but to a lesser degree. For example, a student identified with a learning disability as a primary disability could have an emotional disability or health impairment as a secondary disability.

Case in Practice

Problem Solving in Inclusive Schools: The Classroom Teacher's Role

At Highland Elementary School, staff members are meeting to discuss David, a third-grader with autism. Ms. Dowley is David's teacher, and Ms. Jackson is the special educator who provides needed support. Ms. Janes, the school psychologist, also is present.

Ms. Dowley: David is really a puzzle and a challenge. He is behaving much better in class than he was at the beginning of the year, but he still disrupts the entire class when he has a bad day. One of the parents called yesterday to complain about David taking time away from her daughter and the rest of the class. I'm starting to feel the same way. I hope we can come up with some ideas to improve the whole situation.

Ms. Jackson: What kinds of things seem to trigger the problems?

Ms. Dowley: That's part of my concern. I'm still pretty new at teaching, and I have my hands full with the whole class. I don't even have time to think carefully about what's happening with David. I just deal with him when he does something inappropriate—bothering another student, refusing to come with the group—without really thinking about how it happened or how to avoid it, if that's possible.

Ms. Janes: You've mentioned problem behavior as one issue. Before we start addressing that, are there any other issues we should be discussing too?

Ms. Dowley: No. Right now, it's the behavior—and I want to be clear that I really can see all the other gains David has made. I *want* this to work for David, and I know his parents do too. They've been very helpful and always carry through with their part. I know David can be successful in my class—but it'll be much less stressful for all of us if we can work on his behavior.

Ms. Janes: It seems as though we need more information. One question I have is this: What happens with you and the

other students when David does something inappropriate—talking in a loud voice, pushing books off the desk?

Ms. Dowley: Well, I try to ignore him, but that usually makes it worse. A few of the other students laugh, and that's not helping either.

Ms. Jackson: Maybe we should focus for a minute or two on when David doesn't have difficulty in class. What are the times of the day or the activities David does without having behavior problems?

Ms. Dowley: Let's see . . . He's usually fine and makes a good contribution when we're talking about science concepts. He loves science. When math is activity based, he's fine there, too.

Ms. Janes: Our meeting time is nearly up. I'd be happy to make time in my schedule to observe David, and perhaps Ms. Jackson could too. I know you need answers right away, but I hope we can get a clearer sense of the pattern of David's behavior so we can find the right strategy for addressing it. If we can get in to observe this week, could we meet next Tuesday to try to generate some strategies?

Ms. Dowley: Sure. That would be great. Let's just work out the details on observing.

REFLECTIONS

Why was this meeting a positive example of teachers addressing a student problem in an inclusive school? What did they do that has set them up for success? If you were trying to understand David better, what other questions would you ask about him? What would you like others to observe in the classroom in relation to him? In relation to you as the teacher? What do you think will happen at the next meeting? On the basis of this case, how would you describe the role of classroom teachers in addressing the challenges of inclusion?

near the ear that can provide a sense of sound. Depending on the extent of the disability, students with hearing impairments may use sign language, speech reading, or other ways to help them communicate.

● **Visual Impairments** Disabilities that concern the inability or limited ability to receive information visually are called *visual impairments (VI)*. Some students have *partial sight* and can learn successfully using magnification devices and other adaptive materials;

students who are *blind* do not use vision as a means of learning and instead rely primarily on touch and hearing. Depending on need, students with visual impairments may use braille, specialized computers, and other aids to assist in learning. Some students need specialized training to help them learn to move around successfully in their environment.

● **Deaf-Blindness** Students who have both significant vision and hearing impairments sometimes are eligible for services as *deaf-blind*. These students are categorized separately because of the unique learning needs they have, particularly in the domain of communication, and because of the highly specialized services they require. The degree of the vision and hearing loss may vary from moderate to severe and may be accompanied by other disabilities. Students in this category are likely to receive special education services beginning at birth or very soon thereafter.

● **Orthopedic Impairments** Students with *orthopedic impairments (OI)* have physical conditions that seriously impair their ability to move about or complete motor activities. Students who have cerebral palsy are included in this group, as are those with other diseases that affect the skeleton or muscles. Students with physical limitations resulting from accidents also may be orthopedically impaired. Students with orthopedic impairments are difficult to describe as a group because their strengths and needs vary tremendously. For example, some students with this disability are unable to move about without a wheelchair and may need special transportation to get to school and a ramp to enter the school building. Others may lack the fine motor skills needed to write and may require extra time or adapted equipment to complete assignments.

● **Traumatic Brain Injury** Students with *traumatic brain injury (TBI)* have a wide range of characteristics and special needs, including limited strength or alertness, developmental delays, short-term memory problems, hearing or vision losses that may be temporary, irritability, and sudden mood swings. Their characteristics and needs depend on the specific injuries they experienced, and their needs often change over time. Because TBI is a medical condition that affects education, diagnosis by a physician is required along with assessment of learning and adaptive behavior. Students who experience serious head trauma from automobile accidents, falls, and sports injuries are among those who might be eligible for services as TBI.

● **Other Health Impairments** Some students have a disease or disorder so significant that it affects their ability to learn in school. The category of disability addressing their needs is called *other health impairments (OHI)*. Students who have chronic heart conditions necessitating frequent and prolonged absences from school might be eligible for special education in this category, as might those with severe and chronic asthma. Students with diseases such as acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), sickle-cell anemia, and diabetes also may be categorized as having other health impairments, depending on the impact of their illnesses on learning. Some students with attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) also receive special education services in this category.

● **Multiple Disabilities** The category used when students have two or more disabilities is called *multiple disabilities*. Students in this group often have an intellectual disability as well as a physical disability, but this category also may be used to describe any student with two or more disability types. However, this classification is used only when the student's disabilities are so serious and interrelated that none can be identified as a primary disability. Students with multiple disabilities often benefit from *assistive technology*, that is, simple or complex devices that facilitate their learning, as explained in the Technology Notes.

Analyze and Reflect

Why is it important for teachers to think of students in terms of their strengths and abilities instead of the labels that describe their disabilities?

second, it acknowledges the difficulty of determining the nature of a specific disability in young children. Not all states use this term. Is it used in your state?

Student Artifact Building Teaching Skills Exercise



Go to the Building Teaching Skills section in Chapter 1 of MyEducationLab for an activity about getting to know your students.

Cross-Categorical Approaches to Special Education

Federal and state education agencies and local school districts use the categories of disability described in the previous sections for counting the number of students receiving special education services and allocating money to educate them. When you prepare to teach a student, however, you probably will find that the specific category of disability does not guide you in discovering that student's strengths and devising appropriate teaching strategies. Further, students in different categories often benefit from the same instructional adaptations. Therefore, throughout this book, students are sometimes discussed in terms of only two categories:

1. **High-incidence disabilities** are those that are most common, including learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, mild intellectual disabilities, and emotional disturbance. Together these disabilities account for approximately 80 percent of the disabilities reported in 2002–2003 (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b).
2. **Low-incidence disabilities** are those that are less common and include all the other categories: moderate to severe mental retardation, multiple disabilities, hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, other health impairments, visual impairments, deaf-blindness, autism, traumatic brain injury, and developmental delays.

Consistent with a **cross-categorical approach**, characteristics of students with disabilities are discussed in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7, where more attention is paid to students' learning needs than to their labels. In addition, although some strategies specific to categorical groups are outlined in those chapters (for example, the use of large-print books for students with visual impairments), most of the strategies presented throughout the text can be adapted for most students. If you adopt a cross-categorical approach in your own thinking about teaching students with disabilities, you will see that many options are available for helping all students succeed.

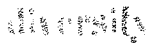


Why does the cross-categorical approach encourage teachers to identify strengths in all students? How does this help foster inclusive practices?

Other Students with Special Needs

Not all students who have special learning and behavior needs are addressed in special education laws. Many other students, described in the following sections, can benefit from the ideas presented throughout this book.

DIMENSIONS OF



Diversity has many faces. It includes ethnic, cultural, economic, linguistic, religious, ability, gender, and racial differences among the students you may teach.

● **Students Who Are Gifted or Talented** Students who demonstrate ability far above average in one or several areas—including overall intellectual ability, leadership, specific academic subjects, creativity, athletics, and the visual or performing arts—are considered *gifted* or *talented*. Erin is included in this group; she seems to learn without effort, and she also is eager to learn about almost everything. Evan is considered talented; still in elementary school, he has participated in state and national piano recitals, and his parents have requested that he have access to the music room during recess so he can practice. Students who are gifted or talented are not addressed in federal special education law, but many states have separate laws that provide guidelines for identifying and educating students with special talents. Adequate funds are not always provided to implement these laws, however, and so the availability and scope of services for students with particular talents vary across the country and even within a particular state.

● **Students Protected by Section 504** Some students not eligible to receive special education services are entitled to protection through Section 504 and receive specialized assistance because of their functional disabilities, as described previously in this chapter. Among those likely to be included in this group are some students with attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). These students have a medical condition often characterized by an inability to attend to complex tasks for long periods of time, excessive motor activity, and/or impulsivity. The impact of this disorder on students' schoolwork can be significant. Students with ADHD may take medication, such as Ritalin or Strattera, that helps them focus their attention. Many students with learning disabilities or emotional disturbance also have ADHD, but these students receive assistance through IDEA, as do students with ADHD whose disorder is so significant that they are determined to be eligible for special education. Other students who may be protected by Section 504 include those with asthma, severe allergies, or epilepsy.

● **Students at Risk** Often, the general term *at risk* refers to students whose characteristics, environment, or experiences make them more likely than others to fail in school (and they also may have disabilities). Students whose primary language is not English—sometimes referred to as *English-language learners (ELLs)*—sometimes are considered at risk, and they may need assistance in school learning. They may attend bilingual education programs or classes for English as a second language (ESL) to have opportunities to learn English while also learning the standard curriculum, or they may receive assistance in their general education classrooms. Some ELLs also have disabilities; when this is the case, both English-language instruction and special education are provided. By reviewing the checklist presented in the Professional Edge, you can analyze your readiness to work with students and families from diverse backgrounds, including those who are English-language learners.

A second group of at-risk students includes *slow learners*, whose educational progress is below average but who do not have a disability. These students are learning to the best of their ability, but they often cannot keep pace with the instruction in most general education classrooms without assistance. They are sometimes described as “falling between the cracks” of the educational system because while most professionals agree they need special assistance, they are not eligible for special education. They do sometimes receive assistance in remedial reading or math or tutorial programs.

Other students who might be considered at risk include those who are homeless; those who live in poverty or move frequently; those who are born to mothers abusing drugs or alcohol or who abuse drugs or alcohol themselves; and those who are victims

www.resources

The Family Village School website (www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/education/inclusion.html) provides a wide variety of information about associations, instructional resources, legal issues, projects, and research related to inclusion.