

HANDICAPPED CHILDREN IN MODAL PROGRAMS

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Introduction

My interest is in handicapped children. However, the specific focus of this paper concerns itself with the preparation of regular classroom teachers, supervisors, administrators, and other educational personnel to meet the needs of the handicapped in these regular or model programs. After three-quarters of a century represented by enormous difficulties and rather modest accomplishments, this may be an appropriate time to review alternatives to the so-called special education model developed in the United States to meet the educational and training needs of our handicapped children.

Beliefs and Assumptions

(1) Beginning with Bennett's study in 1932, Perry's in 1936, this author's in 1956, and the many that followed and are being reported to this day, it has yet to be demonstrated that our existing special education models for trainable or educable children have demonstrated efficacy or special value. Further, the few studies that have been reported concerning the education of blind, deaf, orthopedically handicapped, disturbed, and learning disabled have not satisfactorily demonstrated the necessity to enroll such youngsters in currently designed special education programs. Unfortunately, however, both data and experience indicate clearly those problems attendant with the placement of handicapped children in ordinary school programs. Therefore, when a profession such as ours finds itself in an unsupportable position if we turn to the right and an equally unsupportable position if we turn to the left, we had better find another direction to move — for, it is equally clear, that the truly unsupportable, mindless, position is to remain exactly where we are now. This must be a time for experimentation, and the special training of regular class personnel and regular supervisory staff are clearly the indicated areas that deserve of our attention.

(2) Special education has not proved its efficacy, neither have special methods or special curricula — for ordinary children or for students preparing to teach them. I have written a great deal concerning this interesting, albeit disheartening, phenomenon. Essentially I have concluded that — within broad limitations — one curriculum design is as good or as poor as another and, further, I include teacher preparation curricula within this conclusion. To state this another way, whatever the teacher preparation design may be, there is no guarantee of it being either proper or improper, good or bad. To state this yet a third way, we will not learn from the words used, or the curricula designed, whether a particular program will train regular classroom teachers and supervisors to deal more effectively and sensitively with handicapped children and their families. I would be in a position to better estimate the chances for that program to succeed if I were given some evidence concerning the thoughtfulness that was invested in preparing the program plan, and the degree to which the program was inductive in nature, open, interesting to the students, and requiring each participant — both student and faculty member — to struggle toward understanding himself as a learner or a person capable of changing.

(3) The responsibility for preparing teachers and allied professional personnel does not reside exclusively in the college or department of education. The entire university or college, not only its specialized schools and departments, must be involved and concerned with the preparation of teachers. Further, teachers and other educational personnel do not receive all of their professional preparation during either the four year undergraduate or during their graduate preparation. Teacher, as all professions, requires continuous self-appraisal, retraining, and in-service opportunities for personal and professional growth.

(4) A broad liberal education is crucial to adequate teacher preparation — be these teachers of ordinary children or teachers of the handicapped. Insofar as this writer is concerned, there are two dominant characteristics that all teachers should possess: *an interest in people* an interest in learning for the sake of learning. Especially insofar as teachers of the handicapped are concerned — teachers of children who have difficulty in school and who may be “reluctant” learners — it is important that the teacher, herself, struggle with and master challenging intellectual tasks and, consequently, learn that learning can be its own reward, that learning can be the most vital autotelic activity. Without such experiences, it is difficult for this writer to believe that teachers of the trainable, for example, will have much of a chance convincing their pupils that learning may provide both personal as well as material benefits. For this reason, I believe the teacher of the trainable and the teacher of the multiply handicapped require, at least, an education as rigorous, as broad and as liberal as anyone in either fields of education or other professions.

(5) The clinical orientation is an indispensable part of professional preparation. As we have written in several books and papers, preparing the teacher as an applier of psychological principles rather than as a technician or imparter of knowledge is not likely to take place in any marked kind of way by merely increasing the amount and variety of information (i.e. liberal arts, child psychology, science) which teachers should have. We must not confuse what a teacher knows with how she applies such knowledge. Stated another way, in agreeing with the general desire that the preparation of all teachers be more concerned with the breadth and depth of liberal arts and science background, it would be unfortunate to assume that by rectifying any deficiencies we may possess in these areas, the effectiveness of teaching has thereby been eliminated as a problem. As a strong liberal arts preparation forms the foundation for the theoretical study of education, the clinical experience — ranging in character from observation and student teaching to long-term clinical internships — provides the environment for dynamic learning by bringing theory to life. Crucial to the preparation of teachers is the maximization of the possibility that a teacher’s practice harmonizes with principles of learning and development.

(6) There is a basic core of professional knowledge and activities common to all teachers, regardless of their specific specialization. This core should include: proper attention to the study of educational philosophy, proper attention to the study of the behavioral sciences, proper attention to the study of the role of teachers and schools in a democracy, and a sensitivity to the philosophies and structures of the sciences and arts.

(7) Specialized professional skills, techniques, and content are more in need of review and ongoing re-evaluation and refinement than any other aspect of the teacher education curriculum.

(8) Probably, attracting intelligent, interesting, and humanistic kinds of people to work with handicapped children has much more to do with the development of effective teachers of the handicapped than however the training program happens to evolve. That is, the kinds of people that will be recruited for EPDA programs may well determine how successful these programs are and how well they fulfill their missions.

(9) We should not be misled to overestimate the numbers of specialized personnel needed to deal with handicapped children in the regular grades. For example, the usual textbook on exceptional children estimates incidences in the various categories of exceptionality that are both

erroneous and misleading. Mental retardation commonly is estimated to include anywhere from three to sixteen percent of the school population. My own recent demographic studies lead me to conclude that, insofar as mental retardation is concerned, the aforementioned estimates are based purely on presumed psychometric retardation. Mental retardation — where a child is identified and placed (or denied placement) in a special program or treatment — occurs in not more than one percent of the total population and in not more than 1.5 to 2 percent of the school aged population. Similarly, estimates concerning the incidence of learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, and other handicaps are probably inflated.

(10) The recent annual report of the National Advisory Council on Education Professions Development to the President and the Congress of the United States (October, 1969), and more recent executive and legislative behavior, indicate that the coming years may not be without great hardships and, possibly, little or no progress concerning programs and activities on behalf of the handicapped and their families.

Objectives

(1) The dominant objective in preparing regular classroom teachers and other educational personnel for work with the handicapped should be concerned with the development and reinforcement of their humanistic concerns. Because handicapped children are most prone to discriminatory practices, thoughtless and insensitive plans, and public policies that are designed to isolate and segregate them, teachers and administrators in E.P.D.A. programs are especially in need of workshops and experiences that emphasize sensitivity to these matters and ways to better guarantee that the rights these children have — the rights all children have — will not be observed in the breach. All teachers must be, first, humanists. Their central concerns must be with people. The strong humanist convictions that most teachers have when they enter training programs must be preserved and enhanced.

(2) The process of teaching requires a kind of pedagogical artistry that may be stifled by the drudgery of too many thoughtless courses, mindless activities, and boring experiences. Teachers must be given opportunities to explore and evaluate the basic pedagogical premises, theories, methodologies, and techniques that the literature and demonstrations make available. However, the same concern must be given to the need creative people have for self-expression, for the development of one's original style. Teachers in training must be given sufficient opportunities to struggle to understand themselves as learners. They must be given encouragement to develop their own — not imitative — styles of teaching and interacting. There must be sufficient breadth and flexibility in the E.P.D.A. curriculum to permit each trainee as much freedom as possible to discover himself as a teacher and as a learner and to evolve his own unique style and philosophy.

(3) Basic to her preparation as a regular teacher with newly developing skills and sensitivity for working with handicapped children, is her development as an observer and interpreter of human behavior. Rather than a continuation of lifeless lecture courses or trivial and unrelated discussion groups, a significant portion of the E.P.D.A. trainees' program should involve her in a psycho-educational experience of the kind we, and a great many others, have written about in recent years. Teachers must be trained to observe, to discover that what they see and what they infer must be held separate or an already complex task becomes unmanageable. The processes of observation and inference are strongly affected by the prejudices a teacher brings to the observational task. The goal of preparing the regular teacher for work with the handicapped — culminating in the clinical experience — should be concerned with helping the teacher understand her prejudices so she may deal with them more effectively. Further, the process of clinical training may aid in remedying the kind of "slot machine" education — normative teaching — that practically all children are continually exposed to and practically all teachers universally support.

Strategy and Tactics for Implementation

This paper has presented certain beliefs and assumptions, positions that become critical to the design of a strategy for implementing a program to train regular educators for work with the handicapped. As was mentioned earlier in this paper, I believe one strategy for implementing a program is more or less as good as another strategy. The important element here is that each college and university that accepts E.P.D.A. responsibilities be permitted the freedom to develop their program and pursue their mission in their own unique fashion. In preceding sections, my biases were made plain. However, my overriding bias is for groups to be selected for these kinds of responsibilities on the basis of their thoughtful presentations, logic, and past histories. Especially at this time in our development, we should not expect – nor should we even encourage – programmatic similarity from college to college. Although it is appealing, this reliance on ~~past history or logic~~ or the weight of authority has little place or value in a field that has all too painfully demonstrated its relative incompetence to deal with the problems entrusted to it. *tradition*

Insofar as tactics are concerned – i.e. who is selected for programs, who teaches, course sequences, course credits, field experiences, other clinical experiences, length of program, depth of program, cognate areas, etc., etc., etc., – these are matters that must be left to the wisdom of those to whom we entrust such programs. During the next several years, the wisest decision the Bureau of Educational Personnel Development might make is to deliberately provide the means and encouragement to maximize the varieties of programs designed to prepare these regular personnel for work with the handicapped.

Conclusion

Segregated, four-walled experiences for handicapped children – what is referred to as special education – has not proven its superiority to model or regular school programs. Today, after twenty-five years of enormous post-World War II program development and interest, the time may be appropriate for intensified efforts to develop and evaluate alternatives to either special education programming or the placement of handicapped children in ordinary programs without special regard for the unique needs these children have. As we have stated approximately ten years ago, the preparation of teachers is, essentially, an unstudied problem. Today, it continues to remain unstudied – but greatly maligned. It appears to me that the essential responsibility the Bureau has is to develop the means to generate and support new and innovative teacher preparation models as, hopefully, others among us are promoting the development of comparable models in our pre-school, elementary, and secondary schools. The one thing that must not happen is for this new program to evolve into either a carbon copy of what is now called bona fide teacher preparation in special education or a distorted view of what some modern day alchemists are prescribing for all children and for any child.

I don't believe handicapped children will get along well in a ~~model~~ or ordinary school program. There are many ordinary children who do poorly in such programs. What I have tried to communicate is that, in the best of all possible worlds, every classroom should be a special classroom, teaching should be more inductive and diagnostic and teachers should be most concerned with human beings, the qualities they have, and the skills they need.

References

The reader may be interested in examining: our book on preparing clinical teachers (Sarason, Seymour B., Davidson, Kenneth and Blatt, Burton. *The Preparation of Teachers: An Unstudied Problem in Education*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1962, 124 pp.); my book that discusses the efficacy studies as well as problems concerning the preparation of teachers (Blatt, Burton. *The Intellectually Disfranchised: Impoverished Learners and Their Teachers*. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Mental Health, Community Mental Health Monograph Series, 1967, 273 pp.); and my new book that will be published early this Spring (*Exodus From Pandemonium: Human Abuse and a Reformation of Public Policy*. Allyn and Bacon, in press).