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ABSTRACT

The monograph discusses the establishment of a basic learning philosophy by staff involved in educating preschool physically handicapped children. Focused on as important topics to be considered in the formulation of a basic philosophy are communication systems and educational goals and procedures as they relate to all personnel involved. The establishment of sound educational teaching systems (procedures) is discussed within the context of learning theory. Hilgard (1956) is cited often relative to basic learning philosophy. Particular learning needs of the physically handicapped are pointed out. It is concluded that systems of communication, goal setting, teaching procedure, and specific characteristics of crippled children must be interwoven to design appropriate educational approaches. A chart is presented outlining a possible training approach for the education of teachers working with handicapped children. (KW)

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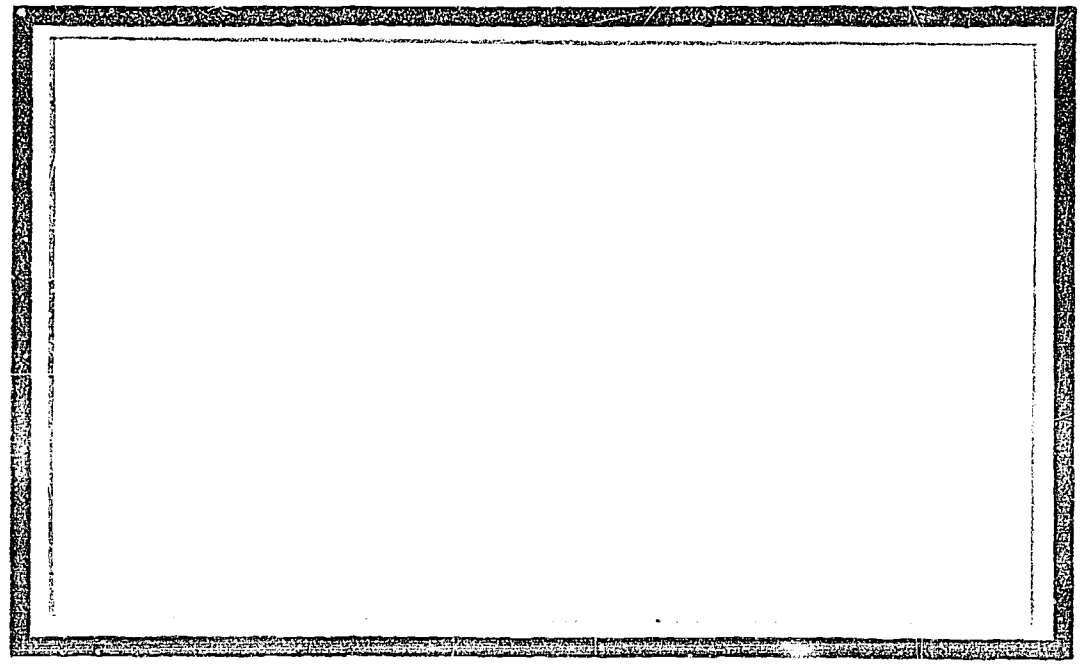
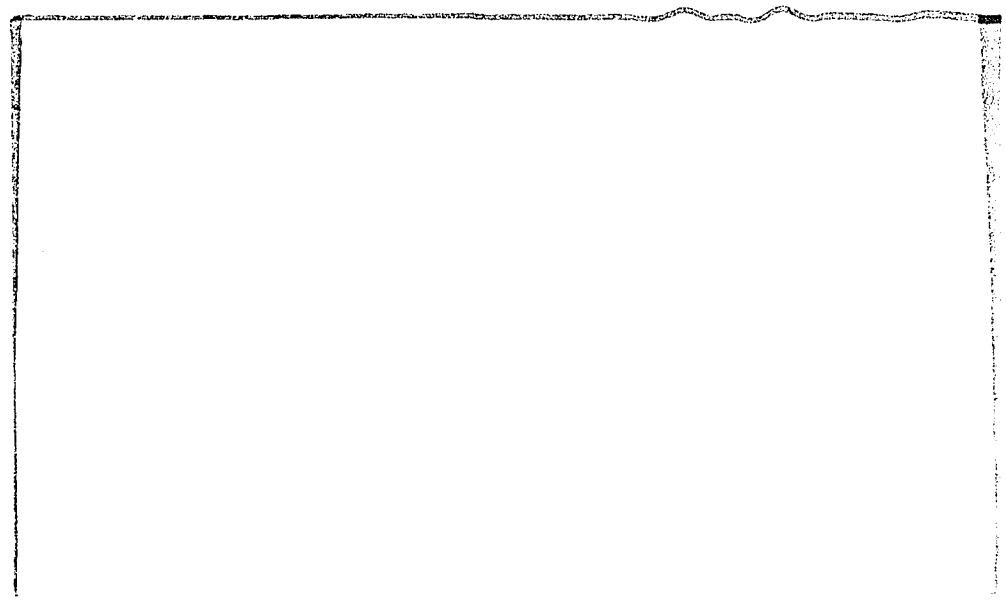
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

THE DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

STAFF TRAINING



A MONOGRAPH



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for Handicapped Children

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P R E S E N T S

THE DISTINGUISHED STAFF TRAINING MONOGRAPH SERIES

LEARNING SYSTEMS

FOR

PRESCHOOL PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN: A TRAINING PROGRAM

by

William A. Myers, Ed.D.

Vol. II No. 3

Assistant Professor - Staff Training Project

The project presented or reported herein was performed pursuant to a Grant from the U. S. Office of Education, and Welfare. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U. S. Office of Education, and no official endorsement by the U. S. Office of Education should be inferred

Introduction

Within the context of this monograph I will restrict the discussion of training procedures to those person's working with crippled and other health impaired problems; however, out of necessity, and due to the high incidence of secondary and erciary disabilities associated with crippled children, we must realize the need to maintain a divergent thought pattern to include multiply handicapping conditions. The process should constantly strive to recognize and work through the following four behavioral criteria associated with any child's physical and cognitive development: social maturity, emotional stability, physical development, and intellectual ability. At the same time, we must be aware in our thought process that it is essential to zero in on the identification of specific problems related to the education of, for example, the ataxic cerebral palsied. The problem solving phenomena there turns into both convergent and divergent thought processes in terms of identification and remediative techniques for educating crippled children.

The same analogy holds true for the development of staff training procedures designed to fit the needs of the crippled child. Early childhood education is faced with the problem of developing many kinds of approaches and solutions to training staff for various environs of handicapped children. The suggestions offered in this monograph will be limited in terms of convergence and divergence and are only offered as a jumping off place for opening new discussion and techniques of training a particular staff. The divergent trainer will be faced with creation or modification of procedures especially pertinent to the particular problems

he faced in terms of geographical location, types of personnel, operating expenses, etc. On the other hand, the models set forth in this monograph may also appeal to a limited number of center directors whose needs may be relatively homogeneous. At any rate, I believe, just as in the approach to the education of children, there is no all encompassing solution. As the extremes are developed, the reader will be faced with the challenge of building his area of compromise.

Question: Help--Where do I start?

Answer: A Philosophical Viewpoint

The age-old phenomena of establishing philosophy continues to permiate, with just cause, establishments in business and education. We must decide where we're going lest we become lost on the way. We cannot formulate objectives until we are firm in our convictions and belief about reality, practicality, learning, and children. How often do we stop and ask, "What is Education?"

I was recently on a committee to draw up a proposal for the establishment of a tuition-sponsored kindergarten program within the confines of a public school building. Parental pressures were great, administrators were pressing for answers to financial problems and teachers were questioning the feasibility of such a program at so late a date. The committee members had backgrounds founded in social work, education, administration, and motherhood--each having subconsciously developed his own philosophy of life. The first meeting had all the ingredients of a disaster until the question was posed, "Why are we here?" Through

the medium of language, personality, flexibility, and motivation the group resolved the issue with a philosophical stand which acted as an advanced organizer (a cognitive set) to proceed with the proposal. The school trustees passed the proposal unanimously with no problem. The secret to the committee's success was a time allowance for cognitive incubation. Each member was searching for a beginning. Each had time to think individually before a coordinated, collective pool could be formed.

Once the center has established a basic philosophical stand you'll feel a pleasurable voltage change in the staff. Now is the time to direct the electricity, keeping in mind, that people are different and house varying degrees of insulation and wattage capacity. Try not to blow a fuse.

A Learning System

A number of topics should be considered in the formulation of a basic philosophy by your staff. Two items seem especially important: communication systems and educational goals and procedures as they relate to all personnel associated with each handicapped youngster.

Effective communication systems are essential for individuals or groups to have an understanding of the role and function of other members in a school setting. Modes of messaging among and between the physician, physical therapist, occupational therapist, teacher, speech therapist, teacher aide, etc. are a necessity for providing a smooth meaningful and well-balanced educational program for the child. Let us not forget the parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and guardians, for

it is they, who have personally assumed the task of raising and caring for a loved one. Miscommunication among and between these human beings may break the electrical circuit causing a short that will pessimisticly affect the psych-educational growth of a child.

When considering a communication system, we need to include social, emotional, physical, and intellectual developmental levels of a particular child as observed by each person in the center. Questions on social functioning at the clinic, classroom, playground, home, and neighborhood must be considered both individually and collectively. The teacher must know how a child reacts emotionally to physical therapy so she can plan appropriately for re-entrance into the classroom in terms of emotional environment. She needs to know the home, social, and emotional actions and reactions for effective educational programming.

A number of forms of communication need to be conceptualized and discussed. As stated previously, no one system will work universally in each center. Three variant but workable modes will be discussed here.

The first is the typical staffing session attended by all professionals and paraprofessionals to discuss the progress of a given child. This method has been successfully used in many instances and has been advocated by numerous text authors on disabled children and adults; however, a few shortcomings are always present, such as time conflict between personnel schedules and even deciding on a captain of the team. Perhaps a particular group can function better without a specially established line administrative hierarchy.

A second mode of communication between professionals may be the development of a communication evaluation sheet onto which each person (teacher, therapist, etc.) contributes pertinent information on a weekly

basis relative to the procedures being used that week. This sheet may be circulated and erred upon by the persons involved with particular children. The value of this technique lies in the fact that the group is now able to supplement and augment each others efforts. In other words, if the speech therapist is working on frontal sounds, then the teacher should focus the language arts program toward similar sounds. If the physical therapist is concerned with particular range of motion therapeutic practices, then the recreation leader or teacher should gear physical education toward enhancing the same. This could be the true team spirit as advocated by Peter (1965).

The above methodologies suggest in-house communication systems are a necessity for securing a uniform approach to filling the needs of the child. At this point, we must also keep in mind the importance of establishing sound relations with extra-school personalities, namely the immediate family. Techniques for working with parents may range all the way from informal drop-in conferences at school or home to formalized group counseling sessions for the parents. Argument pro and con each technique can be discussed forever and will thus be omitted here. The important point is that sound relations with the parents of the crippled child can not be overemphasized.

Finally, a workable communication system between the preschool setting and formalized public or private elementary school is a must. Unless the child's growth and development, coupled with successful and unsuccessful teaching attempts, are transmitted to the next school, valuable time and efforts of the early childhood placement may go for

naught. The transition needs to be smooth and precise to insure performance planning and realistic goals for each youngster.

Educational goals and procedures can only be discussed within the context of learning theory; therefore, the next phase in the construction of a basic philosophy must be considered at length.

Basics to Teaching Procedure

Basic to effective educational planning is the establishment of sound educational teaching systems. Bigge (1964) has set forth a number of learning theories each with its inherent assets and liabilities. Regardless of the teacher's decision in which theory she is predisposed, the fact remains that educators must make a decision, which on occasion may change, as to which learning model to follow. At any rate Hilgard (1956) states,

> It turns out, however, that many of the quarrels of the theorists are intern l ones, not very important in relation to immediate practical problems; there are, in fact, a great many practically important experimental relationships upon which the theorists are in substantial agreement . . .
>
> Here are a few statements on which I would expect a majority of learning theorists to agree . . .
>
> 1. In deciding who would learn what, the capacities of the learner are very important. Brighter people can learn things less bright ones cannot learn; in general, older children can learn more readily than younger ones; the decline of ability with age, in the adult years, depends upon what it is that is being learned. (p. 485-486)

Crippled children, due to their multiplicity of physical conditions, will vary extensively in relative individual capacities to learn. Furthermore, it is important to consider the total environmental influences imposed on the child. Sub-cultures buried within the national culture will certainly influence the child's capacity within the context of

communication systems between peoples. The particular vocabulary used in the family of one child may have meaning only relative to that family's sub-culture while interpretation of the same data by another sub-culture family may impose different interpretations.

We must also keep in mind that our educational analysis of learning deficiencies is far from complete and sophisticated. This is easily understood when looking at the proposed structure of intellect by Guilford (Meyers and McIntyre, 1966). We are only beginning to scratch the surface in identifying the learning capacity of a given child.

A second statement by Hilgard (1956) says,

> "A motivated learner acquires what he learns more readily than one who is not motivated. The relevant motives include both general and specific ones, for example, desire to learn, need for achievement (general), desire for a certain reward or to avoid a threatened punishment (specific)."

Within the life space of the orthopedically handicapped child, this statement is simply saying motivation does in fact affect retention of the learner; however, in order to understand the motives of the child, the teacher is faced with the task of discovering what types of motivation, general or specific, intrinsic or extrinsic, each child responds to best. The motivation type, once identified, must be tempered by Hilgard's third statement,

> "Motivation that is too intense (especially pain, fear, anxiety) may be accompanied by distracting emotional states, so that excessive motivation may be less effective than moderate motivation for learning some kinds of tasks, especially those involving difficult discriminations." (p. 486)

It is my belief the teacher's judgment of motivation intensity is only as accurate as her ability to colate, perceive, and conceptualize hard and soft-signs of behavior. This phenomena is extremely difficult

to judge, especially when complicated by each child's different capacity to form discriminations. Our best judge of motivation intensity will be governed only by the teacher's ability to make accurate unbiased observations. These ideas should not be contrived to mean that teachers and other personnel should not experiment with individual youngsters. This is exactly how the creative teacher should pursue the best interest of the child. The age-old adage applies: nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have been discussed by many authors. Hilgard says that most learning theorists would agree "Learning under intrinsic motivation is preferable to learning under extrinsic motivation." (p. 486) The former is classified as an aroused state of affairs originating from within the individual while the latter is expressed as arousal imposed from without. An example of the first may be working because you enjoy working while the second would be working for a gold star.

Hilgard's next statements, "learning under the control of reward is usually preferable to learning under control of punishment. Correspondingly, learning motivated by success is preferable to learning motivated by failure . . . tolerance for failure is best taught through providing a backlog of success that compensates for experienced failure" (p. 486) are especially important when considering the self concept of the handicapped child; especially the mentally retarded orthopedically disabled. It is generally accepted that reinforced failure experiences will breed a pessimistic failure-oriented personality

which in turn becomes a waste to human culture and lacks a sense of self worth.

With the establishment of pre-school programs for handicapped children, educators now have an opportunity to provide and reinforce success experiences at a much lower age. Up until now, crippled children have had to wait six or seven years to get professional educational assistance at legal age entrance into special or regular school programs. By that time, many personality characteristics are well established and, in some cases, irrepairable damage has been done. Early childhood programs can now supply inner life jackets with which to face failures or misfortune.

Once again the challenge of teaching presents itself as we are faced with the responsibility of choosing projects that may or may not be success experiences. Probably the most crucial issue the teacher must face is at what level to reinforce the experience as being successful. I cannot overemphasize the importance of giving praise for only those tasks whereby in fact the child did do a good job. We must be careful not to give false praise and thus, false security.

The above statement leads to Hilgard's (1956) next observation,

> "Individuals need practice in setting realistic goals for themselves, goals neither so low as to elicit little effort nor so high as to foreordain to failure. Realistic goal-setting leads to more satisfactory improvement than unrealistic goal setting." (p. 486)

Persons of all ages need to learn to know their limitations. A blind cerebral palsied friend of mine was once asked to respond to this question, "When did you realize you were different from other children?" She replied, "When I asked my mother what was wrong with everyone else." Young children, as well as adults, must be realistic

when learning to make decisions and setting goals. The professionals responsibility lies in the task of setting realistic goals for himself as well as choosing appropriate tasks for children. For example, my blind crippled friend once had to make the decision of whether to be ambulatory or use a wheelchair. When weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each against the other, time and efficiency in performing certain tasks were heavily skewed in favor of wheelchair mobility.

Hilgard's (1956) next concern is that "the personal history of the individual, for example, his reaction to authority, may hamper or increase his ability to learn from a given teacher." (p. 486)

When the child reaches pre-school age, his experiences with adults have probably been limited. Any measure of authority can be taken only as it relates to the family structure of the culture from which the child comes. It may, therefore, be important to see whether the child is being raised by an authoritarian or democratic family. If the child functions well under democratic leadership, then he might profit best from a democratic teaching situation. Again, the value of establishing strong parental rapport can be seen in this approach.

"Active participation by a learner is preferable to passive reception when learning" (p. 486) has special applicability when considering pre-school age crippled children. Too frequently, excuses are given for not taking the child out into the neighborhood for active interaction with peers, neighbors, and public figures. Rather, due to ambulation emotional problems, we may find the child a passive receiver glued to a T.V. set. The professional's responsibility may be to get youngsters actively involved in projects or studies both within the

immediate classroom and out in the community. Teachers and other professionals must assume the responsibility of either bringing the child to the environment or the environment to the child as a child can be deprived regardless of socio-economic background. This can be accomplished through the use of field trips, resource people, and recreation programs. One philosophy believed in, and still practiced widely, is that of learning-by-doing as advocated by Dewey (1938). We must get the child actively involved socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically. Just because a child is in a wheelchair does not necessarily mean he can not participate in youth oriented games both indoors and outside.

Paralleling active participation is the necessity of using materials and presenting tasks that are meaningful to the child. Hilgard suggests "meaningful materials and meaningful tasks are learned more readily than nonsense materials and more readily than tasks not understood by the learner." (p. 486) The next logical question which arises becomes one of discovering what enfironmental lessons are, in fact, meaningful to the child. In effect we are trying to put outselves in his shoes. Since our life experiences may be entirely different from those of a physically handicapped child, we are faced with one of the most difficult tasks assigned to working with disabled children. We, thus, have two resources available; the child himself and research literature from child development. Accurate observation of the interaction between child and environment may give us cues to his interests. What are his needs in the home, school, and community? Developmentally, a host of information is available in relation to cognitive structure. For purposes of

this monograph it is inappropriate to present various theories and research findings. As an option it would be well to explore literat from Hoffman and Hoffman (1964), Thompson (1962), Cruickshank (1963) Kirk (1962), Dunn (1963), and Wright (1960).

So now you have discovered the child's interests but are faced with the question of how much repetition to give. Teacher judgment becomes crucial when considering Hilgard's (1956) next statement "There is no substitute for repetitive practice in the overlearning of skills...." (p. 487) Many students have grossly misinterpreted the concept of overlearning. They say, "I've studied too much and anymore will cause me to forget." What is really happening is that they becor physically tired and do not want to pursue their lessons. By contrast, overlearning is perfecting a skill at a consistent level of perfection. The creative educator must develop many approaches for teaching the same concept. This, of course, is one of the challenges of the profession.

Transfer of training is the ultimate payoff for the youngster. When he can grasp a concept and apply that knowledge to a new situation, we say transfer has occurred. Gagne (1965) reports there are two types of transfer; horizontal and vertical. Horizontal refers to using information in a new situation of the same difficulty level while vertical refers to using previous knowledge to attack a more difficult problem. An example of vertical transfer is learning to add, subtract, and multiply before dividing. Hilgard (1956) suggests "transfer to new tasks will be better if, in learning, the learner can discover relationships for himself, and if he has experience during learning of applying

the principles within a variety of tasks." (p. 487) When considering multiply handicapped (crippled-retarded), however, I believe the teacher or therapist may have to show the child the relationship between two events. Again, understanding causation is also a function of cognitive development; especially when considering conservation and reversibility. (Hoffman and Hoffman, 1964)

The rationale behind the foregoing statements relative to basic learning philosophy is considered on the assumption that most crippled children are more normal than non-normal. They do, in fact, possess the same needs as all children; however many, due to secondary disabling conditions may possess additional learning needs.

Learning Particular to the Physically Handicapped

Consider the overprotected child or the ashamed parent who may have sheltered the crippled child from what would otherwise be termed ordinary experiences. If, in fact, this occurs it is entirely possible the youngster may have missed the scope of experiences gained by the non-disabled child. When this is postulated, and we consider cognitive developmental periods as advocated by Piaget (1954) and Bruner et al. (1956) the logical possibility for having specific learning problems is reinforced. If this is the case, the teacher should explore the contents of each developmental period and supplement the individuals curriculum content at the theorized level of deficiency. These general deficiencies may be coined by the term "developmental lag."

Cruikshank (1963) has taken detailed accounts of research in the area of psychological considerations when working with crippled children.

Extensive research summarizations were reported relative to body image, emotional and social adjustment, attitude of the child to the culture, attitudes toward the child, intelligence, and perception. While this author appreciates the need to become familiar with this literature, an entire monograph could be devoted to it. Specifically, in addition to the many environmental influences on the development of a crippled pre-schooler, I would like to devote some space to some possible learning characteristics that may be common to this population.

Since many crippled children, namely the cerebral palsied, are brain injured, they may demonstrate the characteristics of the Strauss syndrome (Dunn, 1963). These youngsters may be easily distractible and they cannot shut out extraneous stimuli. They may have dissociation problems whereby they see parts of a whole rather than a totality. Figure-ground disturbances may be prevalent. Cruickshank, Bice and Wallen (1957) suggest visual-motor perceptual deviancies are present to a greater degree in crippled children when compared to non-handicapped populations. In addition, Dolphin and Cruickshank (1952) reported that physically normal children produced a significantly larger number of figure drawings while cerebral palsied children produced more background drawings. Their study of tactile-motor perception was comparable to the findings of their figure-background experiment. Additional studies on auditory and kinesthetic perception need to be conducted.

Conner, in Cruickshank and Johnson (1958) has expressed the need to include evaluation of the pre-school child with cerebral palsy as discussed by Fouracre et al. (1952)

Conner (Cruickshank and Johnson, 1958) stresses the need for providing first-hand experiences in the curriculum. Yum (1955) has described

nursery school experiences for crippled children as directed in a Chicago hospital. Connor goes on to discuss the implications of communication systems for the child with a motor handicap. Further, he discusses preschool personal development, physical development, emotional-social development, and intellectual development in crippled children.

Summary

Learning systems should assume a high priority rating when considering the education of physically handicapped children. Those individual segments of the global learning process are relatively easy to understand within the framework of one's personal experiences; however, each part will influence a particular child to a different degree. For one child, motivation may be the prime consideration for teaching approaches, while for another youngster, reinforcement schedules are the predominant issue. The creative teacher will consider each of the points presented here as it relates to the others for each preschooler she works with.

I believe it should also be mentioned that the above agreements on learning should be considered by all personnel, not just teachers. Each segment can be plugged in by the therapist, aide or administrator. It is important to understand these basics before delving into specific learning problems briefly mentioned as peculiar to this population.

The goals for physically handicapped children are basically the same we hold for all children. The procedures for reaching these goals vary from child to child but are yet permiated by certain agreements among and between learning theorists.

A learning system will be governed by a basic philosophy of education. In addition, it should be flexible enough to change a teacher's direction and thought pattern when considering individual differences in children. Systems of communication, goal setting, teaching procedure and specific characteristics of crippled children must be interwoven to design educational approaches appropriate of each child. A professional ability to integrate background information with creative teaching approaches will determine, to a great extent, the outcome in a learner. All educational variables must be considered before designing your teaching approach. Learning is just one variable when considering complex human behavior. Let us not forget, as an environmentalist might say, children are our most important natural resource.

A Professional Training Approach

The following chart outlines a possible training approach for the education of professionals working with handicapped children. This particular model was prepared specifically as a suggestion for teacher preparation; but, it may be applicable to other professionals as well. Portions of the procedure may be extracted and changed to fit the needs of various levels of professional and para-professional personnel. The procedure was suggested by this author two years ago as a portion of a report to Washington and should serve only as a jumping-off place for modification to fit specific personnel needs.

Basic Liberal Arts Background

Preparation in General Professional

Education e.g.
- Sociological
- Psychological
- Physiological
- Philosophical
- Emotional

Human Development & Learning

School Programs → Methodologies

Integration
Differentiation

Preparation in Special Education; specialized Professional Preparation: Integrated common sore of knowledge related to individual differences in: human learning, child development, language development, sensory stimulation and Perception, psycho-educational procedures and remediation beginning with pre-school and extending through independent living.

Volunteer Experiences i.e. Teacher Aides

Volunteer Experiences i.e. Teacher Aides

PRACTICUM EXPERIENCES

1. Regular Education as student teachers
2. Special education as student teacher with children who have various types and degrees of impairments

Continuing or re-education after one year teaching experience

Competent Teacher

PROCESS

1. Liberal Arts Background: Consists primarily of liberal arts course work aimed at establishing a firm background in knowledge and study skill.

2. Preparation in General Professional Education: Consists of a general background of knowledge related to human development and learning coupled with subject matter and teaching methodologies. The focus should be on the establishment of a philosophy of education and a developmental understanding of the school as a social and learning cultural unit. The background for this is secured by grasping professional course work paired concomitantly with practical work experiences in regular public school programs.

3. Preparation in Special Education (specialized): The process involves a higher level in-depth Special Education course of study conducted by means of specialized courses utilizing specific seminar and discussion groups.

Courses in General Professional Education are prerequisite and in some cases run concomitantly with the specialized preparation. This procedure endeavors to make the total experience both theoretical and pragmatic. The specialized program also alludes to establishing the mutual criteria of the integrations and differenciations between the regular and special school child and respective school programs.

4. Practicum Experiences: Upon completion of the above course work and accompanying pragmatic experiences, the student enters into a concentrated time allotment of student teaching in the areas of regular education and/or special education classes. (Paralleling the practicum experience, the

student is guided by supervisors through utilization of video tape playback and self-evaluation.) These are paired with theoretical and pragmatic centered discussion seminars to give a totally meaningful experience.

5. Continuing and/or Re-education: This process may be completed by either of two formulas and employs a high level in-depth study of the education process: a) Seminar courses concentrated as a one time-period block (one semester) or b) seminars conducted in the public schools and supervised by higher education instructors concomitantly with the second year teaching experience.

6. Competent Teacher: Upon completion of the first five phases, the student is issued a professional teaching certificate.

This is just one possible training approach that must be modified to meet varying staff personnel needs.

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PUBLICATIONS:

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