

FOCUS ON EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

Modifying the Attitudes of Regular Class Students Toward the Handicapped

Richard L. Simpson

In an historical review of services for exceptional children, Egbert (1968) observed that "fifty years ago in most schools there were only two choices for most handicapped youngsters: Either enroll in a regular classroom with 30 other children or stay away from school" (p. 15). Fortunately, our educational community has moved significantly beyond that era of supineness and is presently involved in developing suitable educational experiences for all handicapped pupils. Primarily as a function of legislative and legal mandates, exceptional children and youth are today entitled to a free and appropriate public education in as normal an environment as possible. Landmark court cases including the *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1971) and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972), as well as legislation, primarily the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142), undergird the principle of "least restrictive environment" and what came to be known as "mainstreaming."

Although these principles were at one time considered radical by both parents and educators, clarification of the concept and refinement of the process have resulted in increased levels of acceptance. Commensurate with what the National Association for Retarded Citizens (1973) referred to as "an existence as close to the normal as possible" (p. 72) and Stephens (1977) "as near normal as their performance and their competencies and creativity of school personnel allow" (p. 146), most educators now seem to have adopted (or at least accepted) the philosophy of placing handicapped children in the same environments and settings as regular class children whenever possible.

Nonetheless, little attention has been given to the issue of preparing the least restrictive environment to accommodate the handicapped pupil. Specifically, while significant attention has been focused on developing and implementing curricula and procedures for exceptional children and youth within the least controlling setting, few studies have been directed at methods and procedures for positively modifying regular class students' attitudes toward exceptional children placed in these "normal" settings.

As Martin (1974) cautioned, unless educators develop strategies for creating an attitude of acceptance within students in regular education toward the exceptional child, "we will be painfully naive and I fear we will subject many children to a painful and frustrating educational experience in the name of progress" (p. 150). Others too (MacMillan, 1977; Simpson, Parrish, & Cook, 1976; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1978) have suggested that programs designed to place handicapped pupils

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with or near their normal peers can be successful only to the extent that they are able to create an educational environment in which exceptional children and youth will be able to thrive and develop. Creating this kind of supportive environment requires, of course, utilization of appropriate instructional materials, but it also requires proper attention to affective and attitudinal concerns.

DISCRIMINATORY ATTITUDES TOWARD THE HANDICAPPED

The consensus seems to be that handicapped children and youth are assigned relatively low positions of status by their nonhandicapped peers. Both empirical data (Meyerowitz, 1965; MacMillan, Jones, & Aloia, 1974; Rucker, 1968) and subjective reports have confirmed that exceptional children are received less favorably than are typical pupils. Weintraub and Abeson (1976) observed that:

With minor exceptions, mankind's attitudes toward its handicapped population can be characterized by overwhelming prejudice. [The handicapped are systematically isolated from] the mainstream of society. From ancient to modern times the physically, mentally, or emotionally disabled have been alternately viewed by the majority as dangers to be destroyed, as nuisances to be driven out, or as burdens to be confined. . . . Treatment resulting from a tradition of isolation has been invariably unequal and has operated to prejudice the interests of the handicapped as a minority group. (p.7)

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This pattern of peer rejection appears to hold true whether the handicapped individual is assigned to a regular or special class. As Meyerowitz (1965) noted, "The retarded children, whether in regular or special class, were . . . less likely to be interacted with, either positively or negatively, than normal children" (p. 249).

While the mechanism for this phenomenon remains an unsolved puzzle (and exists as an issue outside the scope of this paper), several factors may be crucial to understanding regular class children's attitudes toward the handicapped and to implementation of successful attitude management and modification programs.

1. *Discriminatory responses may exist as relatively normal patterns of behavior.* Abundant evidence supports the contention that even infants discriminate among people and, in particular, changes and differences in individuals. These discriminatory responses may be made on the basis of rather subtle characteristics, and the most frequent response is one of fear. Thus, an infant may react with fear to a stranger, or to a change in characteristics (e.g., new hat, haircut, glasses) in an otherwise familiar person. According to a number of authorities, this natural tendency to discriminate among people is considered to be the basis for later differential social responding. This explanation is not intended to justify the relatively poor reception given exceptional children by their peers in regular programs, nor should it imply that these attitudes cannot be positively modified. But it does suggest that this pattern may have a developmental and perceptual basis and thus cannot be

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considered innately "bad" or totally a function of environmental factors.

2. *Attitudes toward handicapped children and youth may exist whether or not the exceptional pupils have been formally "labeled" and assigned to a special education program.* Much has been said and written about the pernicious effects of labeling handicapped children and adolescents, including the negative impact of this process on handicapped pupils' interactions and relationships with their normal peers. However, there is a lack of empirical data to support this position. Although this absence of empirical support should not be construed as an endorsement or justification for capricious and indiscriminate labeling, neither can the labeling process, when applied in an appropriate and professional manner, be said to be innately negative or detrimental. In short—even though exceptional children may be judged negatively by their peers, the crucial factor may not be the labeling process.

With regard to mentally handicapped children, Wilson (1970) suggested that "teachers trying to help retardates win better sociometric status will want to remember that retardates are generally unaccepted because of bothersome, inappropriate, or antisocial behavior . . . or simply an absence of positive likeable traits and behavior" (p. 204). And in a review of mental retardation literature, MacMillan et al. (1974) concluded that, "While many accept as fact that labeling children mentally retarded has detrimental effects, conclusive empirical evidence of these effects was not found" (p. 257).

To summarize the question of labeling, then, data have not been produced to support the position that formal labeling is the basis for the social positioning of the handicapped. Nor do we have empirical evidence that the social status of handicapped individuals is detrimentally affected by special class placement.

3. *The attitudes of normal class children are influenced by the beliefs and attitudes of significant others with whom they relate.* As might be expected, both children and adults are influenced by the attitudes of individuals and groups with whom they come into contact, and they integrate the beliefs of groups and individuals with whom they have meaningful relationships. Thus, parents, administrators, teachers, and peer groups all have the capacity and potential to influence an individual's attitudes toward the handicapped, through communication of their own beliefs about the handicapped. Triandis and Triandis (1967) noted that, "For normal populations . . . social distance is greatly influenced by cultural norms concerning which is

appropriate behavior toward persons who are 'different' (p. 206)." Consequently, children's attitudes toward the handicapped appear to be based, at least in part, on the attitudes of those with whom they interact.

In particular, evidence has confirmed that teacher perception of children can be biased by alleged indications of exceptionality (Carroll & Repucci, 1978; Ysseldyke & Foster, 1978). And in an attitude modification research study, Reinhardtson (1980) noted that the attitudes of the classes involved in the investigation toward the training program appeared to be a direct extension of their teacher's attitudes.

4. *The attitudes of regular class students toward the handicapped are influenced by a variety of social, physical, and experiential factors.* Data have generally shown that handicapped pupils, whether assigned to regular or special programs, are recipients of fewer positive interactions than their nonexceptional peer group, but this discrimination varies. The following patterns have been identified:

- Nonexceptional individuals with the most positive social adjustment have the most accepting attitudes toward handicapped persons (Lazar, Haughton, & Orpet, 1977).
- Females generally seem to be more accepting of handicapped persons than are their male counterparts (Goodman, Gottlieb, & Harrison, 1972; Newman, 1978).
- Persons with previous positive experience with handicapped persons tend to have more favorable attitudes toward them than do those lacking prior experiences (Jaffee, 1966; Bateman, 1962).
- Younger children have more accepting attitudes of the handicapped than do older children (Billings, 1963; Newman, 1978).

Although the above generalities have been confirmed by empirical evidence, these patterns have not been shown consistently and unequivocally to apply in all situations. So, although there does appear to be a proclivity for certain types of response patterns, they cannot be considered as unerring. Furthermore, other factors in which measurement has been attempted (e.g., socioeconomic status, race, community type, type of exceptionality) have been associated with such variant findings that even the most tenuous inferences would be suspect.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE MODIFICATION AND MANAGEMENT

According to Fishbein (1967), an attitude is a learned predisposition to respond to an object or concept in a consistent and predictable manner. This theorist also has suggested that all stimuli impinging upon an individual are evaluated. Consequently, individuals have an attitude, whether it be negative, positive, or indifferent, toward each stimulus item with which they come into contact. In accordance with this model, attitude changes occur in situations in which "(1) an individual's beliefs about an object change and/or (2) when the evaluation aspect of beliefs about an object change" (p. 397). Therefore, beliefs about an attitude can be changed only when new beliefs are learned or when positive or negative feedback concerning a particular attitude is introduced. Each positively oriented belief associated with an attitude leads to some positively evaluated concept, and negative associations result in negative attitude changes.

At the classroom level this model suggests that positive modification of regular class children's attitudes toward the handicapped requires positive information and experiences, replacing previously held associations. Four specific steps associated with this process are discussed in the following pages. These are: preliminary considerations, student attitude management, parent concerns, and exceptional child procedures.

Preliminary Considerations

Although the actual process of effecting attitude changes involves a series of structured, highly coordinated maneuvers, several apriori factors must be considered. These factors may not be related directly to an actual attitude management program, but nonetheless may determine the success or failure of any program. The following initial considerations have the most direct reference to outside consultants entering a system or class with the intent of influencing attitudes, but they are applicable to regular classroom teachers given the same charge.

1. *Establishing rapport between special class personnel and regular class children and teachers.* Establishing and maintaining a positive interpersonal relationship between the special services staff and regular education personnel are prerequisite to creating an

environment consistent with positive modification of attitudes. Since both regular educators and pupils respond not only to the exceptional child but also to the attitudes and behaviors of the special class teacher, observation of positive modeling efforts is necessary. And the relationship between the special teacher and the regular education faculty and students must be characterized by interpersonal rapport. The need for a positive relationship is especially important with the building principal, since he or she frequently sets the attitude tone for the entire school. Without the interpersonal ingredient, there is no basic framework upon which to build an attitude change program.

Detailed procedures for rapport building are well beyond the scope of this article, but several elements should be considered. First, special education personnel must recognize that regular classroom teachers' jobs are not easy — even when their classes do not include pupils identified as handicapped, and even though they may have specific educational interests and goals different from those of the special educator. In any case, the exceptional educator must be a *colleague* to other staff members rather than exclusively a conductor of unsolicited inservice-training programs in the halls and teacher's lounges or a recruiter of disciples to help shoulder the burdens of the world on behalf of the handicapped.

While remaining sensitive to the needs of the regular education staff, the special educator must also be willing to serve as a resource to individuals requesting information or aid. This includes the sharing of curricula, procedures, and teaching techniques appropriate for select students. Successful application of these skills to regular education students and their problems may jointly serve to enhance the relationship with the teacher's colleagues and to demonstrate that special education personnel can effectively implement intervention procedures.

2. *Becoming an integrated component of the faculty and school.* Making distinctions between "special education" and "regular" pupils and classes may be relatively commonplace, even in settings where students are mainstreamed part of each day. With this realization, special service personnel must strive not to become a separate entity in the schools. Unfortunately, exceptional educators have tended to accentuate the discriminatory characteristics, problems, and other differentiating factors associated with their pupils and their instructional processes. This information may sensitize other staff members, but it does not necessarily

facilitate acceptance of the students in the school mainstream. Exceptional children cannot become an integrated component of the school if special education teachers fail to integrate themselves and if attention is focused on the exceptional group's differences. Although this process must embody the principles of establishing and maintaining a suitable relationship, it must go beyond the bounds of rapport building. Special staff personnel must develop roles as accepted, integrated components of the school faculty who have more similarities than differences from their regular education colleagues.

Student Attitude Management

Creating an attitude of acceptance in regular education students toward their exceptional peers must be recognized as a basic element of any integrational effort. The idea of expecting nonexceptional student body members of any school to support and accept exceptional persons may be considered highly presumptuous and unrealistic, but almost every noteworthy integrational and normalization program has been founded on this premise (Tunick, Platt, & Bowen, 1980).

Facilitating changes in school atmosphere through development of more positive attitudes toward the handicapped cannot be approached as a short-term endeavor. Just as attitudes are developed over time, so is the change process. Component processes leading to these planned changes include providing realistic and appropriate information regarding the handicapped, and controlled experiences with exceptional persons. Both procedures merit attention (Lazar, Gensley, & Orpet, 1971; Marsh & Friedman, 1972; Simpson, Parrish, & Cook, 1976).

Information that might be shared with regular class pupils to facilitate attitude changes includes:

- The concept of individual differences.
- Identification and discussion of common handicapping conditions and their characteristics.
- Curriculum and methodology used in educating and training the handicapped.
- Review and discussion of historical figures who have been handicapped.

- Appropriate ways of interacting with handicapped persons.

Curricula can be effectively utilized to influence children's attitudes toward handicapped persons. The import of these materials, however, is directly related to the degree of rapport and positive influence of the individual communicating the information to the students. Although this principle may not be as obvious when the content is delivered by the regular classroom teacher as a component of ongoing class activities, it is still an important variable, and even more so when educators other than the regular classroom teacher present the materials. Therefore, consultants or special class personnel attempting to influence the attitudes of regular class children must invest sufficient time in establishing a satisfactory relationship with the students, since the value of the materials and information may be directly proportional to this interpersonal relationship.

In addition, even though some curricula and content may appear to be most expediently delivered through a lecture format, the participating children must be given an opportunity to discuss the material and their own reactions. Finally, according to some indications, unstructured discussions serve primarily to reinforce previously existing attitudes (Myers & Lamm, 1975; Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969), so the input should serve as information and stimuli for constructive discussion rather than merely offering the pupils an opportunity to air their opinions without guidance or structure.

The Concept of Individual Differences

In considering the issue of human heterogeneity and the related concept of exceptionality, one should point out that handicapped pupils are more similar than they are different from their nonhandicapped peers and that each individual, regardless of his or her purported normality, has unique characteristics that make him or her different from all other persons. This strategy can provide a common basis for examining variance in people — to remind children of their own uniqueness, including relative strengths and weaknesses, and to establish that exceptionality in individuals is simply an extension of an ongoing principle of human development. Discussions of likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, and ability differences of children in the same classroom or family can also "set the stage" for introducing the other concepts set forth in this section.

Identification and Discussion of Common Handicapping Conditions and Their Characteristics

Information in this content area is intended to familiarize students with the characteristics associated with the most common conditions seen in special education programs, and to give them an opportunity to discuss their own feelings about these characteristics. Although any of a number of organizational strategies can be used in presenting this information, I suggest that consideration be given to categorizing deficits as intellectual, psychological, physical, academic, sensory, and communicative.

As a means of introducing the subject, the previous point on individual differences might be reviewed with the children. This can be followed by identification of characteristics that make it necessary for children to receive special education. Again, the need and intent of special education as a vehicle for serving individual differences can be presented. The discussion can be concluded by pointing out how the specific conditions and their presenting characteristics relate to the need for special education provisions.

Although specific syndromes, diseases, and varieties of exceptionalities can be identified, the primary focus of these sessions should be on the major classification groups — the blind and partially sighted, deaf and hearing impaired, physically and health impaired, speech and language impaired, intellectually limited, learning disabled, and emotionally disturbed. Within each of these groupings, one should attempt to familiarize the children with the general characteristics of the population, causes of the handicapping condition, identification procedures, and educational and curricular provisions. Children participating in these sessions should have an opportunity to relate appropriate experiences and feelings about the information disseminated. The discussion, however, should always focus on the similarities of the majority of the handicapped and the nonhandicapped as far outweighing their differences.

The Curriculum and Methodology Used In Educating the Handicapped

After reviewing the content of the previous two points, attention can be directed at the delivery service alternatives available to handicapped children and youth. In each instance the features of residential, day school, self-contained class, resource room, consultant, and regular classroom programs can be pointed out,

along with the general criteria for determining the most appropriate type of service. Unique features including class size, physical structure, ancillary services needed, adult-pupil ratio, and room arrangement could be highlighted, along with the practice of successfully assigning many exceptional children and adolescents to regular classrooms for much of each day, aided by various supporting resources.

In identifying curricula and procedures available to handicapped students, one might familiarize participants with the use of individualized educational and treatment programs. This information may be followed by a categorical discussion and analysis of the teaching materials, procedures, and technology available to specific diagnostic groups. If undertaking this categorical strategy, sensory handicaps and physical impairments are best dealt with first. This suggestion is based primarily on the availability of audiovisual materials and books on the subject and the relative ease in comprehending these impairments and their associated teaching strategies. Also, sensory and physical handicaps are highly amenable to small-group and individual demonstration activities which, as far as possible, should be a component of this session. Specifically, students might be asked to participate in activities like completing an assignment blindfolded, learning a few simple "signs," or trying to write their names without using their hands.

In addition, one might demonstrate specific curricula and procedures used with the various groups, again pointing out that the materials and assignments given handicapped children are in many ways like those used by the majority of students. Whenever possible, students participating in the training should have an opportunity to utilize or experience firsthand the materials and procedures available for a specific handicapped group. Simulation activities have many advantages, but some precautionary measures must also be considered. Clore and Jeffrey (1972) reported that they were able to produce relatively long-term positive attitude changes by having individuals traverse a designated route in a wheelchair or by arranging for observation of this activity. But others (Wilson & Alcorn, 1969) failed to produce favorable attitude changes as a function of simulation opportunities. Donaldson (1980), in an analysis of these equivocal data, suggested that the critical factor may be how realistically a handicap is simulated and whether or not the person engaging in the activity is truly perceived by the "normal world" as being handicapped. Even though creating these realistic conditions in the classroom or training environment may be virtually impossible, attempts should be

made to at least maintain a "businesslike" atmosphere during the sessions. Though the intent should not be to create an air of tension, neither should a game atmosphere be allowed to prevail. Either extreme is likely to be detrimental to the desired final outcome.

An additional consideration in using simulation exercises is that certain types of conditions are far more difficult to imitate than others. Specifically, intellectual, learning, and behavioral problems are probably not appropriate for simulation exercises. As a recommendation, these exceptionalities should be discussed last so the teacher can be assured that the students have the basic concepts well in mind and understand the more obvious handicapping conditions and their intervention approaches. Finally, regarding the learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, and mentally retarded, an "excess-deficit" model is recommended. In accordance with that model, these exceptional children are to be presented as having areas of strengths and deficits and, subsequently, as being in need of individual attention in the areas of deficiency. Again, particular attention should be given to the similarities of academic materials and strategies used by these children and by regular students.

Historical Figures Who Had Handicaps

Discussions about famous individuals who were handicapped have been popular in these groups. Our history and that of many other countries abounds with documented accounts of historical figures faced with various types of handicapping or potentially handicapping conditions. This information can be fused into an information and discussion packet focusing on the capacity for change in individuals with handicaps. These materials should be designed to draw attention to the uniqueness of individuals and to the manner in which people have been able to adapt to their strengths and weaknesses.

An ample supply of entertaining teaching resources and aids is available. Recordings by entertainers like Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder, and books and films about individuals such as Helen Keller and Franklin Delano Roosevelt offer a source of inspiration that may not be possible in the other areas of discussion. When presenting information in this area, however, one should be careful not to communicate that any handicapped child or adult can overcome his or her handicap simply on the basis of inspiration. Since this is not the intended message or the proper inference, primary attention should be given to the adaptability of

individuals and the potential available to handicapped persons who are provided with appropriate educational and treatment alternatives.

Interacting with Handicapped Persons

Substantial data support the position that nonexceptional children and youth can be expected to interact appropriately with their exceptional peers only when given suitable direction for doing so. Thus, contrary to popular belief, simply providing for contacts between regular and special pupils seldom produces fortuitous attitude changes. After providing cognitive information on individual differences and various handicapping conditions, then, follow-up instruction must stress desirable response patterns.

One mechanism (which is highly compatible with the other activities in this series) for accomplishing this goal is to ask the pupils to identify school and community situations in which they might interact with handicapped persons. Often, the sessions can be made more realistic through role playing. And videotaping these simulation exercises usually helps stimulate discussion and corrective feedback. Regardless of the teaching method used, the training process should emphasize the desirability of a peer relationship with handicapped individuals rather than a "parent-child" or otherwise patronizing association. Also, students should be apprised of the need to maintain eye contact and acceptable conversational distance, address the other person by name, and have a topic or series of topics in mind. Even though students' anxiety level may be raised and their spontaneity reduced by being overly prepared, insufficient preparation presents greater danger. The overall intent is to create an atmosphere in which normal interactions and conversations will take place, but since indications are that this does not happen spontaneously, one is justified in creating the situations "artificially" to a certain extent.

With mildly to moderately handicapped populations, the emphasis should be on encouraging appropriate interactions under conditions as normal as possible. If the population being approached is severely or profoundly handicapped, however, additional preparation must precede the initiated interactions. One approach that met with success (Newman, 1978) involved displaying slides of individual severely handicapped pupils and discussing their characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses. The pupils' names, ages, strengths (e.g., he

"talks" with his fingers, he is very good at drawing cartoon characters) and areas of weakness (e.g., she lacks spoken language) were given. Although the discussion focused on the handicapped pupils' adaptive abilities and strengths, the obvious areas of variance were noted. And the regular class students received an opportunity to ask questions. The parents had granted the necessary permission to use the slides depicting their children, and some of the parents participated in the familiarization process.

As a part of the process of encouraging interactions, information should be provided on the responses students might encounter. The students must be made aware that their contacts, regardless of how well planned and executed, might be rebuffed or otherwise negatively connotated. Because the responses are unpredictable and varied, students must be instilled with realistic expectations and alternative responses.

Structuring Interactions with the Handicapped

Although some students can be expected to initiate contacts with handicapped children on their own or after receiving cognitive information and simulation experiences, many others will not. And, as noted earlier, contact in and of itself seldom results in significant attitude changes toward the handicapped. Nonstructured situations provide few safeguards against negative experiences and reinforcement of stereotypic perceptions. Consequently, interactions should be planned and structured. Such interactions have consistently been associated with positive attitude changes.

Structured integrational activities should involve moderately to severely handicapped pupils assigned to self-contained programs. Interactions of this type should not be undertaken with mildly handicapped pupils potentially eligible for or involved in a mainstreaming program, since these activities, despite their advantages, can sometimes solidify the original perception of a stereotypic handicapped condition and the individual's special education status. Interactions with these latter children call for more subtle involvement in cooperative games, projects, and other planned group activities that may facilitate interactions in the regular classroom.

A structured interaction strategy with the moderately to severely handicapped can result in a variety of benefits if certain precautions are taken. First, if a structured activity is selected as the vehicle for bringing together exceptional and nonexceptional children, the nature of the activity and the responses required must be given

careful thought. Activities that are beyond the range of abilities for the handicapped children or those requiring lengthy explanations and demonstrations are not suitable. Rather, alternatives such as simple physical education, music, art, and other recreational activities should be given priority. In addition, the special class teacher might practice the chosen integration activity with his or her students before the actual session, to raise the confidence level and help ensure competence.

As a note of caution — integrational activities should never be the initial step in the attitude modification series. Nonexceptional students must first receive cognitive information as a foundation for understanding and being able to successfully participate in the structured interactions. Along with that consideration, the activity should not be designed such that regular class students are brought in to "study" the handicapped. A structured joint activity must only provide an opportunity for interaction, hopefully under structured, pleasant conditions, between handicapped and nonhandicapped children.

Additionally, evidence points to the idea that positive attitude changes as a function of integrational activities are most apt to occur when the handicapped and nonhandicapped have equal status in terms of age, social or educational positioning. As Donaldson (1980) noted, "It appears that provisions of the opportunity for interaction between disabled persons will not ensure positive results, but that non-stereotypic attitudes are more likely to emerge when disabled and nondisabled persons are of at least equal status" (p. 507).

Finally, when individuals have been given an opportunity to familiarize themselves with a handicapped person (Langer, Fiske, Taylor, & Chanowitz, 1976) and the special apparatus and equipment used by exceptional persons (Marsh & Friedman, 1972), positive interactions are more likely. While one cannot dispute the overall logic and potential advantages of providing for structured interaction opportunities between normal and handicapped pupils, these benefits appear to be a direct function of the appropriateness of the activities.

Parent Concerns

Educators and other professional groups generally agree that parents represent the most significant influence in a child's life (Kauffman, 1977) and strongly influence the attitudes of their offspring. Given the profound influence of parents on their children's beliefs, any attitude modification strategy is obviously most

efficacious if families of both handicapped and non-handicapped children are involved as a vital component of the program. With both groups of parents, a positive atmosphere and a relationship of mutual trust with school personnel are prerequisite to successful attitude modification procedures. As McAfee and Vergason (1979) noted, "People (parents) who are disenfranchised will not actively seek to support the organization (education system); in fact, they generally will work against it in some way" (p. 3).

Further, a satisfactory relationship reflective of mutual trust and respect must precede the process of attitude modification. Society has historically been less than accepting of handicapped persons. As a result, parents of normal children may have problems of their own in accepting exceptional children and their integration in public schools. And parents of handicapped children may have experienced rejection of their offspring. Thus, without prior positive involvement, neither group can be expected to enthusiastically greet the prospect of an attitude management program.

Considerations for Parents of Regular Class Children

In many respects educators' strategy for influencing attitudes of parents of nonexceptional children is similar to that used with their children. The process involves dissemination of information about individual differences and common handicapping conditions, a rationale and basis for educating handicapped and nonhandicapped children together, educational materials and technology used with exceptional children and youth, and the need for acceptance and support from nonhandicapped peers and their families.

Although the general strategy for influencing parents' attitudes and perceptions resembles that used with their children, there are some differences, the primary one being that the time frame for sharing information with parents face-to-face is extremely restricted. Attempts to familiarize parents with common handicapping conditions and service delivery models, therefore, should be designed to provide information in as short a time as possible.

In one public school demonstration program associated with the University of Kansas, a short slide-tape presentation was introduced to parents at a PTO meeting, followed by an "open house." The open house was primarily intended for the parents to meet with their own child's teacher, but the invitation was further extended to all parents to visit the special education program. And parents of children in special education

were encouraged to visit a regular classroom. A large number of parents of regular class children did visit the special classrooms and received information on the way in which exceptional pupils were individually planned for and served. A PTO meeting later that year included explanation of an attitude modification program for regular students being conducted in the school, along with a request for support from the nonhandicapped student body and the parents. Special attention was given to the advantages of encouraging contacts between exceptional and regular children, pointing out that in mainstreaming classes, this interaction did not adversely affect nonhandicapped students' progress. The benefits to regular class students of being able to better understand conditions relating to handicapped persons were also mentioned. Although the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act was noted, it was not cited as the basis for the current program. Thus, rather than giving the parents a reason to "blame the government" for the current emphasis on exceptional children, the program attempted to focus on other, more farsighted reasons for the involvement.

Face-to-face contact with parents is not the only strategy possible for disseminating information about the handicapped. Nonetheless, attempts to initiate such contacts are strongly recommended, because programs without this component have frequently failed to produce the desired results.

Considerations for Parents of Exceptional Children

Just as support from parents of nonhandicapped children is an important ingredient in attitude management programs, so is the involvement of parents of exceptional children. Interest in programs to modify prevailing attitudes toward exceptional children and youth, however, will come only after establishment of basic trust and communication, and only after the parents' more basic needs have been satisfied.

Trust as a necessary, basic component of a parent-educator relationship has been reported by Kroth (1975) and Kroth and Simpson (1977), among others. Even so, the relationship between parents and educators has historically not been characterized by a high degree of trust. According to Kroth and Simpson (1977), trust is the "belief that another person will act honestly or perform reliably and, therefore, can be depended upon (p. 34)." Without this ingredient, parent-teacher interactions can be expected to function at less than an optimal level, and support from parents for attitude modification programs can be anticipated to be marginal at best.

At the same time, parents of handicapped children must be recognized as having certain needs and as passing through various stages. Before parents are able to serve as advocates for all exceptional individuals, their personal needs and those of their child must be satisfied. As Kroth and Scholl (1978) have suggested, "School personnel must be aware that lower needs must be satisfied before one progresses to the next higher level (p. 16)." Consequently, a fundamental premise in soliciting parents' support for attitude modification programs must be to assure that basic needs of the parents and their handicapped children are being met.

At the Judevine Center for Autistic Children in St. Louis, parents at times conduct visitor tours of the facility and interpret the intervention procedures and curricula. On one such occasion, two parents of children at the Center transmitted information about the program to a group of high school students. After the tour, several of these students were overheard saying how impressed they were that the parents were so involved and that the information had been shared on such a personal level. When the parents were told about that response, they replied that they were able to function as a part of the staff only because they were pleased with the program and because their own personal needs were being met.

When dealing with parents of exceptional children, one must also be sensitive to past difficulties they may have had in working with schools and school personnel. A legacy of conflict and frustration in obtaining satisfactory services for children, frustrations in traversing the bureaucracy of the public school and state education system, and discouragement upon realizing limited gains in children and youth exposed to expensive, time-consuming programs may all serve to counterpoise the goal of recruiting parent support for new programs. At the same time, though, one should keep in mind that, "There is more historic data to document the role of parents as agents of school system change than of school initiated direct pupil change" (Simpson & Poplin, in press). In view of the past successes of parents in that regard, educators are behooved to work for the support of this population. The effectiveness of attitude management and other programs has been and most likely will continue to be highly related to parent involvement.

Exceptional Pupil Procedures

A number of theorists and researchers have found that the relatively negative perceptions held about

handicapped persons are most directly associated with this group's overt behavior (Johnson, 1950; Wilson, 1970). Specific behaviors have been identified as "nastiness" and ignoring interpersonal peer initiations (Bryan & Bryan, 1978), antisocial behavior (Kauffman, 1977), and other aberrant responses (MacMillan et al., 1974). In a discussion of the social consequences of deviant behavior, Hobbs (1975) observed that society maintains rather rigid restrictions on behaviors that will and will not be tolerated. When a person engages in behavior outside the parameters of social acceptance — such as is found in the response patterns of some handicapped children and youth — the system (school, social institutions, and so on) implements consequences that vary in strength and restrictiveness. Each of these consequences works to maintain the order of the majority and to distinguish between individuals who are in basic compliance with expectations of a given social order and those who are not.

Given this state of affairs, attitudes of regular class pupils toward the handicapped will not be easily modified without overt behavior changes on the part of this group. Regardless of the relative effectiveness of an attitude modification curriculum or the amenability of students, parents, and educators, a change in attitude toward the handicapped must be based at least partially on patterns of acceptable behavior by exceptional children. This should not be taken to mean that exceptional children and youth, whether assigned to regular, resource, or self-contained programs, must reflect total "normality." It does imply, however, an approximation of normality, especially in the areas of social responsiveness. If progress is made in this direction, the attitudes of regular class pupils toward the handicapped will reflect the quality and extent of the assessment, behavior management, evaluation, physical environment, curriculum, socialization, and other basic educational services provided exceptional pupils. Failure to attend satisfactorily to this basic and underlying area may neutralize the influence of other components in any attitude modification effort.

CONCLUSION

Influencing the attitudes of regular class children and youth more positively toward the handicapped is prerequisite to effective integration and mainstreaming. The emphasis placed by the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act on integrating handicapped children and youth into the least restrictive environment points to the significance of this need. For handicapped

children and youth to be accepted by their normal peers in the mainstream of public education, however, requires methods and procedures designed to facilitate this process. The special educator has the primary role in facilitating the integration process, through more than the academic and social preparation of handicapped pupils. Without direct, effective measures for positively modifying the attitudes and behavior of regular class children and teachers, handicapped pupils will continue to experience more rejection than they should.

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CLASSROOM FORUM

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Although I have tried to group my students according to their abilities, they still seem to be in heterogeneous groups when it comes to certain learning tasks in the classroom. Does any research explain to the teacher how to teach students who have high ability but who fail to perform well in such groups?

Most of life is spent on the process of "getting there," not on the final achievement. With children who have learning problems, we should think more about the learning process than the final outcome. Research doesn't tell us how individual children learn best or how to best teach them. Researchers generally do not look at children close up. Likewise, teachers often fail to look at the research close up. Research suggests teaching procedures, but the teacher has to make the final decisions. The curriculum should be based on researchers' suggestions for curriculum development, but research alone will not result in a ready-made curriculum. Teaching strategies within the curriculum should be based on current research findings in the literature, along with your own research concerning your own students.

Learning styles are often predictable if you know what to look for in your students. Most people have several different learning styles and use each according to what is to be learned. To discover the learning styles of individual students, you must carefully observe how the student behaves in specific learning situations. Does Bill use similar strategies for different tasks? How does he attack the learning task? How does he compensate? Also, you should keep in mind that children with similar abilities and disabilities may not have the same learning styles because they have learned to use these abilities or disabilities differently. How this has affected them, along with the impact of the disability, is different for each student.

When looking at individual learning styles, remember that a learning style has four major components. First, one must take into consideration the physiological aspects of the individual. Is the child on any medication that might affect overall behavior in the learning situation? Is he or she tired, sick, upset?

Second, one must acknowledge the attitudinal and emotional aspects of learning. The child's attitude

toward past learning experiences affects his or her current attitude toward learning in general. If the child has no need to respond or is not an active participant in the learning process, he or she most likely will not learn the task at hand. Self-expectation determines whether a child plunges ahead with a learning task or gives up easily after only the slightest hint of possible defeat.

A third component of learning style is on-task behavior. To analyze the various facets of on-task behavior, you could time an individual work task and observe the student's initiative regarding starting the task. Does Amy get started right away or does she immediately look for excuses? To what extent does she concentrate on the task at hand? (This may be difficult to analyze from mere observation since one cannot "read" the thoughts going on inside a student's head.) How does Amy plan and organize her work related to the task? Does she work quickly just to complete the task, or does she show evidence of thought and concentration when working out the solution?

The fourth area of consideration concerns both the psychological processes involved in and the general mental abilities required for learning the task. Here, the dynamics of problem-solving behavior come into play. The object is to get the student to think through and analyze problems in general, not just those related to academic learning. Problem solving is actually concept learning. Too frequently, we teach concepts but not *concept learning* — generalizing, categorizing, classifying objects or events in terms of their attributes or functions.

To teach concept learning, you may first have to modify the concept because many children have concrete definitions for abstract ideas and, thus, understand such concepts only at face value. One can validate a concept by applying the criteria to other objects and events. The criteria must be stated clearly, along with the principle or rule for inclusion or exclusion into a specific category. You may also have to abstract and identify the common factor for the child. Then you might ask him or her to compare objects or events and identify the various similarities and differences. For some students, you may have to help them attend to single qualities of objectives, events, and ideas before expanding their concept learning.

Of primary concern to the teacher who must deal with a variety of learning styles is the integration of these styles into effective teaching strategies in the classroom. Then, one can improve learning styles, even teach learning styles. You can remediate a disability, use ability to compensate for disability, or direct a child's learning style if you know what to look for in student learning styles.