MAINSTREAMING -
A Positive Means to a Positive End

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The passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) has caused a major transition in special education programs nationwide. Regular classrooms in public schools are also changing so that they can meet the needs of children formerly enrolled in self-contained special classes, as well as the needs of the "normal" child.

The legislation has caused much concern and consternation among special educators and general educators because of uncertainties in implementing the law. Many general educators are worried that the implementation of the law will infringe on the education of the "normal" students enrolled in regular classrooms. I hope to illustrate in this essay that the Education for All Handicapped Children Act is a positive means to a positive end for all children, whether they are handicapped or non-handicapped.
On November 29, 1975, President Ford signed into law the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142). The theory of the "least restrictive environment" has become law, and each school system throughout the nation must implement the law so that the theory becomes the reality of a free and appropriate education for all children.

Donald L. Macmillan (1977, p. 1) outlines the basic rights established by PL 94-142 as follows:

1. The right to due process, which protects the individual from erroneous classification, capricious labeling, and denial of equal education

2. Protection against discriminatory testing in diagnosis, which ensures against possible bias in intelligence tests used with ethnic minority children

3. Placement in an educational setting that is the least restrictive environment, which protects the individual from possible detrimental effects of segregated education for the handicapped

4. Individualized program plans, which ensures accountability by those responsible for the education of the handicapped

DEVELOPMENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act lays the foundation for progress in educating all children, and many forces and developments led to the legislation. Special education for the mentally retarded has been growing slowly and gradually over the last 200 years. Before the 17th Century people were aware of mentally retarded persons,
but did not treat or study them in any systematic fashion. It was not until after World War II that special education began to expand rapidly, and was supported nationally by all states and educational agencies. The major impetus for this support came from parents of retarded persons who felt that professionals in the field were not making progress with their children.

In 1950 parents from twenty groups that were working for progress in protecting the rights of the mentally retarded merged into the National Association of Parents and Friends of Retarded Children. The group later changed its name to the National Association for Retarded Citizens (NARC), and by 1974 membership was near 250,000 members, with approximately 60% of the members being parents. NARC is a nonpolitical group, however the organization has had considerable influence on legislation at various levels of government. The unified parents association lobbied at state and national levels for legislation to aid the mentally retarded. The organization also became a protector of the rights of mentally retarded citizens. (Macmillan, 1977)

In the 1960s, the concern shifted from issues of merely meeting the needs of the mentally retarded to issues of the quality of programs provided for the retarded. Until the late 1960s, all children with any type of learning label, whether they be severely retarded, or mildly retarded, were placed in special classrooms, away from the mainstream
of education. In the late 1960s, special educators began to question the value of special classes for those children labeled mildly mentally retarded. Much of the questioning of the value of self-contained special classes began with Lloyd Dunn's 1968 article, "Special Education for the Mildly Retarded - Is Much of it Justifiable?" Dunn pointed out that many of the students that were being labeled educable mentally retarded were in fact socioculturally deprived children with mild learning problems.

Around the time that Dunn's article was published, educators began to realize that once a child was put into a special education class, he usually stayed there. There was a reshuffling of goals, and special educators began to see the special classroom as a temporary placement, rather than a permanent withdrawal from the regular classroom for mildly mentally retarded children. (Thurman, 1980)

Litigation that has added momentum to integrating exceptional children back into regular classrooms has been related to minority testing and placement (e.g. Hobson vs. Hobson, 1967; Diana vs. State Board of Education, 1970); due process in selection and admission procedures (e.g. Mills vs. Board of Education, 1972); suspension and expulsion of exceptional children (e.g. Calloway vs. Briggs, 1971); and exceptional children's right to an appropriate education (e.g. Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children vs. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1971). (Clark, 1978)
By 1975, these were the findings of the U.S. Congress that led to the passage of the All Handicapped Childrens Act:

1) there are more than 8 million handicapped children in the United States today;

2) the special educational needs of such children are not being fully met;

3) more than half of the handicapped children in the United States do not receive appropriate educational services which would enable them to have full equality of opportunity;

4) one million of the handicapped children in the United States are excluded entirely from the public school system and will not go through the educational process with their peers;

5) there are many handicapped children throughout the United States participating in regular school programs whose handicaps prevent them from having a successful educational experience because their handicaps are undetected;

6) because of the lack of adequate services within the public school system, families are often forced to find services outside the public school system, often at great distance from their residence and at their own expense;

7) developments in the training of teachers and in diagnostic and instructional procedures and methods have advanced to the point that, given appropriate funding, State and local educational agencies can and will provide effective special education and related services to meet the needs of handicapped children;

8) State and local educational agencies have a responsibility to provide education for all handicapped children, but present financial resources are inadequate to meet the special education needs of handicapped children in order to assure equal protection of the law.

MAINSTREAMING

Public Law 94-142 and past court cases utilize the term "least restrictive environment" instead of "mainstreaming," probably feeling that it has a more explicit
meaning. The law makes it clear that in order to place an exceptional child in any alternative other than the regular class, evidence must show the placement is justified. (Macmillan and Semmel, 1977)

The law does not mandate that all handicapped children will be mainstreamed, but those who can function in a regular classroom will remain there, and may receive additional help (e.g. resource room, tutor, etc.) if necessary. Educators who feel a particular child can not function in the regular classroom must consult the parents and present evidence that the child is not in the environment that best suits his or her needs. Orville Clark (1978) re-defined the term "least restrictive environment" as the "most productive environment." Integration in itself is not the goal, but a means to an end, which hopefully will be the acquisition of life skills needed by handicapped children to live in a world populated by handicapped and non-handicapped people. (NARC 1978)

For many handicapped children, especially those who are mildly mentally handicapped, learning disabled, or emotionally disturbed, who were in special classrooms in 1975, the least restrictive environment was equated with mainstreaming.

Definition of Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming means many different things to many people, and definitions offered by educators range from very
general concepts to specific working definitions. Perhaps the most used definition of mainstreaming is that cited by Kaufman, Gottlieb, Agard, and Kukic (1975; pp. 40-41)

Mainstreaming refers to the temporal, instructional and social integration of eligible exceptional children with normal peers. It is based on an ongoing individually determined educational needs assessment, requiring clarification of responsibility for coordinated planning and programming by regular and special education administrative, instructional, and support personnel.

It is significant to note that there is a difference between the theory of mainstreaming, and its implementation. To believe that it is desirable to provide each student with a least restrictive environment is not enough. The belief must be implemented with administrative arrangements, instructional methods, adequate materials, and prepared teachers. If the present implementation of the theory should fail, the failure would not invalidate the theory itself, it would simply mean that another implementation of the theory is needed. (Macmillan, Jones, Meyers, 1976)

Cautions and Guidelines for Mainstreaming

In a recent publication, The National Association of Retarded Citizens stated positions concerning mainstreaming, and cautioned that mainstreaming must be implemented in carefully planned stages to be certain that the students are returned to regular classes with carefully planned goals and support systems. The school policy should encompass the following:
Ganelda Sowers illustrates a carefully organized plan for mainstreaming, and she reports that it is a successful plan. She states (Ibid, p. 1), "Mainstreaming and the program devised to implement it have been a benefit to all pupils."

**General Educators Response**

Mainstreaming has met a variety of responses. Many general educators oppose the concept because they feel that they and their students will be burdened by taking on exceptional students. The exceptional students would only be a burden if the mainstreaming effort was not carefully organized, and regular class teachers were not prepared.

There are some educators who believe that mainstreaming is nothing more than placing handicapped children in regular classes. They do not take into consideration the amount of careful programmatic planning necessary for a successful integration. Macmillan, Jones and Meyers (1976, p. 4) make an analogy between mainstreaming and racial desegregation:

When schools were racially desegregated, children of one ethnicity (usually minority children) were physically placed in a classroom (usually in a predominantly Caucasian school) with children of differing ethnicity. It was soon realized that racial desegregation and racial integration were separate processes. Similarly, to place EMR children in the regular class for a portion of the school day is one step, however, having them succeed socially and academically is another.
1) procedural guidelines and clear delineation of responsibilities;
2) inservice education for both regular and special class teachers;
3) careful orientation of students to avoid unnecessary sensitization to individual differences; and
4) involvement of parents in formulating education objectives, student evaluation and development of individual educational plans, and the employment of support personnel.

(NARC, 1978, p. 4)

After four years of experience with mainstreaming, Ganelda Sowers, principal of a school in North Carolina also stresses that mainstreaming requires much more than placement in a regular classroom. First of all, the effect on the child must be considered. The school administrator must then analyze the faculty in terms of the following:

- degree of acceptance of a concept by a teacher
- strengths of classroom teacher
- pupil population of classroom
- recommendations of resource team
- teaching styles
- personality of teacher and child

(Sowers, 1978, p. 6)

In addition, Sowers states mainstreaming requires:

- new perspectives and skills for the staff
- increased awareness and sensitivity on the part of each individual
- supportive resources for the classroom teacher
- in-service for teachers with emphasis on acquiring diagnostic and observational skills
- acceptance by the faculty
- understanding by resource teachers of their role
- acceptance of children with special needs by other pupils
- variety of instructional materials
- efficient methods in diagnosing and prescribing for individual pupils

(Ibid, P. 4)
Recall the Cautions and Guidelines section of this essay. Ganelda Sowers did not state that the mainstreaming program benefitted only the handicapped children, rather the program benefitted all the pupils involved. After reading the outline of her program, one would not be surprised that all children were aided. The staff is more highly skilled due to inservice and emphasis on acquiring better skills. Teachers are trained to accept each child and have the knowledge to deal with them as individuals. The emphasis of individualization provides each child in the program with an educational plan at his own level.

"No amount of systems development will preclude the presence of the teacher." (Gallagher, 1968, p.486) The teacher has an immeasurable influence on the success of mainstreaming. His or her attitudes will affect the students along with the skill he or she possesses. If a teacher does not support the program, and does not willingly accept a handicapped child into his or her class, her attitude will be evident in her actions. The handicapped student will feel he does not belong, and the other students will not accept him as readily. Regular class teachers will have to believe in the success of mainstreaming, and prepare themselves in terms of skills and attitudes before a mainstreaming program will be successful, and the individual child receives an appropriate education. (Macmillan, Jones and Meyers, 1976)
Research has shown that directive teaching practices, stemming from individualized instruction, are not only desirable, but superior methods of teaching because of individual differences in learning. (Thurman, p. 291)

This applies to all children, whether they are handicapped or non-handicapped. If mainstreaming programs are carefully planned, and part of that organization is to prepare regular teachers by providing them with more skills, then the teacher will most probably gain skills in individualizing programs in the inservice training. Along with the knowledge of how to accept and aid handicapped students in a regular class, educators will hopefully learn the skills to individualize the learning environment so that all children in the class are gaining from the program.

Other "burdens of mainstreaming" complained about by general educators are class size and inadequate teaching materials. Recall the Developments in Special Education section in this essay. Thirty years ago, parents and educators of exceptional children united into organizations that influenced state and national legislation on the issues general educators are again raising today. The parents organized because they felt their children were not receiving the best possible education, and their rights as citizens of the United States were being infringed upon. Even though parents and teachers within general education have had differences, perhaps there is a common interest
with the concept of mainstreaming.

If general educators could get to know the parents of the children in their community, perhaps they could influence the parents to organize and assist the educators in obtaining educational needs. Smaller classes, specialized facilities, specialized materials, and specialized training of educators are only some of the educational requests granted to exceptional children due to parent input at local, state and national levels. (Thurman, 1980) Such an organization would take a tremendous amount of planning and attention to public relations, but considering the benefits, such an organization could bring to all children, the efforts would be worthwhile.

Perhaps the greatest problem in the classroom today is disruptive behavior. Discipline is viewed as the single greatest problem in the classroom by some educators, and without discipline, teaching cannot take place. (Thurman, 1980)

Behavior problems have been and continue to be the major cause listed on special education referrals.

(Ibid, p. 291)

All teachers need behavior management skills, and if the mainstreaming process is carefully organized, general educators will be required to learn new skills. Behavior management skills should not be neglected, because improved classroom management is accompanied by improved learning on the part of the students.

If general educators could embrace the positive aspects of mainstreaming and use them to their advantage, rather
than persist with negativism, all children would benefit.

A POSITIVE MEANS TO A POSITIVE END

In this essay we have reviewed developments in special education which led to the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. The concept of the least restrictive environment was discussed, along with implementing that concept through mainstreaming. A definition of mainstreaming is supplied, along with cautions and guidelines with which to implement the concept. There have been varied responses to mainstreaming, and many general educators have voiced complaints that mainstreaming is a burden to the "normal" child. The contention of this author is that a good mainstreaming program can act as a catalyst in improving the educational environment for all children, due to an improvement in teacher skills and more individualized programs. The concept of mainstreaming, if accepted and implemented and carefully by all educators, could lead to a free and appropriate education for ALL children. If general educators could utilize the positive aspects of mainstreaming, and enlist parent support to improve problems of implementation, mainstreaming would truly be a positive means to a positive end.
Bibliography


