

FOCUS ON EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

The New Relationship Between Parents and Schools

Peter Fanning

PARENTS AND INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING

A new age is dawning for all parents of exceptional children, including parents of children with the severest of handicaps. At times this change has been occurring subtly and quietly, but at other times the realization that this age is upon us has been manifested by confusion, aggravation and anxiety.

On one hand, this new age has emerged quietly because of the behind-the-scenes lobbying-type efforts of parents and other advocate groups for exceptional children which have steadfastly worked to guarantee more opportunities for exceptional children and their parents. On the other hand, the new age has come about because parents and advocates of exceptional children have refused to be denied access to a system that — in theory at least — is at the beck and call of every citizen and/or resident of this nation.

These same groups which could bring about change quietly and subtly also found that spectacular change could be initiated through litigation. Lawsuits were filed by and for exceptional children and their parents. The persons filing these suits have claimed that certain handicapped individuals were not protected and/or provided for to the same extent as nonhandicapped individuals; thus, they were imploring the courts to unburden these individuals from a special type of discrimination. In almost every case the courts have granted the offended parties (exceptional children and parents of exceptional children) relief by removing the shackles of restriction which inadvertently were causing the handicapped individual to be more handicapped than necessary.

There was in effect (and possibly still is, in some places) a system which perpetuated handicappedness on the part of children and fear on the part of their parents. It is difficult to believe, in a society that goes to such great lengths to protect all of its citizens, that these things might still be occurring. But even where these things are occurring, the growing realization is that a new age is indeed here, and that it is presenting to exceptional children and their families more opportunities than even the most optimistic of advocates had dreamed possible.

See article
on page 10
about simulation techniques.

Dr. Fanning is Director of the Department of Special Education, Wichita Public Schools, Kansas.

© Love Publishing Company 1977.

OPENING OF NEW DOORS

The doors of opportunity which have been opened for exceptional children and their parents by legislation and litigation are ones of accessibility. In some cases the accessibility which is being afforded to parents is passive; in other cases the accessibility is active. The distinction is that passive accessibility allows parents to exercise certain rights *only* if they wish to initiate the process to activate those rights; while active accessibility demands that the personnel (in this case, within the educational system) seek out and encourage parent involvement by informing parents of their rights.

Parents of exceptional children, for the most part, have been expected to be passive when it involved the education of their children. They were told how "lucky" they were and how progressive or beneficent their school system was when an exceptional child was allowed to take his/her rightful place in the system; little did it matter that sometimes the parent was the last person to be informed that his/her child was in a special learning situation. Nor did it seem to make much difference to many school systems whether a parent was consulted *before* psychological evaluations were initiated, or whether new, more restrictive school assignments were made, or whether information of a confidential nature was released, or whether "playtime" curricula were the basis for a "new" educational opportunity being afforded the handicapped student.

FOCUS ON EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN is published monthly except June, July, and August as a service to teachers, special educators, curriculum specialists, administrators, and those concerned with the special education of exceptional children. This journal is abstracted and indexed in *Exceptional Child Education Abstracts*, and is also available in microfilm from Xerox University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Subscription rates, \$10.00 per year. Copyright 1977, Love Publishing Company. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or part without written permission is prohibited. Printed in the United States of America. Second class postage is paid at Denver, Colorado.

Executive and Editorial Office
6635 East Villanova Place
Denver, Colorado 80222
Telephone (303) 757-2579

EDITORIAL BOARD

Edward L. Meyen
University of Kansas

Glenn A. Vergason
Georgia State University

Richard J. Whelan
University of Kansas Medical Center

Carolyn Acheson
Senior Editor

Stanley F. Love
Publisher

DECLINE OF THE AGE OF IGNORANCE AND FEAR

In the late 60s and early 70s, parent and advocate groups began to realize that exceptional children were being denied an opportunity to become all that they were capable of becoming. Lack of access to the "system" was seen as the largest stumbling block to an equal educational opportunity. As with many other minority groups, a great deal of the inaccessibility to the system was being perpetuated by archaic laws and guidelines enforced by state and local education agencies.

The laws and guidelines in question had been generated in past years from a position of fear, which in many cases was caused by ignorance. This ignorance (and fear) was easily observed when viewing the part many local and state education officials were playing — especially when these officials attempted to rationalize their positions of exclusion with regard to the exceptional individual and his/her inabilities to function in a public school setting, or when rationalizations for exclusion were built around the concept that financial expenditures for handicapped individuals were not a sound capital investment.

Litigation

The age of ignorance and fear received a death blow in 1971, when the State of Pennsylvania entered into a consent agreement with the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC). This agreement, sanctioned by the Eastern Pennsylvania U.S. District Court, in essence gave mentally retarded children full access to the educational system of Pennsylvania at public expense (*PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1971*).

Only a short time later, U.S. District Judge Joseph Waddy, in a suit filed against the Washington, DC Board of Education (*Mills v. Board of Education, 1972*), issued a decree which affirmed the right of all handicapped children to a publicly supported education, including appropriate alternatives for those children who might be unable to attend regular classes or schools. In addition, Judge Waddy declared that school systems must guarantee to exceptional students all the constitutional protections of due process and equal protection of the law which are guaranteed for all citizens by the Constitution of the United States.

Legislation

With *PARC* and *Mills* providing the impetus, a flood of legislation was introduced in the various states, as well

as in the U.S. Congress. This legislation at the federal level culminated in Public Law 94-142, the *Education of All Handicapped Children Act* (1975); and at the state level in legislation which brought many existing state education statutes into compliance with the federal legislation.

For all handicapped children, the new legislation meant a chance for an appropriate education at public expense. For all parents of handicapped children, the new legislation meant a chance to become intimately involved in their children's public school opportunities. For school systems, the new legislation meant a chance to exercise their responsibilities in such a way that all citizens could benefit.

In order for children, parents, and school officials to have their "new chances," a new relationship between schools and parents needed to be developed. Those educational systems which had every intention of complying with the spirit of the law, as well as the intent, actively sought to break down barriers which previously impeded communication. These systems began to afford parents and other interested persons opportunities to help provide direction to the school system's efforts in special education by appointing citizen advisory boards or councils. Through the encouragement of these citizen organizations, new policies and implemental procedures have been written so that handicapped children and their parents can have access to the entire public school system.

A NEW AND ACTIVE ROLE FOR PARENTS

As difficult as it might have been for some school systems to adjust to the new role of parents, even more difficult has been the adjustment for parents of exceptional children to the new role of being active participants, rather than passive observers, in their children's educational future. Thus far in the short history of full accessibility, it has become clear that where school officials and parents have cooperated and learned with one another, things have progressed — if not always smoothly, at least to the advantage of the exceptional individual. By the same token, where school officials have continued to defend the rationales of past practices or where parents have let paranoia direct their efforts, the exceptional individual is still an exception to the system.

One of the most beneficial actions that can occur for parents and the school system alike to facilitate accessibility can be through the organizing of an effective parent group or groups. For the individual parent of an exceptional child, such a group may provide psychological

support and guidance in coping with various problems. For the parents of exceptional children as a whole, such a group may become the vehicle by which change will be initiated and access to appropriate programs and services for their children facilitated.

For the school officials involved in providing alternative educational programs and services, an effective parents' group may become the force necessary to encourage boards of education and legislators to provide the resources for accessibility. In addition, an effective parents' group may reduce the number of trial and error situations which arise when new programs of accessibility are initiated. Mistakes can be minimized and successes maximized if school officials have an organized group of knowledgeable parents with whom they may work to improve the programs and options in special education.

School districts, whether large urban centers or small rural districts which have come together in a cooperative endeavor for the purpose of providing programs and services to exceptional children, need the support of parents. These school districts need to encourage parents to become involved in the education of exceptional children so the districts' credibility can be increased.

CLOSING THE CREDIBILITY GAP

For too many years, school districts have been contributing to the credibility gap by making promises to parents without delivering on those promises. The first thing a school district can do to close this gap in credibility, and at the same time show good faith in meeting the mandate of PL 94-142, is to encourage the active participation of parents of exceptional children in the education of their child. The district can accomplish this by asking the various school officials responsible for administering special education programs to meet with the consumers of those services and programs as frequently as possible to answer concerns and listen to the ideas of interested consumers.

In some districts, such as Wichita, Kansas (the largest school district in the state of Kansas), school officials who are responsible for administering special education programs have initiated a massive inservice effort for parents. The idea behind such an effort is to inform parents of exceptional children about the many programs available to exceptional individuals, and to encourage these parents to become involved in the education of their children, as well as to support the efforts of their school personnel.

In becoming involved, parents have found they are able to voice their concerns with regard to accommodations, curriculum, transportation, and other related

services which they had passively accepted previously irrespective of quality. Through the Wichita endeavor, a mutually cooperative relationship has developed between concerned and/or interested persons in special education and the school administrators responsible for special education. Several beneficial events have occurred as a result of this effort:

1. Parents who previously felt that their only recourse to change was through hostile attacks on school administrators in public Board of Education meetings have found a much less antagonistic mechanism for accomplishing change;
2. Community support for special education programs, which previously had been rather narrow in scope, has started to broaden; parents of exceptional children have begun to support parents of other exceptional children, regardless of categories;
3. Special education administrators have felt more secure in presenting changes in programs and in increased budget requests to the Board of Education because they have come to realize they can rely on support from the special education community;
4. Problems which previously had gone unnoticed until they were at the crisis stage were now being anticipated and resolved *before* they arrived at the crisis stage; and
5. Parents were becoming involved in the education of their children.

KEEPING PARENTS INFORMED

Inservice-type programs may be one mechanism by which special education programs and services can be improved, but parents also should remember that legislation in the area of special education, as well as the judicial decrees and pronouncements as the result of litigation, guarantees to parents of exceptional children more than just accessibility to programs for their children or accessibility to channels of communication with school administrators. *Legislation and litigation have guaranteed that parents shall be afforded an opportunity to know what is happening to their child, educationally, before it happens.* As a result of this guarantee, many school systems are (and all school systems will be) setting up "due process provisions" which school officials must follow.

Due Process Provisions

Without getting into all the legal ramifications of due process, it simply guarantees "fair play" on the part of

the school system. That is, in the context of what the Supreme Court has stated about procedural due process, a school system must provide proper notice to an individual before denying that individual any liberty or properties. Further, the Court has stated that the individual must be given an opportunity to be heard, and that the hearing must be conducted fairly (Alexander et al., 1969).

Thus, when a school system identifies a student for placement in a special education program, it must follow a process far more involved than procedures used previously, whereby a parent simply was notified of an educational change in status of his/her child. With the advent of procedural due process guarantees in special education, school systems must recognize that placing children in certain special education classes, especially through categorical labeling, deprives these children of some liberties and possibly some property rights and, therefore, prior notice must be given before such action is initiated.

Prior Notice and Parental Consent

The prior notice provisions on the part of school officials must occur far in advance of the placement decision. As soon as the responsible school personnel realize they have engaged a student in a process which might ultimately lead to labeling or placement in a classroom for students with special needs, they must obtain parental consent, based on a clear understanding of what is happening. As negative as this may sound, it is simply sound educational practice which, for whatever reasons, has not been followed by a great number of school officials in the past. Written consent removes any doubt about parental awareness of something being done for their child.

School districts that strive to open the channels of communication and that work to develop cooperative relationships between parents and school personnel will find surprisingly little restriction in the due process provisions mandated by various pieces of legislation and guaranteed by judicial decree. Aside from legislation, appropriate educational practice would seem to dictate that a school system would require periodic progress reports and an opportunity for parental conferences to occur, whether or not these things were mandated. This endeavor would appear to be a minimum requirement for even the most able student. For a student experiencing learning and/or adjustment difficulties, frequent contact with the parents of such a child should be the rule rather than the exception.

Contacts being made with the parents might occur by telephone, letter, face-to-face conference, or a combination of these means. But regardless of what method or methods are employed to involve parents in attempting to remedy problems faced by the students, one thing is clear — parents should not be taken by surprise when a teacher, principal, social worker, psychologist, or whoever, approaches them seeking written consent for an evaluation. We emphasize that permission for a comprehensive evaluation should always be preceded by frequent parental contact to give school officials the opportunity to explain educational adjustments being made to help a child be successful in his/her present placement. That is, if a child is having difficulty learning to control him/herself in large group activities because of excitability or distractibility, a plan, with the parents' knowledge, should be implemented which will help that student avoid large group activities until his/her tolerance for such activities could be increased. *This plan must be well thought out, and shared with the parents.*

Parents of the child need to be involved in frequent communication with the teacher and/or other personnel involved in the modification program. If such parent involvement is sought and parent assistance encouraged, and if after several adjustments to a child's routine or educational program have been tried and progress or adjustment in the regular program is still inadequate, then sharing the next step, which might be a comprehensive evaluation and seeking the permission for such, should not be a traumatic or devastating experience for parents. Rather, requesting permission to do a comprehensive evaluation should — and probably will be — viewed by the parents as simply the next logical step in trying to help their child compete successfully with his/her peer group. Thus, when consent is sought, it would not seem unreasonable to view the situation as more than just trying to comply with a bureaucratic or administrative regulation. Wise educational practice on the part of school officials seeking parental consent suggests that they continue to be as forthright and cooperative as possible in their communications. School personnel need to spend time with the parents to insure that they are well informed about what evaluation instruments and procedures are being proposed, including a description of how they will be used and the amount of time involved in their administration.

In helping the parents to become informed, school personnel also must remain cognizant of special circumstances that may detract from a parent's ability to become fully informed. For example, a parent who is a disabled reader will not become fully informed through written communication. By the same token, a parent whose pri-

mary language is other than English may not be able to give informed consent if the mode of communication is through written or spoken English. Parents of hearing impaired children may be hearing impaired themselves; thus, informed consent might be obtained only with an interpreter. These special circumstances, however, can be compensated for by school personnel who have developed a cooperative relationship with the parents, because they will have become familiar with the parents prior to the request for consent for evaluation, and will understand that special circumstances exist. If such a cooperative relationship is developed, any further guarantees provided in the due process provisions should occur very smoothly. That is, for school personnel who have involved parents from the very beginning in trying to locate the most appropriate methods and settings to enhance the students' probability for success, very few problems should arise in complying with the proposed rules and regulations for P.L. 94-142 with regard to prior notice. That section states (*Federal Register*, 12/10/76):

121a.404 Prior notice; parent consent.

- (a) Written notice which meets the requirements under section 121a.405 must be given to the parents of a handicapped child a reasonable time before the State or local educational agency:
 - (1) Proposes to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the child or the free appropriate public education provided to the child or
 - (2) Refuses to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the child or the free appropriate public education provided to the child (p. 56990).

The requirements referred to under 121a.405 are, for the most part, the items already discussed here regarding development of a cooperative relationship. The requirements that proposed actions initiated or refused by the school system should be presented to the parents in their native language, be fully understood by the parent, and include the information upon which the decision is based, present no problem to school officials who have fostered parent cooperation. All these requirements obviously would be occurring naturally in order for parents to be part of the decision-making team which is trying to adjust learning and/or personal environmental situations to maximize the advantages for a particular student.

The Decision-Making Team

When the decision-making team (which most likely will include a psychologist, counselor, social worker, nurse, teacher, administrator, and parent) comes to-

gether for the purpose of recommending a more appropriate placement for a child, there should be no hostility or fear of intimidation between parents and school officials. All members of the team should have been in communication with one another for some time before such action is proposed; and since parents need to be an integral component of this team, everything that is discussed by school officials at this meeting should already be common knowledge to the parents because of the school's attempt to keep them informed. Thus — in theory at least — complying with the due process provisions should be a relatively simple, albeit time-consuming, process.

Beyond theory, however, most parents will enter into a cooperative relationship more easily if they feel they are contributing members of a team trying to do what is best for their child. For parents who are reluctant to enter into a cooperative relationship with school officials, the due process provisions should be carefully followed and presented by the responsible school officials without antagonism. Parents who feel that a school system is little more than just that — a *system* — need to be encouraged to become involved in their child's education and treated with respect so further alienation does not occur.

Beyond simple compliance with legal requirements, development of this cooperative relationship offers many advantages. Parents, who are also the taxpayers of the community, who fully understand the necessity of special programming for handicapped children, and who have become comfortable with and trusting of school officials, may well be the foundation of support needed when budget proposals are presented to the community through the boards of education. This foundation of support may in some instances make the difference between adequate or inadequate programs for exceptional children.

THE IEP

Another advantage gained from the development of cooperative relationships revolves around the legal requirement for an *individualized education program* to be written for “. . . each handicapped child, at the beginning of each school year . . . and (the local or intermediate education agency or unit) will then review, and if appropriate, revise its provisions periodically, but not less than annually” (Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, P.L. 94-142, Sec. 614(5)).

The proposed rules and regulations which accompany this act state that one or both parents should be involved in the writing of the IEP, even if this involvement is

through individual or conference telephone calls. The proposed rules and regulations also stipulate the minimum content of the IEP. The contents are to include, among other items (*Federal Register*, 12/30/76, p. 56986):

1. A statement of the annual goals;
2. A statement of short-term instructional objectives;
3. A statement of specific educational services needed by the child, including related services such as transportation, physical therapy, etc., and special media and/or materials;
4. A statement about the initiation, date, and lengths of time for which services will be provided;
5. A statement regarding the extent to which a child will participate in programs designed for non-handicapped children; and
6. A system for evaluating the effectiveness of the IEP.

Again, for school officials and for parents who are developing a cooperative relationship, the requirements being proposed are in no way threatening to either party. Obviously, if there is to be special programming for exceptional children, parents of the exceptional child should know the purpose of such programming, as well as have some say in the purpose of such programming over the course of the school year (annual goals).

Annual Goals

To help alleviate the anxieties which parents of an exceptional child will have, the annual goals probably should reflect, in writing, how the plan is going to help the child move along the continuum of normalcy. This is not to say that special programming is going to have as its goal the complete “normalizing” or “curing” of all exceptional children. What it does say, however, is that the special programming in which a particular child is involved will make that child's life more compatible with that of his/her nonexceptional peers.

In developing the annual goals, gaining additional information about the child and his parents can be helpful. Parents who have unrealistic expectancies of their child, whether they be too low or too high, will become readily apparent. School personnel responsible for the education of this child then will be alerted to the need for working with the parents and helping them adjust to the reality of their exceptional child. By the same token, parents who think their child is involved in a meaningless experience that is not challenging enough for the child can have direct input into the structuring of the annual goals.

After a determination of the annual goals has been made, specific instructional objectives need to be listed. These, in effect, sequence the process by which the annual goals are to be reached.

Instructional Objectives

The whole process of writing an IEP is a little like planning a trip. First a destination is decided upon; and the route to be followed, with all the signposts, is mapped out. The instructional objectives can actually form the basis or vehicle for a continuing dialogue with the parents. School personnel (most likely the teachers involved in the special programming) can utilize the instructional objectives in keeping parents informed about successes or problem areas experienced by their child. If more problem areas than successes emerge, the objectives, as well as the annual goals, can be re-evaluated relatively soon for their appropriateness in a child's education experience.

Because the destination is stated and the route marked, both teachers and parents can quickly see when a child is pursuing a different route from that planned. Through this system, adjustments can be made so a student can gain as much education as possible for him/her in a year's time. We hope that the days are over of allowing children to flounder without recognizing that they were achieving less than they were capable of achieving during a school year.

Specific Educational Services

In stating the instructional objectives being pursued to achieve the annual goals, both the teacher and the parents must be aware of the learning strategies being used to help the learner progress. Within the Individual Educational Plan itself, then, must be a statement by the instructional planning team (which includes the parent) regarding how certain materials are to be presented and through what sensory channels new materials should be introduced.

By making such statements in the Individual Educational Plan, at least two significant things may occur. First, progress or non-progress, through a set of objectives, can be analyzed to determine whether the objectives or learning strategies are appropriate, and future learning planned accordingly. Second, parents who wish to carry over academic activities in the home outside of school hours will be able to do so with less likelihood of frustrating the child or themselves, because they will be aware of a child's capabilities and his/her least-resistant route to learning.

This second benefit, by itself, may make the whole requirement of an Individual Educational Plan worth all the work connected with it, for certainly parents and children who are not experiencing frustration in learning activities at home will be more likely to carry out such activities than parents and children who are at the point of tears. Additionally, because practice is taking place at home, the student should progress at a more rapid rate toward his or her goal than children who do not receive the benefits of practice and parental interest.

Scheduling and Updating

In determining the progress being achieved by the child, periodic evaluations of that child's progress are necessary. Again, it is extremely advantageous to involve parents in the reformulation of the short-term instructional objectives, strategies, learning styles, and techniques, as well as the restatement of unmet objectives. Although the teacher will continually review the progress of the student and keep the parents informed about significant events, we suggest that the formal updates should occur at the same times as other children's progress is reported to parents. For instance, in the system with which this writer is familiar, teachers will conduct an Individual Education Plan update conference with the parents every nine weeks, because all student progress in the system is reported quarterly. The update conference will be scheduled so that it is convenient for both the parents and school personnel to attend.

This "schedule of convenience" is a most important consideration if the planning session is to be productive. Probably nothing can cause more lack of cooperation or feelings of antagonism toward bureaucratic organizations than the scheduling of an appointment at only one party's convenience. A meeting scheduled so a parent must lose a day's or even an hour's wages will be much less productive than a meeting scheduled at a time when the parent does not have to be concerned about his/her personal security. In addition, a meeting scheduled at the convenience of both parties will help foster the cooperative relationship, because such scheduling obviously conveys the message that the parties involved respect one another.

In addition to scheduling meetings at convenient times, other factors need to be considered. For instance, a meeting does not necessarily have to take place only in the classroom. At times, meeting in the child's home may not only be appropriate, but such meetings may further indicate to the parents that a quality of mutual respect exists on the part of school personnel. This quality of mutual respect can only help to foster cooperative rela-

tionships. As another consideration, assisting parents in their efforts to cooperate might mean that a school official helps the parents arrange for transportation or child care for siblings so the parents can concentrate on the task at hand — assisting in the formulation of an appropriate education plan for their child.

A System for Evaluating Effectiveness

With the formulation of the Individual Educational Plan, involvement on the part of the parent, as well as teachers and other school personnel, is increased to the point where the probability for success for a particular child is maximal. Through this system of planning and updating, the child is constantly at the forefront, with little chance of getting lost in the system. Periodic re-evaluations will occur when necessary, and children will be less likely to have a lifetime placement in special education because of neglect. In addition, children who are at the center of all this planning and monitoring surely will begin to realize that people care about their educational well-being. Such caring should have a positive effect on the progress of a child if there is even an ounce of credibility to the notion of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

There will be extrinsic advantages also. Parents who know what is expected of the child in school can help a child progress by encouraging the child to work on related areas of instruction at home. For instance, if one of the objectives being worked on in school involves organizing and completing tasks, parents can increase the chances of the desired behavior to occur by encouraging their child to organize and complete household tasks appropriate for their child's age and ability. Parents then can report to the teacher any problems or successes their child is having at home in the related areas. From this type of activity, teachers will gain information about how well the students are able to apply learnings from the classroom to actual life situations.

Again, what has been discussed in terms of legal requirements is, for the most part, little more than sound educational practice. Moreover, most of the techniques outlined as requirements have been daily routine for the effective teacher in special education and should present no new burdens to this professional.

Association with Nonhandicapped Peers

As important as the Individual Education Plan is to teachers and parents of exceptional children, the student — as it should be — may stand to gain the most from the requirements that an IEP be written for all handicapped

pupils. The student will not only have his/her progress monitored continually and be presented with instructional situations from which he/she can benefit but, additionally, the student will have an opportunity to associate and learn with his/her nonhandicapped peers.

Often in the past, partly because parents or other advocates of the handicapped child were not allowed to participate in educational decisions involving a child, handicapped students were segregated and isolated in self-contained learning situations. This occurred even though a child's major handicap was something other than a learning impairment, or even when the nature of the handicapping condition would allow normal functioning in selected activities with nonhandicapped peers. Today, however, because of the requirements mandated in the various pieces of legislation, and because of judicial decrees, the student is guaranteed the right to be educated with his/her nonhandicapped peers whenever he/she is able. Thus, through this process, it will be possible for handicapped students to begin to adjust to their peers in mainstreamed society. These are the same peers with whom the handicapped will be expected to live compatibly after their public school experience.

By the same token, peers in the mainstream society will have the benefit of associating with persons who are different from themselves when viewed in a physical or mental context, but who are the same when viewed from the standpoint of desires, emotions, and personal expectations. Such realizations and experiences should lead to a better and less anxious life for the nonhandicapped as well as the handicapped person.

LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

For mainstream education to become a reality for handicapped students, however, a unique relationship (again, between school personnel and parents) must be cultivated if the student is going to have an opportunity to be educated in what the legislative mandate refers to as the "least restrictive environment." Some parents who have traditionally been told that their child is handicapped and therefore must receive his/her education in a segregated classroom in a regular attendance center or in an isolated facility for only the handicapped may have difficulty understanding why, all of a sudden, their child is able to be educated in more normal environs. Other parents, who have been unable to accept the reality that their child is handicapped, may over-react to the intentions of a least restrictive placement and demand full-time regular class placement.

Both sets of attitudes or feelings expressed by these parents, who represent the extremes on a continuum,

need to be dealt with compassionately but with intelligent forethought by school personnel. These parents need to be assured that the welfare and best interests of each individual child are being considered when a mainstream assignment is proposed. From the personal experience of this writer, the time spent in face-to-face meetings with parents, either in groups or individually, to explain what a less restrictive educational placement will mean to them and their children, will be rewarded tenfold. These meetings, of course, absolutely must provide the parents an opportunity to fully understand what is being proposed and to be able to express their anxieties and hopes to those responsible for such proposals. This opportunity will continually present itself if school personnel responsible for the proposals continue to treat parents with dignity and respect throughout the entire educational planning process.

LIFELONG, ACCESSIBLE RECORDS

School personnel have one more legislatively mandated tool to utilize in building cooperative relationships with parents and at the same time displaying their intentions of meeting the spirit as well as intent of the new legislation. This area revolves around the requirement set forth in what is popularly referred to as the "Buckley Amendment" (Protection of the Rights and Privacy of Parents and Students) in Public Law 93-380 (Education Amendments of 1974). Many parents of handicapped children are concerned that the educational records of their children will be indiscriminately released and made available to whoever requests them, thereby prejudicing the future of their child. Parents also are concerned that anecdotal comments, comments with regard to a child's behavioral characteristics, and test information which is no longer appropriate or accurate will follow the child, even through adulthood.

Not only law, but sound educational practice, assures the parents that *they* are the integral link in the control of these records, for parents must be informed and the parents must consent to the release of records in any requests from personnel outside the school system. School officials should help parents understand that in controlling a handicapped child's records, what is in them and who might see them, the parents must be active participants and not passive bystanders; the parents must consent to the release of a child's educational records.

Additionally, parents have the right to challenge any information in their child's records which they believe is inappropriate or inaccurate and request that the information in question be deleted from the records. School

officials who are in the process of developing cooperative relationships with parents may comply with the parents' request to destroy the records, or may help the parents see the accuracy or appropriateness of the information in question, or may aid the parents in their efforts to challenge the information through a hearing before the records officer. Whatever route or action is selected, school officials can certainly use such opportunities to show parents that they too are advocates of the child, and interested in the child's welfare. Such a position on the part of school officials removes the adversarial qualities which so frequently permeate the relationships which exist between parents and school officials, and replaces it with an advocacy relationship.

SUMMARY

In the evolutionary growth of special education, within the network of regular education, cooperative relationships between parents and school personnel possibly would have developed and been fostered naturally. However, with the advent and passage of legislation mandating appropriate programs and safeguards for the parents of handicapped students and the students themselves, a new emphasis has been placed on special education with regard to the unique roles and relationships which have been assigned to parents and school officials. The parent has been asked to take his/her rightful place alongside the professional educator in order to insure the best interests of his/her handicapped child. The professional educator, in local and state educational agencies, has been asked to develop policies and procedures which facilitate involvement on the part of the parents in the educational process of their children, and which guarantee opportunities for active parent participation.

The concept of a cooperative relationship between parents and school officials can become a reality through the vehicles of due process and all of its ramifications — individual educational planning for handicapped students, confidential and professional treatment of educational records, and parent involvement in advisory committees. These vehicles for the development of cooperative relationships exist in law, having been formulated and upheld in the courts. Now it is up to parents and school officials to make it happen for the good of children.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, K., Corns, R., & McCann, W. *Public school law*, St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1969, p. 539.
Federal Register, December 30, 1976, Part IV, 41(252), 56966-56998.

Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia, 348 F. Supp. 866 (D.D.C., 1972).

Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 343 F. Supp. 279 (E.D. Pa. 1971), Consent

Agreement.

Public Law 93-380, Education Amendments of 1974.

Public Law 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975.

Applications of the Simulation Technique As a Training Instrument for Teachers and Students

Bill Wagonseller and Allen Mori¹

During the past decade, a great deal of interest has been generated in the use of simulation activities within the field of education. At the present time the term *simulation* evokes as many different definitions as there are individuals to define it. For continuity, the definition proposed by Searles (1970) will be employed here. Searles suggested that simulation was an arranged environment which provides the learner with an opportunity to learn vicariously about reality.

The advantages of simulation as a training instrument are many. Schild (1968) suggested that simulation games tend to teach the learner to believe in control of the environment; further, the participants not only learn by interacting, but they also learn to interact. Abt (1968) indicated that learning in simulation usually occurred in three successive phases: 1) learning the facts experienced in the content of the simulation; 2) learning the processes which are simulated through the content; and 3) learning the relationship and relative cost-effectiveness and/or rewards of employing different strategies in the decision making process. In addition, Abt suggested that "both slow and rapid learners can share social interaction in the game while learning from it at different levels" (p. 78).

Clearly, active participation of the learner in the simulation process can enhance motivation. Since the setting within which the game takes place is realistic, yet controlled, the actions of the participants will not do harm to them, their colleagues or students, or to the community in general. In the simulated activity the learners constantly are called upon to evaluate their personal beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, opinions, perceptions, and the relationship of these variables to the decision making process. Thus, participants in simulation activities

should gain greater insight into their own personal philosophies, problem-solving styles, and decision making processes.

APPLICATIONS OF SIMULATION

Horn and Zuckerman (1973) suggested that the use of simulation was growing at a phenomenal rate; but despite the apparent growth of simulation games designed to provide educational experiences in a variety of settings, widespread diffusion of simulation into *classrooms* has not been evident. While there are probably many reasons for this lack of use of simulation in the classroom environment, the authors (Horn & Zuckerman, 1973) noted that simulation is not widely employed largely because few teachers have been exposed to simulation games in the course of their own education experiences and training.

The literature indicates that simulation techniques can be used effectively with teachers, parents, and children; and we submit that simulation can be a powerful tool to motivate learners at all ability levels to become deeply involved in the learning process.

Teacher Training Simulation

The primary emphasis in using simulation in a teacher training program is to provide a standardized experience in dealing with problems which typically confront teachers in a classroom. In developing simulated problems, the teacher trainer should remember that the major purpose of these experiences is to bridge the gap between classroom theory and real world problems. The simulation situations should offer a wide variety of problem areas — i.e., behavior, academic, and motivation problems that confront the classroom teacher during the academic year.

¹Drs. Wagonseller and Mori are on the staff of the Department of Special Education, University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

The problems presented by the teacher trainers in the simulated situations should allow freedom for the teachers to devise specific techniques and methods that will assist them when they are faced with similar problems in their classrooms. The emphasis of simulation is not on the development of pat answers, but rather to illustrate various ways in which a teacher may handle problems within the framework of a classroom design.

The simulation program may serve as a supplement to lecture and other informational sources, or it may stand alone as an introductory program for an undergraduate teacher training program. It affords opportunities for decision making; and after having faced the problem and made the decision, all the individuals can participate in a consideration of the pros and cons regarding the handling of each problem.

Parent Training Simulation

In developing a simulation program for parent training, the simulated problems should relate closely to situations with which parents are confronted daily. The training group leader's major purpose in using simulation is to bridge the gap between child-oriented theory and child-oriented problems. Using the simulation approach, the parent training program remains a training program and not a therapy program. The training leader, by presenting simulated problems, is not placed in the position of an Ann Landers. No attempt is made to solve one participant's problems at the expense of the group. Many parent groups fail because the session is not structured and one parent controls the session with his or her problem areas. When this occurs, the group leader is unable to give the other parents concrete examples of how they might use the material presented to assist them in developing good child-oriented techniques. Group leaders using simulation techniques, in contrast, structure the training session by informing the participants, at the onset, concerning the rules which will apply to the session.

Suggestions for Program Implementation:

1. Parents must become involved as participants and play the parent role as completely and realistically as possible to receive maximum benefits from the simulation situation. For example, the parent group leader could assign parents to bring to the session a picture of a problem that they do not feel competent to handle. The parent would also be asked to write a short statement describing the situation, prior to giving the picture and statement

to the instructor. The other parents would then react to the simulated situation. The unique feature of this simulation application is not to develop "textbook" answers, but to illustrate the various ways in which parents may deal with given situations involving their children.

2. The use of audio-visual materials to film simulated parent-child, teacher-parent, or other designated conflicts increases participation from the group.
3. Parent group leaders should present simulation situations that are related to the interest of the group. If the parent group is concerned with learning disability problems, the major focus should be upon simulated situations involving manifestations of learning disabilities.
4. After the parents have responded to the various problems, all parents should be allowed to provide input regarding possible solutions to each problem.

Student Training Simulation

The simulation program can be used at preschool through high school levels. Emphasis should be placed upon developing situations that relate closely to the group and the types of problems that group might be experiencing. Developing simulated situations is an ideal way of bridging the communication gap between teachers and students. The simulation situations should offer a wide variety of problem areas which the students may encounter often; e.g., student-teacher, student-peer, student-administrator, student-parent, and student-police.

The teacher/group leader should allow the students to respond to the simulation situations at the "gut level." Students should have the freedom to take a personal stand, but they also need to role play the other person's role in simulation situations to gain insight into the complexities of interpersonal interactions. The leader must structure the students' responses to the simulation situations to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate solutions to the problems. Simulation should allow students the freedom for decision making, and after having faced the problem and a decision is made, all students can participate and consider the pros and cons regarding the handling of each problem. If the teacher is attempting to shape certain behaviors, appropriate responses should be reinforced.

Suggestions for Program Implementation

1. In the first phase, the group leader should select situations to which the students can relate, and should ask students to volunteer in role-playing the situations to enhance group involvement. Each student should be encouraged to participate and indicate what he or she would do in each given situation.
2. In the second phase, the leader may ask students to make up their own situations. The leader could assign students the task of bringing a picture which shows a problem situation, accompanied by a brief, written statement beneath the picture, describing the problem.
3. After an individual is assigned to respond to a given simulation, each other student should be allowed to contribute additional inputs concerning its solution.
4. In dealing with written problems and situations, the students should be told to not sign their papers; thus, they will feel more free to respond without being penalized.
5. Motivation in the simulation program can be increased by using audio-visual materials to film simulated situations; tapes depicting verbal interactions between people; and slide-tape presentations showing the situation and providing the verbal interaction associated with it.

The above ideas represent only a few of the possibilities for utilizing simulation as a training exercise with a wide variety of participants. The simulation technique offers many advantages as a means of problem-solving, conflict-resolution, and decision making, in a non-threatening, realistic environment.

This discussion is intended to provide readers with a means by which to begin exploration of simulation activities appropriate to their particular situations. We suggest that you consult the literature for a more com-

plete understanding of simulation techniques and their applications, and have included some of these sources within the reference section. Simulation not only has widespread applicability, but it also has the potential to maximize the learning experiences and involvement of all participants.

REFERENCES

- Abt, C. Games for learning. In S. Boocock and E. Schild (Eds.) *Simulation games in learning*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing, 1968.
- Horn, R. E., & Zuckerman, D. W. Getting into simulation games. In D. W. Zuckerman and R. E. Horn (Eds.), *The guide to simulations/games for education and training*. Lexington, MA: Information Resources, 1973.
- Schild, E. Interaction in games. In S. Boocock and E. Schild (Eds.), *Simulation games in learning*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing, 1968.
- Searles, J. *Instructor's manual for decision making in the secondary school classroom*. Scranton, PA: International Textbook Co., 1970.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

- Abt, C. *Serious games*. New York: Viking Press, 1970.
- Beck, I., & Monroe, B. Some dimensions of simulation. *Educational Technology*, 1969, 9, 45-49.
- Boocock, S. Simulation games today. *Educational Technology*, 1969, 9, 14-15.
- Cruikshank, D. *Simulation as an instructional alternative in teacher preparation* (ATE Research Bulletin No. 8). Washington, DC: Association of Teacher Educators, 1971.
- Garove, W. E., Handley, E. E., & Stevens, G. D. The Shannon State School and Hospital simulator: Simulation materials for superintendents and other management personnel. *Mental Retardation*, 1975, 13, 32-35.
- Glazier, R. E. *How to design educational games*. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates, 1970.
- Goodman, F. Gaming and simulation. In R. Trances (Ed.), *Second handbook of research on teaching*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973.
- Heger, H. Toward a curriculum-building technology in simulation and gaming. *Educational Technology*, 1971, 11, 3-5.
- Raser, J. *Simulation and society: An exploration of scientific gaming*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1969.
- Twelker, P. A., & Layden, K. A basic reference shelf on simulation and gaming. In D. W. Zuckerman and R. E. Horn (Eds.), *The guide to simulations/games for education and training*. Lexington, MA: Information Resources, 1973.