



FALL 2024

Disability is Environment or Task-Specific

Disability is often environment or task-specific, meaning that a person's ability to function can vary significantly depending on the setting or the demands of a particular task. Rather than seeing disability as an inherent limitation within the individual, it's more accurate to view it as a mismatch between a person's abilities and the requirements of the environment or task they are trying to complete. This highlights how disabilities are not static; they can be amplified or minimized depending on the skills necessary to find success on a task, how supportive the environment is, and how well the tasks are adapted to meet the individual's needs. When necessary, by adjusting environments and tasks, we can create spaces where a person's disability has less of an impact on their ability to succeed.

[Read on to learn more!](#)

With little effort, you can find many examples of how the world is combatting the impact of environmental factors on physical disabilities. Thankfully, we've developed wheelchair ramps, self-opening doors, power wheelchairs, handicap-accessible restrooms, curb cuts at intersections, and more to help make our world more accessible to people who use wheelchairs. These features help minimize an environment's impact on a physical disability. Chances are, if you've ever broken a bone, sprained an ankle, or supported someone who has, you've benefited from one or more of these features; if not, there's a decent chance you'll appreciate them at some point in your life! When you do, you'll be glad they are there because you'll discover that in their absence, your disability will be magnified.

Why is this so obvious for physical disabilities but not necessarily as accepted for social, emotional, learning, and other disabilities? Have you considered how your home, school, or classroom environment and tasks might exacerbate a child's disability? More importantly, have you considered ways you might make your environment more accessible?

*It's
always
SEEMS
IMPOSSIBLE
until IT'S
DONE!*

The Difference an Environment Can Make

Tell me the story...

Disability or not?

Danny loves math class! Mr. Ware is a fun teacher, and Danny is good at math. Most importantly, in Danny's mind, he doesn't need to read much in math class. With Danny's reading disability, he struggles in every other class but not math! To make it even better, Mr. Ware uses iPads in his classroom, so when Danny needs to read a word problem or the directions for an assignment, he uses the device's Speak Screen feature, which reads the problem or directions aloud. In math class, it's almost like he doesn't have a disability because the subject, setting, and tasks don't require him to read! Danny loves math!



Social studies class is a different story. Here, Danny's teacher, Ms. Lynn, expects students to read quite a bit. Ms. Lynn knows it's important for fifth graders to read to learn, so she has established a classroom built around literacy. Further, Ms. Lynn's administration worked with her to reestablish social studies as a fifth-grade class built with a literacy mindset at its core. Danny gets anxious the minute he enters class because he knows he will struggle. His guard goes up, his stomach hurts, and he often acts out in class because of this anxiety. Like many other teachers, Ms. Lynn is always in her classroom, unaware that Danny doesn't behave like this in other classes. She doesn't recognize that her environment and the activities she expects the students to complete are directly impacting Danny's disability in reading, nor is she aware that there's something she can do about it. It's a recipe for disaster, and it's quickly headed there!

What's the context?

Our control over disability

Disability (a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities) is environment and/or task-specific. This means that when an environment or the expectations of a task conflict with an individual's abilities, they experience disability. Danny struggles with reading skills, but when it's not necessary to read, he can function as expected. However, when he is in a setting where his skills or abilities are limited, in Danny's case, this means anything involving reading, then he will experience disability.

As teachers, we have control over our environment, the tasks we assign, and the support we provide. If we recognize the barriers in the environment or tasks that contribute to a student's disability, we can make adjustments to minimize their impact. For Danny, realizing that reading is a challenge allows us to provide accommodations such as audiobooks, oral instructions, or pairing him with a peer for tasks that require reading. By adjusting the environment or modifying the task, we can help Danny access the content and participate fully, reducing the experience of disability. Ultimately, the goal is to create an inclusive learning space where all students can succeed, regardless of their individual challenges.

Get to the point...

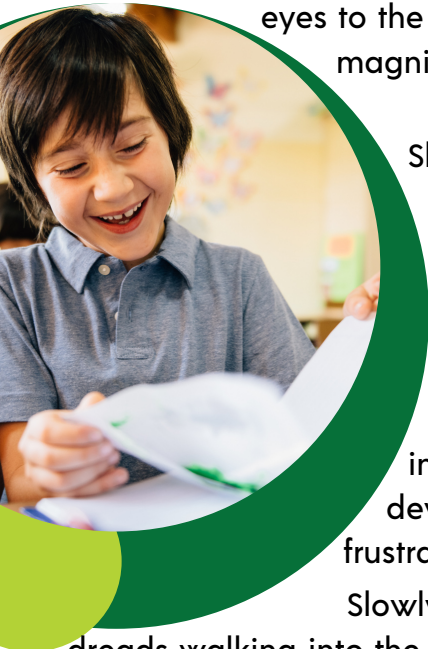
Disability is environment or task-specific

By understanding that disability is environment or task-specific, parents, teachers, and other IEP team members can minimize and even eliminate it by predicting the tasks and environmental elements likely to present a barrier. Identifying these potential barriers in advance allows us to plan for and control the proactive strategies and accommodations necessary to eliminate the impact of disability, ensuring the student has the support needed to succeed.

The story continues...

Teachers can control the impact of a disability

One day, after another difficult class with Danny, Ms. Lynn meets with the school's special education team and learns more about Danny's struggles in reading. She's surprised to hear that he thrives in math class, where the environment and tasks are more accessible to him. This opens her eyes to the idea that her literacy-heavy approach, while important, may be magnifying Danny's reading disability.



With guidance from the IEP team, Ms. Lynn starts to make some changes. She introduces text-to-speech tools, like the ones Danny uses in math class, to help him with reading assignments. Equally as important, she develops an understanding of [accessibility](#), which helps her discover that if she's going to achieve her mission of developing Danny's literacy skills, then she needs to make some modifications to the reading assignments. Through accessible assignments, Danny can independently complete activities, which means he is working to build literacy skills by becoming independently engaged with the content. Independence allows Danny to develop his skills starting from his current level versus the disengagement and frustration he demonstrated when the text was too difficult to read.

Slowly, Danny's attitude toward social studies begins to change. He no longer dreads walking into the classroom, and his anxiety starts to ease. With the right accommodations, Danny can access the material in a way that works for him. He becomes more engaged, and his behavior improves dramatically. Ms. Lynn realizes that by adjusting the environment and tasks, she can help Danny and other students like him thrive in her classroom. What once seemed like a recipe for disaster has now become a pathway to success.

Be action-driven...

1. Explore how your unique instructional environment might be causing a disabling situation for a student. Then, jump into [Accomods](#) to consider adaptations to help minimize this impact.
2. Next time you give an assignment, ask yourself: "How might this task cause a disabling situation for a student?" Then, make adjustments with an accommodation or modification to make the task [accessible](#).

Sign up for future newsletters at www.actiondriveneducation.com/newsletters/

Learn more!

Watch a Video

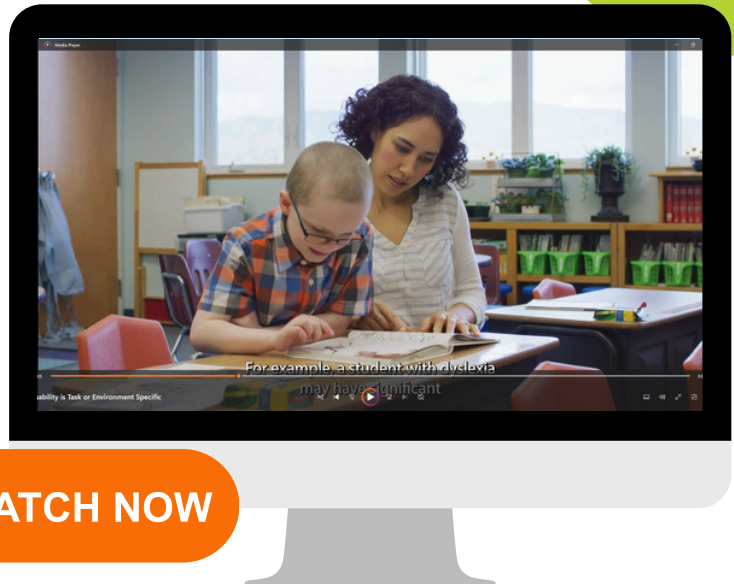
Are you an auditory/visual learner? Want to learn more about how [Disability is Task or Environment Specific](#)? Check out this video!



Scan me or
click here!



WATCH NOW



Do an Activity

As teachers, we need to be aware of when a particular task or environment might cause a child to struggle due to their disability. By recognizing this, we can plan to minimize or even eliminate its impact. [Download this matching activity](#) to see how many needs you can pair with a potentially challenging task or environment.



Schedule Professional Development "My Accessible Classroom"

Action Driven Education's newest professional development helps teachers build classrooms that fit their unique style while also working to eliminate or minimize its impact on a child's disability. Participants explore how accessibility becomes the root of rigor!

[Schedule a Professional Development Consultation to learn more!](#)



[Learn More](#)

[Member Login](#)