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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes recommendations for the training of teachers for the 21st century based on a Newton (Iowa) project to improve and broaden the skills of secondary education teachers for working with special needs students in regular classrooms. The paper calls for a practical and positive approach to defining disabilities, to summing up the rationale and the laws governing delivery of the services, and to presenting effective instructional strategies. Teacher training, it argues, must commence with the capturing of the students' attention by involving them in how it feels to be handicapped. This should be followed by the presentation of a practical text that can serve as a guide not only during preparation but also on into the actual teaching career. Simultaneously students must get into quality classrooms for observations and hands-on experience, and they must thoroughly research current issues. Finally, the paper suggests, technology will play a key role in quality college training to produce confident and competent teachers who will be part of the effort resulting in a minimum of discipline problems in the classroom and the education of all students to their maximum potential. (Contains 16 references.) (JB)

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Shaping Secondary Teacher Training for the 21st Century: A practical approach to promoting success with at-risk students and with mildly disabled special education students in the regular classroom.

Paper presented at the annual international meeting of the
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University administrators and teachers face many challenges in developing education programs for preparing college students to become effective secondary-level regular classroom teachers. Among the challenges is the provision of adequate training of teachers to work with mainstreamed exceptional students. In the 21st century special students will continue to be entitled to an appropriate education in regular classrooms, the least restrictive environment, as long as special needs can be met in that setting without neglect or interference with the needs of the rest of the student body. This paper proposes recommendations for the training of teachers for the 21st century. It calls for a practical and positive approach to defining disabilities, to summing up the rationale and the laws governing delivery of the services, and to presenting effective instructional strategies. Teacher training must commence with the capturing of the students' attention by involving them in how it feels to be handicapped. This should be followed by the presentation of a practical text that can serve as a guide not only during preparation but also on into the actual teaching career. Simultaneously students must get into quality classrooms for observations and hands-on experience, and they must thoroughly research current issues. Finally, technology will play a key role in quality college training, in order to produce confident and competent teachers who will be part of a team effort resulting in a minimum of discipline problems in the classroom and the education of all students to their maximum potential.

Tell me and I will forget. Teach me and I will remember. Involve me and I will learn.

This statement is the philosopy behind a project recently undertaken by the community school district in Newton, Iowa. The project included a hands-on simulation that would make an excellent introduction to a college course in exceptionality. The Board of Education agreed to allow time and funds for the faculty at the senior high school to meet in groups to examine strengths and weaknesses in our system, to prioritize problems, and then to jointly plan and implement any necessary improvements and changes. One of the resultant improvement goals included sessions for regular teachers to broaden skills needed for working with special needs students in regular classrooms.

Members of the high school special education department got together and planned the sessions. The regular staff was advised that they were about to experience what it is like to be a learning disabled student in a regular classroom. Imagine their reaction to the opening remarks: "If you do not want to participate or prefer to sit this out; if you do not want to be called upon, don't want to be embarrassed or made to feel uncomfortable, that's tough."

Things went from bad to worse, as the leaders all but demolished the regular staff members' self esteem. The teachers were required to race through a series of activities that was exhausting and caused frustration, anxiety and tension in the processing of information, visual perception, reading comprehension, visual/motor integration, dysnomia, oral expression, spatial orientation, reading and decoding, and auditory and visual capabilities.

These technical educational terms were not mentioned until after the tasks were completed, and the terms were made easy to understand through brief explanations, direct instruction, discussion and reflection. Despite the discomfort, it was fun and informative. The faculty agreed that it made them more sympathetic towards special needs students. It served to stimulate interest in further in-service examination of disabilities and how to deal with them in regular classes. The project brought home the fact that we do not all possess the same learning styles, and therefore there is need for varying teaching approaches. Another key factor observed was that students who are forced to rush through an assignment find it very difficult to do a good job. Also, if a person receives no reward for performing a task correctly and is criticized for erring, he or she starts taking fewer and fewer risks and may lose interest altogether.

The presentation was based on a workshop, a 70-minute video tape, developed by Richard D. Lavoie (1989), Director of Eagle Hill School Outreach in Greenwich, Connecticut and entitled "Understanding Learning Disabilities: How Difficult Can This Be?" The program is referred to as The F.A.T. City Workshop, the "F.A.T." referring to the aforementioned "Frustration, Anxiety and Tension." It features parents, educators, psychologists and social workers engaging in the activities described above, as well as excellent commentary and explanations by Dr. Lavoie throughout the workshop. The video can be shown in its entirety, or it can be studied and adapted, as was done for the Newton faculty, so that the audience can be personally involved

participants, rather than passive observers.

Being required to see the world through the eyes of the learning disabled student helps eliminate the assumption that students function poorly in class because they are lazy and dumb, and that all they need to do is to try harder. The F.A.T. City Project is an example of collaborative efforts taking place throughout the country between special educators and regular teachers to jointly enhance the delivery of education in a more and more diversified regular classroom setting.

All states require that to become certified to teach in the regular classroom, college students must study exceptionality, or special needs. However, there is no consistency in requirements from state to state, and universities are free to set their own standards. Some offer and require a minimum of one course, and other universities require more extensive training. In some colleges special education departments work together with the regular education department. On other campuses exceptionality is taught separately by special education specialists or by regular education instructors. When exceptionallity is studied in isolation, it can further the mistaken belief that students with special needs are the primary responsibility of special education teachers. In reality, although students with mild disabilities may be the joint responsibility of the classroom teacher and special education teacher, in many cases students at risk are entirely the responsibility of the regular classroom teacher. In some universities, the study of special needs is left to the last year in college. But when the study of special needs comes very early in the teacher preparation curriculum and is teamed with field observations and exploration, long before the final college year, a better foundation is built upon which to carry out the formal practice teaching.

In an introductory course in exceptionality all college students need a practical textbook for use not only in passing the course, but also as a handy reference while practice teaching and

then while actually employed as secondary school teachers after graduation and certification. An example of a well organized, sensible and comprehensive text is The Exceptional Student in the Regular Classroom, (1992) by Bill and Carol Gearheart of the University of Northern Colorado, and Mel Weishahn of Southern Oregon State College. The Fifth Edition was published in 1992 by Merrill.

The authors state in the preface: "We believe that preparation to teach exceptional students requires three general types of knowledge: (a) a history of education for individuals with disabilities and the legislation which governs service delivery, (b) specifics of the nature of exceptionalities and the ways in which characteristics help determine instructional needs, and (c) instructional strategies which are most likely to be effective with students who have special needs." (Gearhart, 1992, p. v)

Technical, educational terms and jargon are kept to a minimum. The history portion is brief. Problems pertinent to the 21st century, as well as the present, are addressed and include students afflicted with the HIV virus, teens who are depressed and suicidal, juvenile delinquency, child abuse/neglect and pupil/parental substance abuse.

The authors point to their "strong focus on the affective nature of teaching, emphasizing the influence of positive personal interactions between teacher/pupil and pupil/pupil on teaching success." (Gearhart, 1992, p. V)

"Particular attention is given to the needs of the adolescent student, including strategies for enhancing study skills, listening skills, and self-monitoring abilities." (Gearhart, 1992, p. VI)

Quite often college students preparing to become teachers have only associated with other college bound young people and adults and are unaware of the numbers of high school students not ready to achieve at the level "normal" students take for granted. The college

students must become aware of special needs through direct involvement with exceptional students.

While the textbook learning is taking place, exemplary field experience can be accomplished through the use of individual contracts developed by the college students, themselves, with the guidance and approval of their instructors. It is a chance to see the experienced secondary teachers and the classroom students in action. It is also an excellent opportunity for creativity and imagination in collaborative planning.

In his or her chosen field, the college student locates a high school class known to include a student or students with special needs. Next, arrangements are made for observation and exploration. Perhaps the college student can offer one-to-one tutoring or some other teacher aide assistance in return for the chance to attend the class, ask questions, work with students and take advantage of the mentoring. The schedule of dates and times, goals, objectives and tasks are specified and agreed upon as the contract is developed, and criteria are established for evaluation and for determination of the degree to which the contract has been fulfilled. The evaluation should be clear, specific and measurable. The experiences in planning and carrying out field exploration help pave the way for practice teaching. They greatly enhance problem-solving techniques and reinforce college lectures and material learned in the course readings.

Choice of classrooms for exemplary field experience is of critical concern. Students must work under the tutelage of secondary teachers who are successful in classrooms with students of ever increasing diversified needs. It includes teachers capable of using sound assessment procedures and willing to make instructional accommodations. Exemplary teachers consult the parents of their students in developing and implementing individual plans, and they keep parents informed of progress, accentuating the positive and working on weakness through the students' strengths. Quality teachers are willing to take risks and make changes. They

should be well organized, have a non-threatening atmosphere, display common sense and rely on their own good judgement and experience. However, they must be willing to acknowledge when they need assistance. They must know and be able to convey to mentees when to turn for help and where. Mentors should exhibit a balance in their lives, knowing when to say "no" to accepting more responsibility and problems than they can realistically manage in the regular classroom setting. Collaboration with special educators should be taking place. There should be a close relationship with the school administrators, guidance counsellors and any other support personnel. The mentees should observe that learning to teach is on-going; that goals and expectations must be realistic. Master teachers should not only be advocates of students with special needs, but they should also be actively involved in a team approach to improving the meeting of the needs. In other words, they should practice what they preach. They should not be afraid of making mistakes, as long as personal growth is achieved by learning from the mistakes. Mentors should provide opportunities for the mentees to participate in all school -related activities, including in-service programs, teacher-student conferences, faculty meetings and staffings. Preservice training should not take place in schools where changes in curriculum or teaching methods occur without sufficient prior preparation and orientation. For example, a staff cannot dive into collaboration without allowing time for understanding and believeing in the theory, and then for developing and implementing the best practices. Especially important is time for team planning.

Quality secondary teachers are well versed in transition. They recognize that some students will be going directly out into the world of work and others will be going on to post-secondary training. Some goals, therefore, will vary from student to student. The business community is trying to stress the importance of quality work and teamwork on the job, stemming from the acquisition of good work habits and ethics in school. In The Quality School

Teacher William Glasser (1993) suggests "...that intellectual growth is achieved not so much by finishing something and then going on to something else but by continuing to think about it and work on it. What students need to learn is the process of quality; once they learn that, the products will follow." (Glasser, 1993, p. 145)

As a part of the contract to observe and explore in the regular classroom setting, the college class should agree to researching and composing a set of quick-reference sheets to have handy on such topics as purposes of assessment, definitions of disabilities and instructional strategies such as test construction modification. It should be a team effort with everyone ending up possessing all of the lists for their own reference file.

Additionally, sometime during their college career, all students who wish to teach regular high school subjects should be required to study current issues regarding exceptional students, using professional journals, daily newspapers and computer searches. The issues should be discussed and solutions determined for resolving the conflicts. Steps might be introduced for becoming involved in political action for effecting change.

For instance, on July 26th of this year, The Tennessean, a Nashville newspaper, published an article on page three entitled: "Schools, courts weigh merits of sharing info." The current issue involved is how the schools and community can best help meet the needs of the juvenile offender. In the article Bernard James of Pepperdine University in Los Angeles is quoted as saying: "Responding to the needs of juvenile offenders in school requires good information." On the one hand the article reports the following repsonse from judges attending a seminar at the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Convention: "Total disclosure of information could prejudice educators who work with teen-agers and jeopardize any progress they may make within the anonymous system." On the other hand the article ends up reporting that in some states laws are changing towards sharing more information because

some jurisdictions think "the school system is an important player in controlling juvenile violence." My own opinion is that teachers are professionals. If they are forewarned of crises occurring in the lives of troubled teenagers, they can be forearmed with strategies that will promote success rather than causing further conflict and stress. The future teacher must learn to weigh opposing opinions.

Access to research can be gained through the use of computers right on the university campus. From their rooms or other accessible locations students can make use of facilities on their own campuses, or from the same locations they can get to information in other places. For example, universities, such as Vanderbilt University, feature highly sophisticated technical learning centers. Vanderbilt (1994) points out:

"The Learning Technology Center (LTC) at Vanderbilt University is a collaborative, multidisciplinary group of approximately 70 researchers, designers, and educators who are internationally known for their work on technology in education. Members of the LTC are currently working on a variety of projects in the areas of mathematics, science, social studies and litreracy. All LTC projects are research based and all products undergo extensive evaluation before being implemented

"...Faculty members who participate in the LTC have their university appointments in a variety of departments including Computer Science, Psychology, Teaching and Learning, Special Education, Mathematics, Chemistry, Organizational Administration and Public Policy...." (The LTC, 1994, p. 1)

Among many of LTC's projects is one entitled "Integrated Curriculum Project." The LTC publishes the following description:

To reduce the extensive academic and social difficulties of junior high school students with mild disabilities, an interdisciplinary team of faculty with expertise in the areas of curriculum development, literacy, social studies, and instructing adolescent students with mild disabilities, are developing and implementing powerful instructional interventions that couple multimedia-based anchored instruction with integrated curriculum. The project enhances students' planning, survival behavior skills, and employment possibilities, by grounding literacy (reading and writing) and social studies content in authentic problem situations. Project staff are developing and testing a series of units of study that center around videodisc-based anchors and that pose fundamental questions in social studies, e.g., "how can we build a just society?" In pursuing these questions, students acquire social studies knowledge (drawing from the fields of history, civics, economics, geography, and government; knowledge about functioning in their community; as well as improved skills in, and increased appreciation for, the importance of literacy. By using multimedia technology (including videodisc controlled by

Hypercard on MacIntosh computers, and modem and networking software) a broad array of sources from which they may develop knowledge and understandings, and through which they may present their learning.

"The project will both (1) develop effective instructional interventions that incorporate research from the areas of cognition and computer/videodisc technology for students with mild disabilities; and (2) disseminate as widely as possible both the processes and procedures that have been found most successful, as well as videodiscs and software. Through these development and dissemination activities, the project will assist teachers working with students with mild disabilities in both general and special education settings to incorporate the technology and procedures into their own instructional contexts and content areas." (The LTC, 1994, p. 4 & 5)

Another LTC project covers preservice education programs, including serving special needs students in the regular classroom. They are described by LTC as follows:

" In addition to K-12 programs are a number of innovative technology-based programs for use with preservice students studying to be teachers. Programs in mathematics, science, literacy and special education are four of the major areas in which technology is currently being studied and used." (LTC, 1994, p. 5)

Information from the John F. Kennedy Center for Research on Education and Human Development on the Peabody Campus of Vanderbilt University, including the Learning Technology Center, is no further away than the Internet. There is a gopher link to the site in VUinfo under Vanderbilt Campus information: Community Information: Kennedy Center Information. Anyone with a VAX account can get to this information by entering VUINFO (or vuinfo) at the S prompt. Computer literacy for all educators and for all students of all ages and levels is a must.

In conclusion, for the 21st century the training of secondary school teachers to work in regular classrooms with special needs students is an issue of vital importance today. The first goal should be to capture the attention of the college students. They need to get involved in how it feels to have special learning needs, and then they need to study in depth the characteristics of the different types of disabilities. This goal precedes all others, because if the college students do not believe in disabilities, they will see no sense in making accommodations. The second goal is to study a text and research that is well written and meaningful. The study should come early

in the college career so that it can be integrated with all other education courses, and so that it can simultaneously enhance the third goal - frequent early field experience in quality schools with quality teachers and support staff, while the college classwork is going on. That way alternative instructional strategies can be learned and tried out in the real world. Another goal is to create, for quick reference, a handy file on subjects dealing with special needs, such as instructional strategies, definitions of disabilities, and procedures for assessment and for developing Individual Education Programs. Another goal is computer literacy and dedication to keeping up with technological advances. Finally, consistent certification requirements from state to state and enthusiastic, positive and qualified instructors for college education courses will greatly help towards shaping teacher training and striving for excellence in education for the 21st century.

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