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ABSTRACT

A national survey was conducted to determine the presence of barriers to placing preschool children with disabilities in normalized education environments. The survey inquired about education policy as well as attitudes, curricula, and methods. Surveys were sent to 278 educators, administrators, and parents, with a 53 percent response rate. Respondents ranked eight areas as possible disincentives to placing children with disabilities in normalized settings, with the following results: personnel training and standards was highest as a disincentive, with values and attitudes and fiscal/contracting policies also ranking high. Responses on this issue varied considerably by subgroup. For example, all parents and all directors of Head Start Technical Assistance programs felt that attitudes were a barrier, but over half the child care directors, Head Start directors, and state directors of special education felt that attitudes were not a barrier. Attitudes were categorized as follows: turf issues; teacher preparedness; awareness; the feeling that either the nondisabled or disabled child will receive a lower quality education ("someone will lose"); and the issue of communication, collaboration, and respect. Strategies for solving these barrier problems are presented. An appendix lists seven organizational resources for information on early childhood policies and programs. (Contains 14 references.) (JDD)

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POLICY AND PRACTICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERIES

ATTITUDE BARRIERS AND STRATEGIES FOR PRESCHOOL MAINSTREAMING

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ATTITUDE BARRIERS AND STRATEGIES FOR PRESCHOOL MAINSTREAMING

Deborah F. Rose and Barbara J. Smith

> "Imagine for a moment that you have a child who today is happy, healthy, attending his or her local school, and progressing normally. Reflect for a moment on where you would want the child to go to school should he or she be in a car accident and become unable to walk without assistance and unable to learn as quickly."
> (Forest, 1992)

Research efforts have documented the existence of attitudes and values that impact on placing children in normalized educational environments (Bailey & Winton, 1987; Gallagher, 1992; Miller, Strain, Boyd, Hunsicker, McKinley, Wu, 1992; Odom & McEvoy, 1990; Rees, Spreen, & Harnadek, 1991; Smith & Rose, 1991; Stainback & Stainback, 1989; Wolery, Huffman, Brookfield, Schroeder, Venn, Holcombe-Ligon, Fleming, Martin, in preparation; Wolery, Huffman, Holcombe-Ligon, Martin, Brookfield, Schroeder, Venn, in preparation). Public school placement teams decide where a child should receive her or his special education and related services. These teams consist of school administrators, teachers, parents, related service personnel or whomever is appropriate for an individual child. Each of these key players brings with them a set of beliefs about where children with disabilities are best educated, the role of the family in the child's early education, and the quality of community-based programs.

The regulations that govern the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require that placement teams determine the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in which individual children will learn (34 CFR § 300.550). That is, these teams must determine: 1) the "regular educational environment" where the child would be educated were she or he not identified and labelled as eligible for special education

and related services and 2) whether the special education and related services can be appropriately delivered in that setting. Additionally, the team is required to ensure that educating children in settings other than the "regular educational environment" occurs only when "the nature and severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aides and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily" (34 CFR § 300.550). School districts have exercised a variety of options in order to meet the LRE requirements of the IDEA. School districts that operate preschool programs for typically developing children have integrated children with disabilities into their public school classrooms. Districts that do not offer preschool services to typically developing children have collaborated with community-based preschool and child care programs in order to deliver special education and related services in normalized preschool environments (Smith & Rose, 1991). However, many districts are encountering policy and attitudinal barriers to placing preschool children with disabilities in community programs.

Are Attitudes a Problem?

A national survey was conducted to determine the presence of barriers to placing preschool children with disabilities in normalized education environments. The survey inquired about education policy as well as attitudes and curricula and methods. Surveys were sent to all state education agency (SEA) preschool coordinators; state special education directors; interagency coordinating councils with a birth-five focus; Head Start Resource Access Programs; and a sample of parents, child care and Head Start programs, federal officials and local education agency (LEA) directors of special

education in 10 states. There were a total of 278 surveys sent with a return rate of 53%.

Survey respondents were asked if the following areas were serving as disincentives to placing children with disabilities in normalized settings for their special education and related services: a) public school accountability for program standards and supervision; b) fiscal and contracting procedures; c) transportation policies; d) use of private or non-public school agencies; e) conflicting policies (eligibility, due process, etc.); f) personnel policies; g) curricula or methods requirements; h) values or attitudes.

Table 1 reflects the overall rating of each of the eight survey areas in descending order of frequency.

TABLE 1

Rank Order of Preschool Mainstreaming Barriers

59.1%	Personnel Training and Standards
57.9%	Values and Attitudes
46.5%	Fiscal/Contracting Policies
33.1%	Program Quality Policies
33.1%	Private or Non-public School Agency Policies
27.7%	Transportation Policies
27.6%	Conflicting Policies
26.6%	Curricula/Methods Requirements

The attitude question specifically asked, "Are there values or attitudes that serve as a disincentive or prohibition to placing and serving preschool children with handicaps

in mainstream settings?" As shown in Table 1, over fifty seven percent (57.9%) of the survey respondents cited attitudes as a barrier to preschool mainstreaming - second only to policies related to personnel requirements.

Table 2 reflects the percentage of respondents, by group, who identified attitudes as serving as a barrier to preschool mainstreaming efforts.

TABLE 2

Percentage of Respondents Who Identified Attitudes as a Barrier to Preschool Mainstreaming

SURVEY GROUP	NO	YES
Child Care Directors	71.43%	28.57%
Head Start Directors	68.75%	31.25%
State Directors of Special Education	54.29%	45.71%
Local Directors of Special Education	35.00%	65.00%
Interagency Coordinating Councils (B-5 focus	33.33%	66.67%
Preschool Coordinators	33.33%	66.67%
Parents	0.00%	100.00%
Resource Access Programs (Head Start Technical Assistance)	0.00%	100.00%
Federal Official	0.00%	100.00%

What Are the Attitude Barriers and Strategies?

The types of attitudes reported on the survey were categorized as follows: a) turf, b) teacher preparedness, c) awareness, d) "someone will lose", e) communication

/collaboration/respect. While some survey respondents did not report attitudes as barriers to preschool mainstreaming, others indicated the presence of multiple attitude barriers. Table 3 reflects the percentages of responses for each attitude category.

TABLE 3

Percent Responses by Attitude Category

ATTITUDE CATEGORY	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
Turf	27	29%
Teacher Preparedness	26	28%
Awareness	20	21.5%
Communication/ Collaboration/ Respect	14	15.1%
"Someone Will Lose"	6	6.5%

Although numerous attitude barriers were cited, few solutions to those barriers were offered by the survey respondents. The strategies discussed below represent options suggested by survey respondents or case study subjects and expert consultants to the project.

TURF ISSUES

TURF BARRIERS

History and tradition are the things of which turf issues are made. The pride that the special education community feels related to the provision of services to children with disabilities was evident in the survey responses to the attitude question. Survey respondents reported that many special educators are "holding on to the

segregated systems of educating children" due to these turf issues.

The location of the preschool program (center-based vs. community-based) was another concern expressed by survey respondents. As more children with disabilities are placed in community-based preschools that are not under the direct purview of the public school system, special educators report concern about how "their" children are being educated. Special educators feel they have been trained specifically to provide "the best" education experiences for children with disabilities. Survey respondents reported a loss of control over the very methods, techniques and curricula that they were taught would be most effective when educating children with disabilities. Concern about the receptivity of community-based programs to technical assistance from special educators was also expressed. With the changing role of special education in some states it is not surprising that turf issues are being recognized as barriers to mainstreaming. Concerns about job security were also expressed by survey respondents.

Some survey respondents reported that they believe that more intensive services can be provided to children and families if the public and private education systems are kept separate.

TURF STRATEGIES

Placement teams should have representation from parents and community providers. Encouraging an airing of the values that are brought to the table by each team member should afford the best opportunity to discuss turf barriers. Frequent, structured, on-going discussions will allow a sharing of team member's expertise and

the opportunity to become familiar with one another. The school and the team should establish a vision statement about preschool mainstreaming. If the public school administrator does not consider facilitating group discussions to be a personal strength, someone who has expertise could be solicited to this end. Perhaps there is a nearby university or human service provider that could be accessed.

Some of the strategies listed below in other categories will also help to address turf issues.

TEACHER PREPAREDNESS ISSUES

TEACHER PREPAREDNESS BARRIERS

Often public school personnel have different teacher certification requirements than do Head Start or community-based preschool teachers. This difference in personnel requirements has contributed to public school personnel harboring some doubts about the expertise of community-based and Head Start teachers. Survey respondents reported concern about having children with disabilities placed in community-based preschool settings due to a lack of resources and support personnel available. It was reported that some parents may be reluctant to have their child placed outside of the public school system due to a lack of teacher training related to the needs of children with disabilities.

Community-based providers expressed concerns about their own abilities to educate children with disabilities, particularly children with severe disabilities or medically fragile children. Secondly, child care teachers reported that special educators lack basic child development knowledge that child care teachers believe

they have.

Survey respondents reported that the curricula of some pre-K and kindergarten programs have an academic focus. This academic orientation can appear to preclude the placement of children with disabilities in those classrooms.

TEACHER PREPAREDNESS STRATEGIES

Improved communication and training between and among the various service systems may affect change. Historically, regular education teachers have been prepared for the inclusion of children with disabilities by being provided with information about the disability characteristics and legal requirements (Ayers, & Meyer, 1992). This type of preservice training does nothing to provide the teacher with the tools needed to effectively teach children who do not learn typically. Most regular education teachers have been informally adapting curricula and methods to fit the individual learning needs of typical children. Community service providers need to be provided with the best information and technologies related to the learning needs of children who do not learn typically. They also should have available to them on-going consultation from special education personnel.

Special education has excelled at individualizing education for children with diverse learning needs. Additionally, special education has long recognized the role of the child as a social being - a precursor to productive adult social interactions (Ayers and Meyer, 1992). Early childhood special education has a "family focus" that can be shared as well - while the "regular" early childhood field has a strong background in child development to share.

Joint training can be used as a means of sharing each program's expertise. If the attitude barriers truly lay with different preservice training requirements, then providing the community-based program with the expertise of the special education personnel should decrease the teacher preparedness barriers. Providing the special education personnel with training conducted by community-based personnel will allow the community-based personnel to feel more valued as well as offering the special education personnel the opportunity to gain some of the child development expertise of the community-based providers.

Including the parents who wish to participate in the training will afford them the opportunity to see the public and private systems work cooperatively and to share their expertise. Providing an opportunity for parents to not only participate in the training, but to provide training to the team on their areas of expertise, can increase the parents' stake in the process.

AWARENESS ISSUES

AWARENESS BARRIERS

Survey respondents reported that more information sharing is needed at all levels with respect to children with disabilities. A lack of understanding was reported related to specific disabilities, medical needs, early childhood programming and services, curricula and methods, integration efforts, etc. These issues were reported by all of the survey groups except parents. The parents of typically developing children were not surveyed, but respondents reported that the parents, in general, appear to be uninformed about the research findings related to the benefits of

integration for all children.

AWARENESS STRATEGIES

There are a number of systems already in place for the information sharing activities that appear to be needed. Some states have their own technical assistance systems, while the federal government funds Regional Resource Centers and the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (see Appendix A). These technical assistance networks have access to current research findings related to integration. Part of the mission of each of these technical assistance networks is to provide awareness materials.

Visiting model programs that are already integrating children with disabilities provides teachers and parents with the opportunity to talk with their counterparts. It may be that by seeing a high quality integrated preschool program in action, a great number of fears will dissipate. Arrange a round table discussion for all participants to discuss the successes and challenges of their program. Talk openly about the difficulties encountered when the program began and the ways that the host program handled the challenges, the training needs, fiscal concerns, etc. The host program has the unique perspective of having lived through the challenges and successes of integration and should prove to be a useful resource.

COMMUNICATION/COLLABORATION/RESPECT ISSUES

COMMUNICATION/COLLABORATION/RESPECT BARRIERS

Parents reported that the people making decisions about their children do not really know the issues because they do not have children with disabilities themselves.

Public school personnel feel that community providers are not receptive to technical assistance from the special education community.

Communication, collaboration and respect have been combined here because the attitude barriers related to these issues all seem to stem from the same source - misinformation about other people and programs. This lack of information sharing has been reported to occur at all levels (local, state, and federal). It is difficult to have respect for a program about which little is known and where no relationship with the providers exists.

"Public school officials at the [sic] state and local level do not make information available about preschool mainstreaming", was the response from one survey respondent. Similarly, it was reported that information about specific programs such as Head Start or child care programs was not being effectively communicated.

COMMUNICATION/COLLABORATION/RESPECT STRATEGIES

In the words of one survey respondent, "Special educators who begin collaborating with "regular" Early Childhood teachers often talk about unexpected learning they experience -- learning about typical behavior and developmentally appropriate approaches. The unanticipated "lesson" is that children with special needs are children first and values begin to shift." Administrators must make a commitment to providing teachers and related service personnel with the necessary time away from their classrooms in order to collaborate effectively with their counterparts. Providing common planning time during the school day will allow personnel to access one another (Ayers & Meyer, 1992).

As the literature on transdisciplinary teaming suggests, to collaborate effectively requires an amount of "role release" or skill trading among participants (McCullom & Hughes, 1988). When collaboration is truly encouraged, participants can freely share their knowledge with others knowing that, in return, they will gain knowledge from the other participants.

Some state department's of education have demonstrated a commitment to collaboration by defining their statewide integration philosophy and encouraging each local school district to adopt the state's philosophy. The New Mexico State Department of Education has issued a "full inclusion" statement which outlines their rationale and expressed commitment to the advancement of inclusionary schools.

"SOMEONE WILL LOSE" ISSUES

"SOMEONE WILL LOSE" BARRIERS

Respondents expressed concern for the early educational experiences of both children with disabilities as well as typically developing children in integrated placements. Some respondents reported that parents of both typically developing children and children with disabilities were concerned that integration could have a negative impact on the services their children receive.

Attitudes Related to Typically Developing Children: For typically developing children in integrated preschool placements, the concern was that they would not receive a quality preschool experience because the children with disabilities would require an inordinate amount of time and attention from the classroom teacher. Fear that the child with a disability will be too disruptive to the classroom and would pull resources

from the typically developing children was also expressed.

Attitudes Related to Children with Disabilities: Many survey respondents reported that public school personnel are reluctant to take advantage of community-based preschool placements because they fear a loss of control over the child's education - a revisiting of the turf issues discussed earlier. Specifically, the public school special education personnel are concerned that they will not be able to adequately supervise the child's IEP. Survey respondents reported that parents and public school personnel are reluctant to have children placed in regular education classrooms because they fear that their child will not receive the specialized instruction or intensity of services that may be provided in specialized settings. Resistance to community-based preschool programs was expressed by one respondent as follows, "public school programs are 'better' with certified teachers and greater resources". One survey respondent reported that "it is still a common belief among parents and educators that students with disabilities will be 'happier' and get better 'special' services in traditional special education settings".

"SOMEONE WILL LOSE" STRATEGIES

Integration can only be considered to be successful if it is done in a thoughtful way with careful consideration to all of the supports that will ensure success. Indeed, the law requires that the necessary services and supports be provided (34 CFR § 300.550). Community-based teachers who feel that they lack the expertise and training to effectively teach children with disabilities must be provided with the necessary training and afforded the opportunity for frequent meetings with team

members including special education personnel. Both community-based teachers and special education personnel could benefit from visiting model preschool mainstream sites where they could see that all children benefit from being together.

Parents of children with disabilities as well as parents of typically developing children who are reluctant to have their children participate in integrated programs must be respected. Perhaps they would feel differently if they were made aware of the benefits associated with mainstreaming. They should be provided with the wealth of current research findings that report positive outcomes related to mainstreaming preschoolers.

CONCLUSION

Public school placement team members hold opinions related to the children with which they work, the parents of those children, and community-based service providers. Each of them also has their own definition of, and attitude about, the philosophy of inclusion or mainstreaming. Exploring these attitudes as a group that includes the community service provider and parents will likely result in more appropriate individualized placement decisions for the children and families they serve.

Both regular and special education personnel need to be prepared through preservice and inservice training to become a part of a new school community, a community that recognizes that all children learn, all children contribute, and all children belong. Children with disabilities in mainstream settings must receive at least what they were receiving in specialized settings. Mainstreaming is meant to enhance

the child's education through the provision of a normalized social context for learning.

Staff development activities can be employed in the hopes that changes will occur in teacher's attitudes, classroom practices, and student outcomes (Guskey, 1986). Guskey believes that there is a temporal sequence to these events. Staff development activities lead to changes in teacher's classroom practices through providing specific tools for the teacher's use. The new learning on the teacher's part can lead to changes in student outcomes. Improved student outcomes should lead to changes in the teacher's beliefs and attitudes.

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APPENDIX A

Resources for Information on Early Childhood Policies and Programs

Council for Administrators in Special Education (CASE)
of the Council for Exceptional Children
615 16th Street, NW
Albuquerque, NM 87104
(505) 243-7622

The Division for Early Childhood (DEC)
of the Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091
(703) 620-3660

National Head Start Resource Access Program
Administration for Children, Youth and Families
Office of Human Development Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
P.O. Box 1182
Washington, DC 20013
(202) 245-0562

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
1834 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20009-5786
(800) 424-2460

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320
King Street Station 1
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 519-3800

National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (NEC-TAS)
Suite 500
NCNB Plaza
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
(919) 962-2001

U.S. Office of Special Education Programs
Early Childhood Branch
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20202
(202) 732-1084