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MAINSTREAMING AND THE CLASSROOM TEACHER: A PRACTICAL APPROACH

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Classroom teachers have always had exceptional students in regular classrooms; many of these children could not be placed due to overcrowding of special education classes. Some were undiagnosed and unrecognized in terms of specific disability. The parents of others would not allow separation from regular learning settings. Often these handicapped learners in normative educational settings were relegated to marginal roles and ignored. Special learners were sometimes the focus of annoyance of teachers and classmates, who did not understand their disability and could not effectively aid special learning. Much of the time, handicapped children were successfully taught by the ingenious teacher, who utilized make-do arrangements, but was effective in reaching students with special needs. Further, there is research to indicate that some exceptional learners whose disability is not extreme do learn very well in regular classrooms and do not profit educationally or socially by being separated from their more normative peers (Dunn, 1968, Goldstein, Moss and Johnson, 1965).

Since the passage of P.L. 94-142, the classroom teacher is being asked to meet the needs of some youngsters with learning problems, not on a catch-as-catch-can basis, but by conscious and rational effort to reach the handicapped child with logistical and educational support from the administration, the special education staff, other teachers, specialist teachers and parents.

The Mainstreamed Classroom

When viewing reading instruction for handicapped children in the regular classroom, the nature of the mainstreaming process and the changes to be considered --we must look at the curriculum, the teaching methods, and the role of the teacher, both for the normative student and the handicapped child. What is called

for, then, is a model whereby all participants are encouraged to rethink their roles to meet the needs of exceptional students, who are often more able than their peers in some abilities.

In the mainstreamed regular classroom, teachers may encounter such problems as 1)auditory problems, 2)visual problems, 3)language processing and language development problems, 4)social and emotional problems, 5)problems of the slow learner, 6)physical handicap, and, as is often the case, 7)multiple handicap as part of the mainstreaming function. To indicate how such disabilities as these may interfere with reading ability, let us take the case of auditory handicap and look at this difficulty with respect to the components of assessment and communication. The knowledge or experiential base of the auditorially impaired may be reduced, since the student cannot hear much of what is being said or explained. Communicative desire may also be reduced, since the speaker may not be certain he has understood what went before. Receptive processes are obviously impaired. Knowledge of the linguistic process may well be limited.

Non-discriminatory Assessment

Diagnosis of reading strengths and weaknesses becomes problematic with the exceptional learner; by mandate, testing bias must be reduced as much as possible in terms of the student's handicap. Using the example above, if a child has an auditory handicap, compensatory methods of testing reading ability must be provided in order that true measurement may occur. A group test would be unsuitable, unless auditory equipment is furnished, giving that student an equivalent status visually and linguistically with his peers.

Thus the teacher and child study team must look for causes of bias in the characteristics of the handicap of the student. Tests themselves may be sources of bias. The examiner may lack appropriate training and proper attitudinal perspective, conditions in the assessment situation may bias the performance of the child; and, conditions between the child and the examiner may influence performance on the tests.

Development of Individualized Education Programs

Once diagnostic and assessment procedures have been carried out by the evaluation team, an individualized educational program for each special learner must be formed by the child study team, which may include the principal, the teacher, the psychologist, the special educator, the corrective reading teacher,

other pertinent personnel, as well as the parents of the child. This individualized learning program must be carried out in a non-restrictive environment. Thus, in the terms of reading instruction, the special learner may or may not meet with the regular class for teacher directed instruction, meet in the small group for reading instruction from the special educator within the classroom and later on in the day, meet in a learning resource room with the corrective reading teacher.

Specific goals for instruction would be spelled out for the youngster and the responsibilities would be delegated to the respective members of the child study team. In addition, the child might be required to meet with his counselor or the psychologist to work out individual problems with regard to motivation and behavior. Thus the child's schedule might include fifteen hours per week with the regular class, five hours a week with the special educator in the classroom context, five hours a week in the resource room, and another hour per week with the psychologist. The child would be expected to achieve specific goals with specified personnel. A pull-out program or cooperative program can become chaotic unless responsibility is clearly delegated to each member of the teaching team for learning.

The special learner's parents should be informed of all that is transpiring in terms of the goals set forth in the individualized educational plan. Indeed, if progress lags, the parent may be asked to aid the child in various ways so that compensatory methods and learning can occur with support from the home.

Universals of Appropriate Instruction

The reader may be thinking that many of the techniques in individualized educational programs are not new to education nor are they appropriate only to the special learner. Why, one asks, would not such IEP's be useful and humane for all youngsters? And that is precisely the point. The diagnostic prescriptive techniques suggested have successfully been used by classroom teachers and reading specialists for many years.

Many teachers have a mistaken notion that the curriculum, the diagnostic corrective procedures, and emotional needs of the handicapped learner are totally different from what occurs among the modal learners. Special educators are bound by state and local curriculum guides as is the regular classroom teacher. Much of their diagnostic procedure is based on tests used by the classroom teacher and the reading

teacher. Remedial techniques are nearly the same with only some modification to accommodate handicap. To assume there is a dramatically different instructional and affective program for the exceptional student is to do the special learner a disservice.

Factors to Emphasize in Implementing Mainstreaming

Teachers who are prepared to teach are prepared for the mainstreaming task. To implement mainstreaming more emphasis on some techniques and less stress on others must occur. Currently, classroom teachers are accustomed to a one-teacher class, large group instruction. But teachers are capable of utilizing every technique that is mandated for the implementation of PL 94-142. The teacher who will engage in mainstreaming instruction should emphasize the following principles in implementing the program:

1. Working in a consistently congenial and scheduled manner with the child study team.
2. Inclusion of parents in the planning, and implementing the individual study program.
3. Stress diagnostic prescriptive approaches and a more complete knowledge of the dimensions of language assessment.
4. Stress non-biased, non-discriminatory assessment in terms of specific disability while assessing reading ability.
5. Commitment to a highly individualized program for the special learner, and for the class.
6. Emphasis on small group instruction, peer-tutoring, parent-tutoring, and the use of the support staff, especially in the classroom.
7. Openness to task analysis and break-down of instructional tasks for the learner as well as reduced or changed pace of presentation based on educational need of the student.
8. Openness to using techniques and materials modelled by the special educator and the corrective reading teacher.
9. Stress on greater knowledge of the linguistic and reading process in terms of cognitive strategies for the special student.
10. Knowledge of what impairs receptive and expressive language.
11. Arrangement of planning periods where the child study team discusses and coordinates instruction for the class as a whole as well as for the exceptional student.

12. Increased awareness of social problems and group dynamics when dealing with exceptional students.
13. Self awareness of attitudes and abilities for working with special students.
14. Emphasis on reduced class size in order to give more individual attention and to do more planning.

The shift in instructional and educational emphasis suggested above is essential and mandated in the mainstreaming process. But all of these principles and techniques could be used effectively with the model student as well. By the same token, there are procedures that work well in the special education classroom, which are especially helpful to all children--the handicapped or modal--in the mainstreaming situation.

First among these procedures useful to the mainstreamed student is modelling of the reading and languaging process. To provide linguistic models to the student, the teacher gives corrective feedback. When the learner responds or speaks using limited or faulty language, the teacher simply includes a correct restatement of the misspoken element in the response. The teacher does not correct the student, but simply changes the linguistic form in the response. The teacher provides a great deal of repetition in speech; using the principles of linguistic redundancy, so that the student not only understands linguistic forms, but has a great many opportunities to gain meaning from what is said. The teacher strives for relevancy, seeking to relate all learning to some experience that can be understood by the child, or is, in fact, part of his past experience. Finally, the teacher should continuously expand the language that the young person is using, integrating more adverbs, adjectives, phrases and clauses in her language as well as more complex reasoning about the experience of the learner.

Second, special learners need warmth, support and understanding. Nearly every child responds to positive reaction and response; but the special learner often needs more affirmation than the modal youngsters. In special classes, these young people frequently are attended to more supportively since such classes are small; in a large class setting, being treated "like everyone else" may seem like rejection.

Third, task analysis, a break-down of what must be learned followed by a highly sequential and ordered presentation of information, helpful to the normative

student, is essential to the conceptual development of the exceptional student.

Finally, the expectancy of success, often a given for the regular classroom student is not necessarily an orientation toward the special student. Teachers may harbor a reticence and reservation about their own capability for reaching such students; further, the capability of a handicapped learner may be in question. These attitudinal factors effect the outlook for success of the program.

The prospects for working out superior educational programs with greater attention to individual children, on the basis of their unique capabilities and affective needs, while working in a cooperative venture with specialists, parents, and administrators, is invigorating. Special children have been isolated for too long. What we have not realized is that people who affect the lives of children, teachers, specialists, administrators, psychologists and parents have frequently been isolated in their functioning as well. The integrative model for mainstreaming may provide for professional interaction with the special child as a primary focus in a model which may function even more effectively for the modal learner.

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