FOCUS ON EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

Change in Services for the Handicapped through Community Special Education

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The "right to education" directives from the courts and in recent public law require that all handicapped children receive an education appropriate to their needs and offered in the least restrictive environment. For most school districts, increased pressures to provide handicapped persons with quality educational experiences in regular educational settings and in their own communities necessitate changes in the nature of special education services. These changes are coming at a difficult time, as local school districts are facing declining enrollments, revenue and expenditure limitations, and less teacher turnover than previously. Schools are filled with teachers who were trained for traditional roles and lack the necessary attitudes and skills to serve the handicapped under changing service models. Further, little money is available to hire additional personnel especially trained to work in new service roles.

A way must be found, therefore, to provide inservice education programs in the community to ensure that all handicapped students are appropriately served and taught by qualified, competent people. Such inservice training must be organized on a continuing basis so that programs for handicapped students can provide a full range of services under changing conditions and include currently validated teaching techniques and materials.

The concept of community special education promises a solution to many of the problems related to change in special education services and offers a foundation

for the design of effective inservice training for person-
nel who work with handicapped persons. *Community
special education is a coordinated, community-wide
planning process that organizes available resources to
meet the needs of the handicapped.* It provides a struc-
tured process for bringing together people and agencies
involved in the lives of handicapped persons to discuss
problems and work toward long-range solutions. When
effectively organized, community special education can
facilitate systematic and appropriate change in special
education and lead to comprehensive, normalized ser-
vices for handicapped children and adults in the com-
munity (Apter, 1977).

Although the importance of school, home, and com-
munity interaction in instructional programs has been
recognized in general education as well as special edu-
cation (Collazo, Lewis, & Thomas, 1977), the problem
seems to be in conceptualizing how to organize pro-
ductive interaction. The model proposed in this article
focuses on development of inservice training as a means
to promote organizational change, but it may be adapted
and applied to solve any educational problem; the
strategies for designing inservice training activities are
applicable to any size and type of educational unit —

single districts, multiple districts, private schools, insti-
tutions, and regional units. They have particular value
in planning the regionalized services for the handi-
capped seen as desirable in rural and sparsely populated
areas (Horejsi, 1976).

A MODEL FOR COMMUNITY
SPECIAL EDUCATION

Community special education has been defined as
community-wide planning that organizes resources to
meet the needs of the handicapped. It can, however,
be viewed as a change process because the purpose of
planning is to change special education toward im-
proved services for handicapped persons.

The model for community special education incor-
porates two approaches to organizational change:

1. The *authoritative approach,* in which decisions
   about change are made by a centralized power
   position, and the rate of adoption is fast; and
2. The *participative approach,* in which decisions
   about change are made in consultation with those
   affected by the change, and change is most likely
   to endure.

A unique aspect of the model is its inclusion of both
of these basic strategies for change separately at dif-
ferent stages, while merging them through use of a
broadly representative Advisory Council comprised
of parents, representatives of community service orga-
nizations, members of the community power structure,
and representatives of all agencies that might relate to
education of the handicapped. The Advisory Council
provides the "adaptive unit" needed in formal organi-
zations to facilitate authority decisions and organiza-
tional change (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971); it func-
tions to redistribute power toward more shared power
through a developmental process, which is central to
successful change in an organization (Greiner, 1967).

The successful change process in any organization
must include the sequential stages presented in Figure
1. In his studies of successful and unsuccessful orga-
nizational change, Greiner found that change does not
occur unless top management in an organization is
under pressure and wants to take action. Following
management's recognition of needed change, there must
be intervention by an outsider who enters at the top

Stage	Stimulus	Reaction	Salient Features
1	Pressure on Top Management ⟶ Arousal to Take Action		Pressures come from either external environmental factors or internal organizational factors. Most effective change occurs when both types of pressure are present.
2	Intervention at the Top ⟶ Reorientation to Internal Problems		Intervention is by an outsider — a respected newcomer who enters at the top of the organization and encourages authority holders to reexamine their past practices and current problems.
3	Diagnosis of Problem Areas ⟶ Recognition of Specific Problems		Beginning at the top, the entire power structure, as well as the newcomer, reviews information and collaborates in locating and finding causes of organizational problems.
4	Invention of New Solutions ⟶ Commitment to New Courses of Action		The newcomer involves authority figures in new forms of collaborative behavior which seek to tap and release the creative resources of many people.
5	Experimentation with New Solutions ⟶ Search for Results		This is reality-testing of the validity of specific decisions, but also reality-testing of the underlying model of shared power in decision-making.
6	Reinforcement From Positive Results ⟶ Acceptance of New Practices		When people are rewarded for their efforts with positive results, they are encouraged to expand the changes they are making, and there is greater and more permanent acceptance at all levels of the underlying methods used to bring about change.

Figure 1. Sequential stages in successful organizational change.

of the organization and encourages authority holders to reexamine their past practices and current problems, leading them to diagnose problem areas and recognize specific problems. The outside agent then involves authority figures in new forms of collaborative behavior, which lead to the invention of new solutions and commitment to new courses of action. Experimentation with solutions and a search for results follow, to reality-test the validity of specific decisions and the model of shared power in decision-making. With favorable results, the people involved in the change process feel encouraged to expand the changes and, at all levels, there is greater and more permanent acceptance of the collaborative methods used to bring about change.

The pressure for change in special education services is not a formal part of the model for community special education, but it is clearly assumed. The model then systematically provides for the basic stages of organizational change presented by Greiner. Development of inservice training programs is used as the content for stage progression (see Figure 1) and provides the mechanism for implementing a community-wide approach to planning special education services. Improved inservice training programs result because they are developed within the context of carefully determined needs and organizational change rather than through the more typical approach of providing training experiences through one-shot, narrowly defined workshops.

The tool of systems methodology is used to present the model for community special education, which appears as Figure 2. Components of the model are described below, in terms of the subsequent steps to be taken in fulfilling the model's objectives.

Step 1: Contact Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

Impetus for change in special education may come from a variety of sources. Often, an outside consultant or facilitator identifies target school districts and solicits participation in planning innovative programs. If districts do not indicate interest, the facilitator should discontinue communication, since organizational change is most successful when top management feels a need for change (Greiner, 1967). Perhaps reluctant districts will choose to participate in the future.

There is merit in the involvement of an outsider who, in collaboration with the organization: (a) settles on the nature of problems and needed solutions, (b) facilitates trial-testing of solutions, and (c) based on the results of trial findings, introduces incremental changes into the organization (Greiner, 1967). Biddle and Biddle (1968) discussed several ways in which the outsider can be especially helpful. The outsider can: (a) introduce basic values as guides for decision-making, (b) keep discussions from bogging down by eliciting or offering alternative solutions to problems, (c) act as conciliator between conflicting factions when such a role is necessary, (d) help the group by serving as its scapegoat, (e) give community planners confidence in their own abilities to solve problems, yet caution them against selecting impractical activities, (f) alert them to the setbacks that almost always follow successes, and (g) advise them on numerous details of project implementation.

Step 2: Obtain Information on Participating LEAs

Comprehensive knowledge of needs and current services is the basis for planning improvement in special education services. An outside facilitator usually collects this information so that he or she will understand participating districts and be able to assist administrators in conceptualizing an appropriate project for local needs.

When no outsider is involved in the project, community special education begins with a self study of local needs. In this case, someone in top management usually is responding to either external or internal pressure for change. This person then assumes the role of a facilitator and encourages other authority-holders to reexamine past practices and current problems.

The self study of local needs includes a review of information about students presently receiving special services, services that currently are being offered to these students, and out-of-school students who are not receiving services.

Step 3: Conceptualize a Project

This is the stage in organizational change when members of the power structure and the facilitator review information and identify causes of organizational problems. The notion of "conceptualizing a project" is important because it sets a problem-solving tone and gives direction to discussions. In the present example, the project is an inservice training project.

First, programmatic needs are specified. Administrators of each participating school district look at "what is" in special education services and think about "what should be" to meet the needs of the handicapped in the district. In light of these programmatic needs, administrators then set project goals, which form the basis for the more specific plans developed later.

After setting project goals, administrators determine the population(s) of persons to be trained (e.g., regular classroom teachers, aides for TMR classrooms) in order to achieve the goals. Finally, they define the parameters for training, such as budget constraints and available time. This information also is used later in developing detailed training plans.

At this stage in the model, persons in authority are making decisions about the nature of training and the selection of target groups — an authoritative approach to change. From a regional perspective, however, the participative approach is included because each district is participating in planning a training project to meet its local needs.

Step 4: Assess Training Needs of Personnel

After identifying personnel to be trained, their individual training needs must be assessed in relation to project goals. For example, assume that the goal of the project is to serve TMR students in the public schools, and the decision has been made to train aides to work with these students. Now administrators must determine what skills are needed by aides in order to work effectively with TMR students in the local program(s), and which of these skills need to be developed in the individuals who will be working as aides.

After identifying individuals for training, assessment of training needs includes developing and employing appropriate assessment instruments and analyzing and evaluating the data received. When more than one school district is participating in the project, data are aggregated on a regional basis for analysis. This is clearly a participative approach to change, because persons to be affected by change are providing information that will determine the focus of inservice training activities.

Information about individual training needs is used to specify the training objectives of the project. It is also the basis for discussion within the Advisory Council, where important interactions related to community special education occur.

Step 5: Activate the Advisory Council

The Advisory Council is central to planning special education services in the community. Its use is based upon the premise that key informants with knowledge of area problems can accurately assess needs and effectively plan programs (Bruininks & Bruininks, 1975). The Advisory Council forms an "adaptive unit" whose purpose is to "sense the changes in the environment, to determine the need for changes in the organization, to identify suitable innovations, and to evaluate the innovations" (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971, p. 314).

The Advisory Council also performs the role of "ligitimizer of change." Its membership includes all groups that relate to the needs of handicapped persons, including educators, parents, representatives of community service organizations, and members of the community power structure. These people can give sanction, justification, and license to act in developing special education services in the community.

The Advisory Council is necessarily a new group, not an old group revitalized with a new mission in community special education. As pointed out by Biddle and Biddle (1968), existing groups often represent special and even selfish interests, but a new group can set purposes in terms of service to their present and growing idea of community. The Council is not organized as a rival of existing organizations, though, because it can and should include representatives of existing organizations. This approach is particularly important in sparsely populated areas because, as suggested by Horejsi (1976), "not only is their involvement necessary to win acceptance of new concepts and new programs but many of these same individuals are needed to form the nucleus of volunteers which are so necessary in rural programs (p. 8)."

The Council acts as an agent for change as it discusses problems, develops strategies for meeting the needs of handicapped persons in the community, and provides feedback to agencies who serve handicapped people. During this process, the people involved are often brought to revise their orientations to old organizational patterns and to develop commitments to new ones.

Thus, use of the Advisory Council as a planning body incorporates the two basic strategies for effecting change in organizations: Because its membership represents the community power structure, use of the Council is an authoritative approach to organizational change; and since it includes members of the community who will be affected by change, the Council also represents a participatory approach to effecting change.

In the present example, the first task of the Advisory Council is to plan a training program to meet previously identified needs for special education services in the community. The Advisory Council later will evaluate the training program and provide feedback to others for subsequent specification of programmatic needs, thus creating a continuous loop of interaction for program renewal.

Step 6: Plan the Training Program

As an initial collaborative activity, the Advisory Council reviews project goals and personnel training needs. It then delineates specific training objectives, and this usually requires a prioritizing of training needs.

Several factors affect decisions about priorities. The first consideration might be the judged importance of the need — given the need for training in two areas, a high importance area might be included in the program before a low importance area. Another consideration might be the number of persons demonstrating a particular training need; and a decision must be made about whether to address intense needs demonstrated by only a few persons or to deal with less intense needs evidenced by many people. A third consideration might be the feasibility of initiating training programs to eliminate certain needs. Although a need might be important and pervasive, it might be assigned a lower priority if there does not seem to be a way to attack the need through training (Anderson et al, 1975).

Discussion of priorities stimulates important interaction among Council members as they have an opportunity to hear others' views, and often leads to generation of various solutions to both the training needs of educational personnel and the service needs of handicapped persons in the community.

After specifying the training program's objectives, the Council's next task is to determine the content of the training program, which again leads to interesting and important interaction among Council members. The Council then discusses how the training should be delivered.

Determining the appropriate method of training involves a number of subtasks such as developing a training plan, simulating the training program in a walk-through exercise to debug the plan, and revising the training plan as necessary. Decisions here form the basis for other decisions about facilities, appropriate instructional materials and media, and the design of instruments to evaluate the process of training.

Finally, the Council must specify staff needs, including identifying people to conduct the inservice program and planning for their recruitment and/or training. In all of these activities, Advisory Council members work together in a decision-making process that sets the tone for future collaborative experiences.

Step 7: Organize for the Training Program

The person designated responsible for the inservice training program must provide for recruitment and/or training of staff and must secure appropriate facilities

and required instructional materials and media. Provision must also be made for the design and development of evaluation instruments to test trainee competency before and after training and to evaluate the training process.

Step 8: Conduct the Training Program

Trainees are first pretested on competencies that represent the objectives of training. The training program is then carried out, followed by posttesting of trainees on competencies. In addition, trainees should evaluate the experience in terms of satisfaction with the training process. Data on competencies are analyzed, and these data and the evaluation by trainees of the training process are forwarded to the Advisory Council for review.

Step 9: Evaluate the Training Program

In this step, the Advisory Council evaluates the training program and provides feedback to participating school districts. If they wish, school districts then can conceptualize a new project, which may be implemented through the same process.

As the Council evaluates the training program, it evaluates the validity of decisions made in design of the training program and examines the efficacy of the collaborative planning process. If the inservice training program was successful in improving the competencies of personnel and was favorably evaluated by participants, the Council is rewarded with positive results and likely will be encouraged to expand its efforts.

Step 10: Plan the Future of the Project System

At this time, the Advisory Council could consider its business completed and adjourn indefinitely, thus eliminating the system of communication and planning used to develop the inservice training program. Especially if

the inservice training program produced positive results, however, the Council could decide to continue its activities in planning improved special education services in the community.

Either with or without revision, the system of communication and planning could be implemented on a continuing basis. In this case, another programmatic need would be identified and another project conceptualized.

Community special education is fully operating if the Advisory Council begins coordination of funding and human resources, replicates the project system, and evaluates the project system on a continuing basis. At any time in the future, however, the project system could be revised to suit various programmatic problems — not just projects for inservice training of personnel. With each successive project, incremental change would be introduced into special education services and perhaps into other organizations represented on the Advisory Council. Each successful project would lead to greater and more permanent acceptance of the community special education process that produced desired changes (Greiner, 1967). Of course, the entire system could also be eliminated at any time.

DISCUSSION

The model for community special education presented in Figure 2 illustrates how to organize and implement community-wide planning to meet needs of the handicapped. Based on principles of organizational change and the application of systems methodology, it involves community decision makers and others in collaborative interactions that lead to invention of new solutions and commitment to new courses of action in solving problems in special education (Chin & Benne, 1969). Development of inservice training is used here as the mechanism for organizational change, because carefully planned inservice education programs are urgently needed to ensure that handicapped students are served appropriately in normalized programs, and are taught by qualified and competent personnel.

Each community in which the model for community special education or another plan is used to change services for the handicapped should give careful attention to empirical evaluation of the initiation, implementation, and incorporation of change. Clear behavioral criteria should be established to judge the extent to which desired changes in program have occurred, and objective direct and indirect measures of change should be utilized whenever possible. As pointed out by Giacquinta (1973), there is much to be learned about the dynamics of organizational change in the schools, and large-scale studies using multivariate analyses of data are needed to study the effects of different variables on each stage of the change process, to test the interaction effects of different variables in the change process, and to examine linkages among conditions affecting the change process. Careful research should provide important information about organizational change so that schools can become more effective and responsive to the needs of all students.

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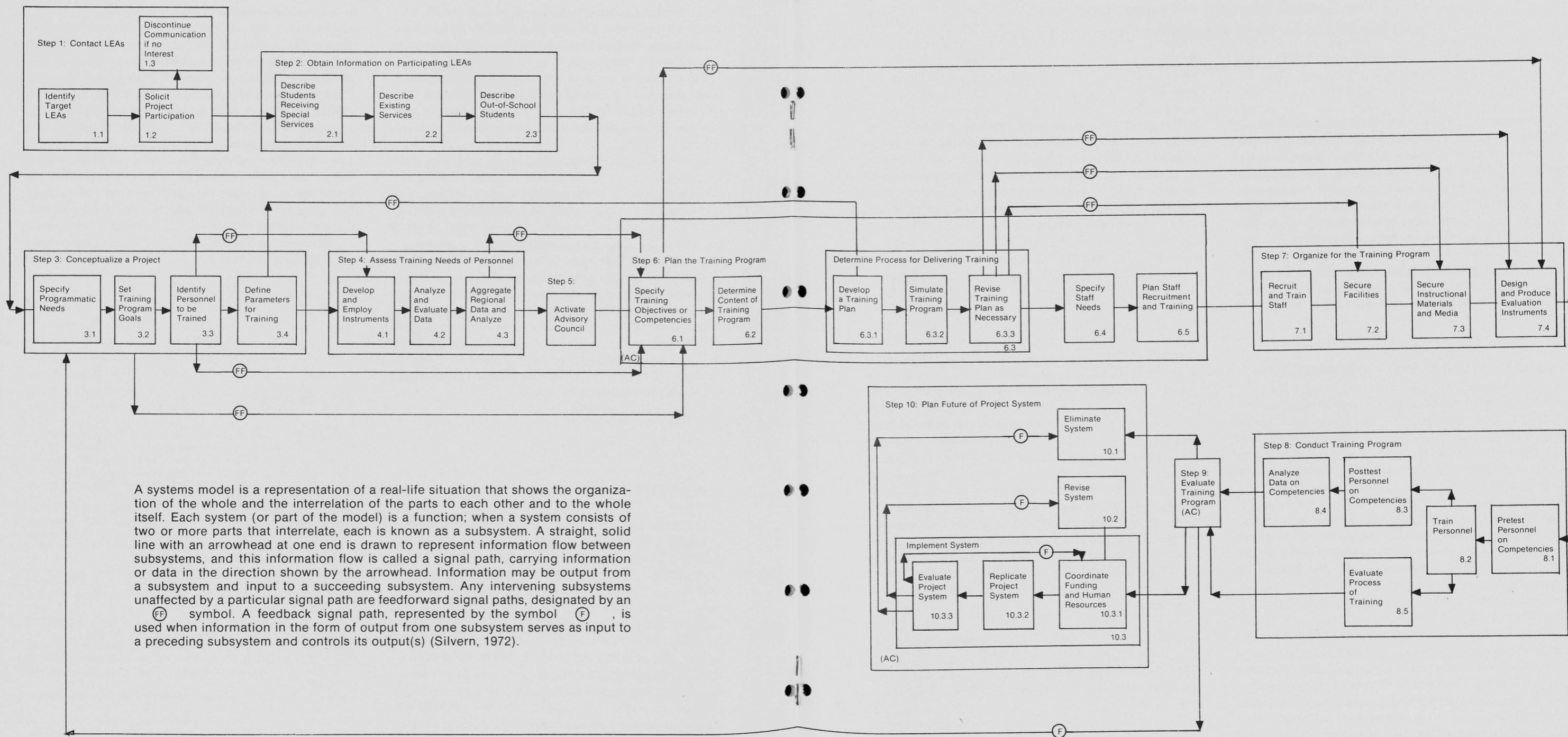
A systems model is a representation of a real-life situation that shows the organization of the whole and the interrelation of the parts to each other and to the whole itself. Each system (or part of the model) is a function; when a system consists of two or more parts that interrelate, each is known as a subsystem. A straight, solid line with an arrowhead at one end is drawn to represent information flow between subsystems, and this information flow is called a signal path, carrying information or data in the direction shown by the arrowhead. Information may be output from a subsystem and input to a succeeding subsystem. Any intervening subsystems unaffected by a particular signal path are feedforward signal paths, designated by an (FF) symbol. A feedback signal path, represented by the symbol (F), is used when information in the form of output from one subsystem serves as input to a preceding subsystem and controls its output(s) (Silvern, 1972).

LEA = Local Education Agency

AC = Advisory Council

Figure 2.   A model for community special education.

The Special Education Paraprofessional
and the Individualized Education Program Process

Mary Goff and Phyllis Kelly

The contribution of paraprofessionals such as teacher aides and teacher assistants in special education programs is becoming increasingly significant. State and federal legislation mandating the provision of full services for exceptional children and the increasing numbers of children and youth requiring such specialized services have caused local school districts to look at the role of the paraprofessional in a much broader sense. The inclusion of paraprofessionals as members of IEP teams planning and implementing programs for exceptional students will assist professionals in providing quality services geared to individual needs, as specified on the IEP.

DEFINITION, ROLE, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The definition of the special education paraprofessional has been expanded in recent years in terms of role, responsibilities, and duties. The definition and scope described here focuses on the instructional paraprofessional who works with a specified teacher and is assigned to a particular classroom. In this context, the special education paraprofessional is defined as a *team member who works alongside the special education teacher*. He/she frees the teacher from the more routine classroom tasks and helps to provide a wider range of opportunities for the students by serving as an effective part of the educational team. In working with the teacher, a paraprofessional may enable many experiences for students that otherwise would not be possible.

There is almost universal agreement that the diagnostic process and the planning and design of programs and procedures to meet educational goals and objectives are professional functions. The role of the paraprofessional, therefore, is to provide *support* to the special education professional in the educational program, in management of students, and in performance of noninstructional tasks.

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For paraprofessionals to be effective in this role, they must clearly understand what is expected of them. A paraprofessional can provide much needed assistance in maintaining accurate, complete records for each student, in implementing instructional programs, and in initiating effective school-home-community relations. Paraprofessionals can help:

1. Motivate pupils.
2. Build their self-confidence,
3. Provide more individual attention, and
4. Increase the services and resources available to students.

PL 94-142 states that a free appropriate public education be guaranteed for all children regardless of background, handicapping condition, or geographic location. As school districts begin to provide these required services and fill their programs to capacity, the increasing numbers of students mainstreamed in regular classrooms and receiving support services often results in insufficient individualized attention from special teachers. The role of the special education paraprofessional, therefore, is essential in effectively meeting the needs of these children, who often require smaller pupil-teacher ratios and more individual help. Effective programming for the varied needs of exceptional children can become more efficient by involving the special education paraprofessional in the child's education program.

IMPLICATIONS OF INCLUDING
THE PARAPROFESSIONAL
IN THE IEP PROCESS

Issues and Concerns

When a new role position is added to the differentiated staffing patterns of the educational team, problems may develop. Perhaps the major concern is the

possibility of a professional, intentionally or unintentionally, giving the paraprofessional more responsibility than he/she can and should assume. The paraprofessional may be regarded by the teacher as a member of a "team-teaching arrangement" rather than as an assistant in the team process. The paraprofessional also may view himself/herself in those terms. The paraprofessional must be given duties appropriate to that role. Differentiated staffing implies that each person is responsible for those tasks which he/she can accomplish successfully in terms of prior training and experience. As an analogy, rarely does a hygienist perform oral surgery, and seldom does a dentist polish a patient's teeth.

Another potential problem area could be the acceptance of the paraprofessional as a member of the educational team by the other professional staff. This situation conceivably could weaken the team's functioning in development of the IEP. Some professionals may think it is not appropriate for the paraprofessional to be involved in the pre-staffing conference or to assist in carrying out portions of a child's IEP. As opposed to the paraprofessional's assuming too much responsibility, the staff could view the paraprofessional's role as being involved solely in housekeeping and monitoring tasks of the classroom.

An additional concern is how parents of an exceptional child will accept a "nonprofessional" in a role of program assistance for their child. Will parents readily accept the paraprofessional as a viable member of their child's educational team? School districts may be wise in explaining to the parents of exceptional children the important role the paraprofessional can have in their child's total education program.

Training Considerations

The concerns mentioned above point to the need for continuous communication between the professional and paraprofessional regarding differentiated roles and responsibilities in the planning and developing stages of the IEP. Effective training for both professionals and paraprofessionals in this area will assist in the process. Training provides the necessary background and skills for competent job performance and is regarded as important to the successful operation of any paraprofessional program.

The training process should be continuous throughout the school year. Training should provide for an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of both teachers and paraprofessionals; thus, misunderstandings and misinterpretations can be avoided. In addition, inservice training for professional personnel to effectively use a paraprofessional is highly advantageous. This area should not be overlooked when plans are being formulated for a district training plan. In fact, all school staff may need inservicing as to the role of the paraprofessional in the IEP process and the total special education program. Such training would facilitate the acceptance of the paraprofessional as a member of the educational team.

THE IEP AND THE PARAPROFESSIONAL

The IEP process includes the written plan and the meetings to develop, review, and revise the written plan. A team of individuals, including parents and sometimes the child, are involved. The IEP itself is the written statement developed in a meeting of educational personnel, parents (and the child, if appropriate).

Two basic phases constitute development of the IEP. The first, the *pre-implementation* phase, involves a pre-staffing meeting and a formal staffing conference of those personnel who took part in the comprehensive evaluation for a given child. At the pre-staffing meeting, the strengths and weaknesses in all areas evaluated are presented and summarized. Input from the parents regarding the child's present level of educational functioning may be received at this time. The intent of this meeting is not to formulate the written IEP, but to determine whether or not the child is eligible for special education services. If the child is determined to be eligible, the formal staffing occurs and the IEP is developed and written. The second phase of the IEP process is *implementation,* in which the plan is actually followed in the educational setting.

Pre-Implementation Phase

The pre-staffing is attended by individuals who have participated in the comprehensive evaluation. Any other person — including the paraprofessional — who is directly or indirectly involved in or who may influence the child's educational success is given the opportunity to provide input at this meeting. Opinions

and concerns of the child's parents are presented (either personally or by a school staff member) as a significant part of the available information. This meeting, then, involves sharing information on the child's present level of educational functioning, including academic, social, pre-vocational and vocational, psycho-motor, and self-help skills.

The paraprofessional in cooperation with the professional is actively involved in the IEP process for children and youth already receiving special educational services. Prior to the pre-staffing conference, the paraprofessional and teacher(s) meet to discuss the individual student's current educational performance. At this time, the paraprofessional provides the teacher with relevant information based on his/her contacts with the child. The paraprofessional may report on the student's academic performance, behavioral characteristics, interests, reinforcers, and performance with ancillary/support staff. The teacher summarizes this information, which is then presented at the pre-staffing meeting.

Once the provision of special education services is determined to be appropriate, the second phase of the IEP process is set in motion with the conference at which the written IEP is developed. This formal staffing involves the following individuals:

1. A representative of the district, or private facility, or state institution, other than the child's teacher(s), who
   —is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, special education, and
   —participated in the pre-staffing conference and is qualified to interpret the written findings of the comprehensive evaluation to the parents.

2. The child's teacher(s), special or regular, who has direct responsibility for implementing the child's current individualized education program. For those children currently receiving special education, one or more teachers who attended the pre-staffing conference should participate in the conference.

3. One or both of the child's parents and, if appropriate, the child.

4. Other individuals at the discretion of the parents or the school.

The paraprofessional need not attend the formal IEP conference. His/her role at this phase should be that of assisting the professional in duties within the classroom. He/she could supervise the classroom while the teacher attends this meeting if it is held during the school day; in that instance, the paraprofessional would carry out classroom activities previously developed by the teacher. The paraprofessional also could work on developing materials, correcting papers, doing housekeeping tasks, etc. if there were no children to be supervised during the time the teacher was attending the formal IEP conference.

Implementation Phase

Implementation of the IEP is the result of the formal conference. The paraprofessional's involvement during this phase is vital. He/she must understand what the objectives are for a certain child, as well as the activities proposed to meet those objectives.

At this time, persons responsible for the student begin to employ the means to reach the goals and objectives stipulated in the IEP. The professional and paraprofessional work together closely in planning the instructional program for the services they will be providing in the special education program. The paraprofessional should at this time ask any unanswered questions regarding the child's program, and should offer suggestions.

Carrying Out the Instructional Program. In carrying out the total instructional program for the exceptional child as specified on the IEP, the paraprofessional's role is that of a team member who works with the special education teacher. Instructional responsibilities for the paraprofessional center on follow-up or reinforcement activities, while initial concept instruction involving the presentation of new lessons or tasks is the responsibility of the teacher. The teacher should plan cooperatively with the paraprofessional in assigning responsibilities to this person. The teacher may wish to work with individual pupils or small groups on particular learning problems while the paraprofessional helps other class members, listens to reading, or the like. In turn, paraprofessionals might tutor individual children or work with groups, using materials and techniques chosen or designed by the teacher.

Implementation of the full service mandate could be difficult for some small, rural areas/districts. In such areas, where a professional serves a large geographic area, the paraprofessional can provide continuous instruction to the exceptional child under the supervision/consultation of the professional, who would work with him/her and the child at least twice a week. The paraprofessional could be assigned to a teacher or the principal in a small elementary or secondary school and follow through with the program arranged by the itinerant staff. Thus, a child who may require such ancillary services as speech, physical therapy, or occupational therapy can receive the benefits of consistent training sessions.

Certain specialized situations are apparent in which the use of a paraprofessional can greatly enhance the program for the exceptional child. For example, a paraprofessional could assist in transportation of a severely multiply handicapped child, in which an adult in addition to the driver is recommended to ride along to supervise and give needed attention to the child, who may have serious behavioral and physical problems. The paraprofessional also could begin some of the programming for the child during the bus ride, by working on such skills as behavior management, communication, or socialization. The ride to and from school for some children often takes an hour or more, and facilitating the educational program in this manner may enable provision of the six-hour school day requirements for certain school districts.

Another specialized setting in which paraprofessionals can be effectively used is in mainstreaming exceptional children into regular education programs. PL 94-142 mandates the least restrictive environment for handicapped children, and the percent of time to be spent in a regular education program must be stated on the IEP. Utilization of the special education paraprofessional in mainstreaming aids this process. He/she can provide tutorial assistance to the exceptional child who is served part-time in the regular education program, or by freeing regular class teachers to spend more time with the mainstreamed students.

Evaluation of the Instructional Program. A significant component of the IEP process is evaluating the child's individual plan. PL 94-142 requires that the IEP be reviewed and updated periodically. The teacher and the paraprofessional can work together in monitoring the day-to-day progress of student growth toward the short-term objectives of the IEP. Paraprofessionals can provide input to the teacher on tasks in which they have been involved in implementing, and can recomment program change. Reassessment of the total instructional program thus can be carried out in less time and with fewer problems.

SUMMARY

The IEP process involves more than a written plan for a child. The written aspect is just one phase of the total programming for exceptional students. The entire program, if it is to be workable, requires team effort. The trained special education paraprofessional, as a member of the educational team for an exceptional child, can be involved appropriately in all phases of the IEP process.

If the goal of an individualized plan for each exceptional child is to be realized, a differentiated plan must be operationalized. The trained paraprofessional can be the link between quality educational programming and individualization of services.

ALERT

February 28 - March 3, 1979
   Association for Children with Learning Disabilities
      San Francisco, California

April 22-27, 1979
   Council for Exceptional Children
      Dallas, Texas

CLASSROOM FORUM

Classroom Forum, Beverly Dexter

> **All too frequently, conferences between the regular teacher and the resource teacher end up as "catch as catch can" sessions which leave both teachers wondering if there isn't a better way to communicate. Could preliminary questions be shared between these teachers prior to the conference, to help lay the groundwork for the conference? What specific questions during the conference will help both teachers focus on the learning needs of the child? How can the teachers continue to communicate with each other in between conferences?**

A major goal of the special education resource teacher is to supplement the teaching of the classroom teacher so that mainstreaming will be more successful for the individual child. To do this, both teachers must be kept up to date on the child's needs and performance levels in both learning situations. Because of full scheduling, the resource teacher often has to catch the classroom teacher "on the run" — before or after school, during lunch, in the grocery store, etc. Although this is not the most efficient method for arranging conferences, there often is little choice for either teacher.

Ideally, release time should be arranged for both teachers on a regular basis. By having regularly scheduled conferences at the beginning of the school year and just prior to grading periods, both teachers would have a chance to discuss the child's needs in relation to their individual teaching strategies. Such conferences also would allow both teachers to reflect on past strategies and thereby develop a mutual respect for each other's roles in the educational system. This pulling together rather than apart should be a primary goal for any teacher-teacher conference, regardless of the circumstances under which it is held.

To expect either teacher to be fully prepared to discuss any child at any given moment is absurd. Therefore, a first step in gaining mutual respect is to schedule a conference at a time convenient for both teachers. Even if this must be done during lunch or after school hours, it can be a fruitful meeting if both teachers are prepared. The resource teacher can aid in structuring the conference by formulating both general and specific questions concerning the child (or children) to be discussed. By making these questions available to the classroom teacher prior to the conference, the resource teacher will gain confidence regarding mutual concerns. Rather than a form or questionnaire to be completed by the classroom teacher, the resource teacher could provide a personal note regarding the child. Some questions that might be conveyed in this note include:

— What long-range goals would you as the classroom teacher choose for this child?
— What do you think are the child's most pressing needs? (short range goals)
— Should academic or social behaviors (or both) be emphasized?
— Are there any specific behaviors (both strengths and weaknesses) that I as the resource teacher should be made aware of from the onset?
— Is further evaluation needed to gain a more complete picture of the child?

After the groundwork has been laid through the personal note, the resource teacher should begin formulating specific questions to bring up during the conference. Some specific questions to be asked of the classroom teacher might be:

— What particular learning modalities has the child exhibited in your classroom? (Or, what learning style does the child appear to have in your classroom?)
— What are the child's interests?
— Does the child appear to be motivated during any particular learning tasks?
— Does the assigned classroom work appear to be either too easy or too difficult for the child?

— Have you had to modify this child's assignments in any way to better suit abilities and/or achievement level?

— What other factors appear to be pertinent to this child's learning? (peer relationships, behavior patterns, health, home environment, etc.)

Other questions which should be resolved at the earliest conference include:

— What type of services does the classroom teacher prefer for working on the goals established for this child?

1. Removing the child from the classroom for a specific time period each day.
2. Resource teacher working with the child directly in the classroom.
3. Resource teacher working with small groups of children within the classroom so that the teacher may work directly with specific children on a one-to-one basis.
4. Flexible scheduling dependent upon the child's current needs.
5. Support during the parent-teacher conferences, making them parent-teacher-teacher conferences.

— What type of feedback does the classroom teacher desire from me, and what type of feedback do I desire from the classroom teacher?

1. Informal exchange of information on a periodic basis.
2. Narrative reports at grading time.
3. Narrative reports prior to parent conferences.
4. Further observation, testing, and evaluation presented in formal write-ups.
5. Work samples exchanged on a periodic basis.
6. Report cards or narrative summaries on a scheduled basis.

Of primary importance is to remember that the goal of this feedback is to provide both the classroom teacher and the resource teacher with information in between teacher-teacher conferences. Thus, such feedback should aid both teachers in providing a continuous and efficient program for the child.

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