

## SIGNIFICANT TRENDS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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The Honorable Sidney Marland, U.S. Commissioner of Education, has set a goal of full educational opportunity for all handicapped children by 1980. While commitment to improving the education of the handicapped is not new, a major national resurgence in such commitment during the past five years, generated by the President's Committee on Mental Retardation, suggests that the goal may not be fantasy.

Formed by Executive Order in 1966, the Committee is composed of twenty-one citizens appointed for three-year terms and includes geneticists, educators, lawyers, and persons active in volunteer work. It is chaired by the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare and seats as ex-officio members, the Secretary of Labor, Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Attorney General, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and the Director of Action. Its functions are to (1) advise the President of the adequacy of the national effort to combat mental retardation; (2) coordinate activities of federal, state, local, and private agencies; and (3) inform the public and enlist support. It reports to the President annually on its activities. Based on the most recent report, MR73, the President issued Executive Order 11776, dated March 28, 1974, setting forth three specific national goals: (1) reduce the occurrence of mental retardation by one-half before the end of the century; (2) redeem to the community one-third of the persons now in public institutions; and (3) assure the retarded full status as citizens under the law. All of these goals are reflected in Hawaii's Comprehensive Plan for Special Education.

The formulation and support of national goals has served as a framework for more direct action at state and local levels. The most far-reaching and significant of these actions have occurred recently in the courts. The landmark case was *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1971) wherein parents of 14 retarded children brought suit because of the state's failure to provide all retarded children with a public supported education. Because of the constitutional

issues involved, a specially impaneled three-judge U.S. District Court tried the case. The issue was that state statutes had authorized the Department of Education to exclude from school "uneducable and untrainable" children below the mental age of five years. The persuasive arguments were that education cannot be narrowly defined as academic experience but must be seen as a continuous process through which individuals learn to cope with their environment; that systematic programs will always produce some learning in mentally retarded children and therefore no child is truly "uneducable and untrainable." The court held that (1) no child could be denied admission to public school without first being afforded notice and an opportunity to be heard; (2) the state was prohibited from applying any law that would postpone, terminate or in any way deny retarded individuals full access to a public supported education.

In a subsequent case, *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972), the constitutional right to public supported education was held to exist for all children regardless of handicapping condition.

The impact of *Mills* and *PARC* has extended far beyond their respective jurisdictions. To date there have been at least 44 class action suits pressed for the rights of the handicapped on five fronts. Twenty-one right-to-education suits have been brought in 13 states including Hawaii. Other areas are the right to treatment, classification/labelling, and wage and hour standards for working residents in institutions and residential zones.

Perhaps energized by both litigation and commitment, is the growing trend in both Hawaii and the nation to adopt a normalization model for dealing with the handicapped. The principle of normalization means making available to handicapped individuals patterns and conditions of everyday life which are as close as possible to the norms and patterns of society and the community. In terms of the delivery of special education services, this principle is reflected in two significant concepts: the zero reject model and mainstreaming.

Zero reject, first proposed by Lilly (1971), was conceptualized as a measure for insuring that a child once accepted in a public education program could not be denied educational opportunities because of his difficulty in learning. In effect, it shifted the responsibility for learning failure from the child to the teacher and the educational system. In the extreme interpretation zero reject could apply to all children regardless of the degree of their handicap. More realistically Lilly intended the concept to apply to less severely handicapped children—those who had at some time been accepted in a regular educational setting. Under this concept, it would be administratively impossible to remove such children from the regular classroom. A broader interpretation accepted in the Hawaii State Plan is that all children are entitled to and must be accepted into an appropriate educational program.

The broad zero reject model is implemented through Hawaii's adoption of the mainstream model for delivery of services. The concept of mainstreaming, based on the normalization principle, is to let the handicapped obtain an existence as close as possible to the mainstream of life. In terms of school placement, the effort should be to place handicapped children, regardless of category or degree of handicapping condition, in school settings that are as indistinguishable from the normal mainstream of education as the child's ability to adapt will permit.

Application of mainstreaming in Hawaii is predicted upon the availability of a continuum of educational placements and services. Emphasis is on maximizing integration and minimizing isolation. The range of placements include:

- a. Regular classroom with no *basic* change in teaching procedures.
- b. Consultation—regular classroom with specialist available for consultation with teacher (or parent) whenever needed.
- c. Consultation and Direct Services—regular classroom with specialists available in the school to consult with teacher and provide short-term direct services to student.
- d. Resource Room—regular classroom with special education services provided on a continuing basis for as much as two hours per day.
- e. Part-time Special Class—student enrolls in special class for the majority of each day, but enters the regular classroom for certain subjects.

- f. Full-time Special Class—students assigned to a self-contained special class on a full-time basis.

- g. Itinerant Services—special services brought to the student at his school, hospital, institution or home.

Under this model, the usefulness of remedial services and prosthetic devices is not questioned; indeed their use is encouraged. It is not appropriate, however, that children needing them be relegated to separate areas for special teaching, but rather that support be given within the regular classroom. The regular teacher should be competent in the special skills needed to accommodate the handicapped child who can adapt in the normal classroom setting.

The current trend in special education teaching and teacher training is toward competency-based teacher education and certification. Both the kinds of tasks and the quality of performance are changing to reflect the growing responsibility to provide appropriate education services for the handicapped. Pre-service training obligations no longer are restricted to prospective special educators but must provide the regular education major with the basic skills needed to deal with mildly handicapped children in the regular classroom. In-service training for the regular educator must promote knowledge of the skills and competencies needed to encourage and support the integration of mildly handicapped children into the mainstream of regular education. For special educators, the goal is to insure that they become fully qualified in the application of new knowledge and skills in special education. The increased demands for higher levels of competencies are generating pressures on special education majors to extend their training to 5th Year and Masters levels.

The special education program at the University of Hawaii has been designed in response to current trends. It changed first in the late 1960's from a traditional categorical program to its present innovative generic orientation which supports the belief that a common core of teaching competencies is appropriate for all learning handicaps. This approach has expanded to include a strong emphasis on the practical application so that students practice all course work in school settings. A further refinement currently in progress is the conversion to a performance-based model. Thus the special education student can learn, practice and assess his mastery of the competencies that define the special educator.