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Conceptual Model of Science

Why teach science to students with significant cognitive disabilities? All students, including those with significant cognitive disabilities, should have the opportunity to gain wonder and understanding of the natural world and their place in it. For this population, it is this outcome of wonder and understanding that will promote quality of life. For example, wonder about the ocean might lead to a lifelong hobby of whale watching or collecting shells. Increased understanding about the human body might lead to choosing to work in healthcare. To gain wonder and understanding, students need to attain the ability to pose questions and share discoveries about the natural world. In science, these abilities are shaped through learning both the process of inquiry and specific science content. In fact, inquiry becomes a tool for learning science content in a way that promotes the desired outcomes of gaining wonder and understanding in ways that are both self-directed (posing questions) and communal (sharing discoveries). Students with significant cognitive disabilities should have the opportunity for science learning in an environment that promotes inquiry and information sharing. At specific grades, certain content will be of greater priority as specified in the general curriculum. In setting priorities for alternate achievement, what is most important is to be sure that while students gain some content knowledge, they also are increasing their skills to pose questions and share discoveries whatever the content of focus.

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