

SPECIAL EDITORIAL

The U.S. PL 94-142 and the British Warnock Report are bound to have a strong influence on Special Education in this country. Both developments suggest new ways of approaching and delivering educational services to handicapped children. These new developments have their well-spring in the milieu of educational and cultural endeavour: changing societal views on human rights; shifting philosophical perspectives; specific current issues and incidents and reactions, both judicial and legislative; and occasionally, empirical support for a new trend.

The diverse papers in this edition underscore many of these developments and probably derive from the sources cited. Rather than observe my usual custom and suggest how these papers reflect particular trends I would like to use this Editorial to raise a number of questions about one of the most discussed developments in Special Education – mainstreaming. My purpose in so doing is to alert teachers, parents and particularly, administrators, to some of the issues which need to be considered before and during the implementation of a mainstreaming policy.

Mainstreaming or The Least Restrictive Alternative.

The latter expression, used in PL 94-142, more aptly describes the concept of placing children in ‘more normal’ educational settings. There appears to be general acceptance of the reality, if not value, of moves towards mainstreaming in our country. I hope that the following questions will raise some of the critical issues which attend the administration of activities aimed at promoting a least restrictive alternative doctrine.

1. Preparing for Mainstreaming.

- 1.1. At the systemic level, have appropriate and thorough preparations been made for mainstreaming?
- 1.2. Which children are to be mainstreamed? How many children? Will the decision be made on categorical grounds? Severity levels? In urban or rural areas first? Will it be done on a pilot basis? State-wide? In particular schools? With specified teachers? With parental approval? With the agreement of the children concerned? Will the teachers be asked if they want to be involved?
- 1.3. What prior planning will take place? The research on changing the attitudes of children and teachers to the mainstreaming children is not only vexed and ambivalent – it leaves us very much in the dark as to how to prepare properly all parties concerned. And, incidentally, it is with the greatest fervour that I suggest that if mainstreaming is to be successful **administrators at all system-levels** must take into account the human side of the educational organization. It is imperative that moves to mainstream be characterised by a qualitative and deep concern for the parents, teachers and children, rather than the quantifiable aspects of placement options, class sizes, numbers of children to be placed and similar mechanistic logistics.

2. Provision of Resources.

- 2.1. If, and when, handicapped children are placed in regular classrooms, will the teachers’ overall class numbers diminish to allow time for the extra work involved?
- 2.2. Will appropriate support services be provided, i.e., resource teachers, aides and nurses, if necessary? Or will teachers have to go-it-alone? If nurses are not provided, does this mean that children requiring some in-class medical attention will not be mainstreamed, even though for educational reasons they might have optimal chances of benefitting from a more normal placement?
- 2.3. Will attention be paid to the provisions of barrier-free architecture in schools?

3. Training.

- 3.1. Will there be an appropriate emphasis on ‘pre-mainstreaming’ and ‘in-mainstreaming’ training for BOTH regular and special educators? Or will the assumption be made that all teachers can teach all children regardless of the educational problems being presented by the mainstream newcomers and the role-changes involved?
- 3.2. Will colleges and universities reflect these new demands and challenges in their professional preparation programs? For that matter, at what stage, if any, are pre-service teacher education students advised that they could be teaching handicapped children in regular classes? I believe that this possibility has been well catered for in Tacoma, Washington, U.S.A. where for the last twenty years there has been a policy of what Superintendent Henry Bertness calls ‘progressive inclusion’ of handicapped youngsters. I understand that Bertness arranges for prospective teachers to be informed that if they are planning on entering regular education they will be required to teach handicapped children in their normal classes.

3.3. Has any systematic attempt been made to ensure that teacher educators are advised or educated about this new educational development – mainstreaming? Has, or will there be, any attempt to ensure that the attitudes of teacher educators to mainstreaming and the handicapped are made more positive and encouraging?

4. On-Going Concern and Efforts.

4.1. Assuming all these preparations and considerations are attended to, what efforts will be made to ensure on-going guarantees that the mainstream placement will be appropriate and beneficial? I have grave fears that the educational planning for mainstreaming will stop after the placement decision, when, in fact that is when the real action begins. While I respect the professional autonomy of teachers, I fear that if there is insufficient follow-up support, guidance and concern, for the handicapped child, the mainstream placement may well become the MOST restrictive alternative. Believing in the value of an educational development does not, ipso facto, guarantee its efficacy or its benefit.

5. Conclusion.

Lest it be thought that I am trying to raise these thorny questions to discourage the practice of providing more normal educational experiences for handicapped children, let me say that the intent of my queries is to challenge those responsible to ensure that mainstreaming policies and procedures are: –

- (a) planned thoroughly at the systemic level;
- (b) introduced gradually and carefully;
- (c) characterised by a qualitative concern for the human side of the process in which key persons are invited, encouraged and prepared to participate;
- (d) given a chance of success by the provision of adequate training, support and resources, and;
- (e) undertaken with a view to continuing evaluation and support.

To do any less is a dereliction of our duties as professionals concerned for the welfare of all children.

JEFF BAILEY
Editor

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Day 3. Personal Adjustment Training

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PROF. DONN BROLIN: Visiting U.S. Lecturer, College of Education
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