

FOCUS ON EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

Excellence at the Cost of Instructional Equity? The Potential Impact of Recommended Reforms Upon Low Achieving Students

Mary Ross Moran

Even a partial listing of recent recommendations for restructuring American education overwhelms the concerned educator. Despite plentiful analysis and advice, however, important issues remain to be addressed in the current debates. Omissions range from insufficient attention to early education (Howe, 1983) to lack of concern for differing urban, suburban, and rural problems (Odden, 1983). A notable omission—the failure of reformers to offer practical suggestions for resolving the conflict between excellence and equity—is arguably the most serious open issue facing education today.

Following two decades of social reforms in the schools (James & Tyack, 1983), a changed focus in Administration policy has altered the vocabulary of educational reform: talk is now of *ability* rather than *access* (Clark, Astuto, & Rooney, 1983). The authors cited here have mentioned the need to safeguard previously underserved groups, but concern has been limited to preservation of *financial* equity. This article goes beyond adequacy of funding to explore the implications of the call for excellence upon *instructional* equity for low achievers.

This discussion is not relevant to *all* handicapped students. Handicapped low achievers are defined as those who do not demonstrate obvious sensory, physical, or behavioral handicaps upon school entry but are later classified because low academic performance is determined to result from a handicapping condition. "These are students who are administratively defined as being in need of special services because of learning problems, either specific or general" (Madden & Slavin, 1983, p. 522).

Low achievers are defined as those scoring below the 35th percentile on standardized achievement tests (Kenoyer, 1982) and receiving one or more failing grades in required subjects, with a grade average typically below C (Warner, Alley, Schumaker, Deshler, & Clark, 1980). Those who have not been identified as

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handicapped may be placed in special remedial reading and subject-matter classes or in compensatory programs such as Chapter I (Mullin & Summers, 1983).

Such an either-or division of handicapped and non-handicapped learners for purposes of discussing large groups of students does not deny the reality that some individuals are eligible to participate in more than one categorical program. Furthermore, although low achievers are not limited to economically deprived or linguistic/ethnic/racial minorities, the overrepresentation of such subgroups among low achievers (Pink, 1982) justifies focus on their special problems in a discussion of educational equity. For all subgroups of low achievers, school experiences are similar enough to provide a rationale for considering them a discrete group of academic performers.

Why should special educators be concerned that low achievers might be at risk in the growing educational reform movement? How have common experiences led to shared interests in school structures? How can advocates ensure that the interests of low achievers are preserved under changing federal, state, and local priorities for education?

Discussion of these three questions provides the structure of an argument for a political and educational

coalition. Special-education and remedial-compensatory-education activists should join together for the purpose of claiming a place for low achievers in mainstream education—an integration denied over decades and now threatened anew by a major shift in educational direction.

RISKS TO LOW ACHIEVERS

Amid the rhetoric of recent appeals to reform education, particularly in the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), are some recommendations that should cause concern among educators interested in the welfare of low achievers. If the Commission report has captured the tenor of the times (and Clark et al. [1983] concluded that it has done so), the present national climate may jeopardize low achievers as more competitive postures in economics and politics react with reduced federal categorical funding to generate pressures for simplistic, low-cost differentiated instruction such as intensified tracking.

Increased Competition

The challenge to compete with other nations in commerce, industry, science, and technology begins in the second sentence of the National Commission report (p. 5); then the theme is repeated in demands to reverse "a steady 15-year decline in industrial productivity, as one great American industry after another falls to world competition" (p. 18). The statement: "We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge" (p. 5) reminds us that we are also competing militarily with the Soviet Union.

In tracing past efforts to reform secondary schools, James and Tyack (1983) pointed out the similarities between the political and economic competitions of the post-Sputnik era and those of the early 1980s. Conservative times, they asserted, are marked by anxiety about productivity in competition with international rivals. Conservative educational reform then tends to focus on the academically talented, on academics in general, on science and mathematics in particular, and on high standards for both achievement and school discipline (Resnick & Resnick, 1983).

The functions of schooling in competitive times are narrowed to strictly cognitive outcomes while social effects are minimized (Howe, 1983; Yeakey, 1982). Amid such a climate in the late 1950s, political conservatism joined with shifts in educational philosophy to react against progressive education and its social goals (Ornstein, 1982). Similarly, at the present time, "Most people . . . agree that the public schools were 'used' (to

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the schools' disadvantage) for social ends" (Clark et al., 1983, p. 192). Such shifts have been described as episodes in the continuing debate between advocates of schooling for socialization and schooling for intellectual excellence. "The latter tends to prevail during periods of heightened international competition" (Kaestle & Smith, 1982, p. 393).

To those who remember Conant's (1959) proposed educational reforms, the present intensified Cold War climate of competition with its goal of winning through technological mastery is familiar. The National Commission's charge that "America can't compete because education has been allowed to deteriorate into mediocrity (pp. 8-10) is a repetition of post-Sputnik rhetoric.

The rhetoric is the same, but the economic conditions are quite different. Whereas the late 1950s and early 1960s were periods of unprecedented economic growth (James & Tyack, 1983; Yeakey, 1982), the economy has been in decline since the early 1970s, resulting in widespread cuts and reallocation of funds for education at state and local levels (Odden, 1983). Futurists have said that this situation is more than a temporary economic recession; they have predicted unemployment and underemployment resulting from decreased productivity into the 1990s (Abbott, 1977; Best, 1978).

The distinction that must be made is that in prosperous times the disenfranchised can gain benefits without competing against essential services for mainstream groups (Safer, Burnette, & Hobbs, 1979). When the economy is lean, however, redistribution of resources means that gains for some groups equal cutbacks for others (Lazerson, 1982).

The call to excellence in the late 1950s was first directed toward enriched school experiences for the gifted (McLaughlin, 1982). But when low socioeconomic groups, racial minorities, and the handicapped began to insist on their share of educational funds in the 1960s, assistance was not limited to the most able students (Yeakey, 1982). At that time enough money was available for separate and extra services to serve a broader segment of the population in the public schools.

Decreased Categorical Funding

In contrast, the 1980s opened upon severe cutbacks in federal funds for education. In 1981 and 1982, "The cumulative reductions of nearly 20% were beyond the imagination of the education community, which had grown accustomed over the previous 25 years to regular increments in federal support for education" (Clark et al., 1983, p. 188). When the 1982-83 congressional appropriations reduced programs for disadvantaged

students and for bilingual, vocational, and Indian education (Yeakey, 1982), it was clear that the social gains of the previous two decades could be readily undone. As funds became competitive, marginal social groups lacking political experience and representation were subject to backlash.

This happened because, "Past a certain point, equalizing tendencies in education run counter to the ethos of competitive inequality that shapes a hierarchical society such as ours" (James & Tyack, 1983, p. 406). Beneath the claims that changes in federal funding reflect an intention to return education to state and local control is what Pratte (1982) has called a "real relations-type explanation" that overproduction of educated manpower leads to societal stress and "political radicalism among educated youths" (p. 95). "Across the entire political and social spectrum, the reaction to the discovery that public generosity and private gain are not compatible at a time of shrinking or stable resources has provoked the most mean-spirited of responses" (Lazerson, 1982, p. 410).

By 1984 the budget request not only proposed cuts in categorical aid but also introduced initiatives for vouchers, tuition tax credits for private schools, and tax incentives to encourage families to save for education (Clark et al., 1983). The concept that individuals should pay more of their own education costs "is indicative of the Administration's view that education is a private convenience rather than a public good" (Yeakey, 1982, p. 24).

This change has also been interpreted as a shift from an egalitarian view of equal access to education to a free-market view in which government may legitimately limit individuals to whatever education is negotiated in open competition between for-profit and public institutions, with decisions about educational offerings made at state and local levels (Imber & Namenson, 1983). The National Commission report appears to reinforce the open-market view by placing the primary responsibility for financing and governing the schools with state and local officials, school board members, and governors. Although the report also exhorts federal leaders to help meet the needs of special groups such as gifted and talented, socioeconomically disadvantaged, minority, and handicapped students, the admonition that "the assistance of the Federal Government should be provided with a minimum of administrative burden and intrusiveness" (pp. 32-33) appears to argue against categorical aid, at least as that aid has been previously administered.

Describing the reasoning behind federal block grants to states, McLaughlin (1982) summarized: "There is general agreement that the previous gaggle of categorical

programs generated a mass of unnecessary paperwork and a maze of overlapping and often contradictory regulations, resulted in counterproductive fragmentation of educational services, distorted state and local budget priorities and often impeded the efforts of state and local educators to act on what they had learned about more effective practice" (p. 565). Yeakey (1982) speculated that even without the present Administration initiatives, some form of block grant would have been forthcoming to consolidate the approximately 160 categorical programs (p. 24). Clark et al. (1983) reported that Washington interviews during the summer of 1983 revealed the Administration continuing to oppose categorical aid. Despite concern for limited constituencies such as the economically deprived and handicapped, "a majority view in Congress" holds that "the 100-plus categorical aid programs of the sixties and seventies were inefficient and ineffective; that route should not be followed again" (p. 192).

Analysts have not been optimistic about what will happen to equity priorities if categorical funds are consolidated into block grants to states. Left to its own preferences about fiscal allocations, states "might set a low priority for providing special educational assistance to disadvantaged, handicapped, and bilingual children" (Tsang & Levin, 1983, p. 331). "We ought to move more education programs out of Washington, but the states will not maintain priorities for minorities, the handicapped or women" (Clark et al., 1983, p. 192). Because federal categorical policies didn't alter state and local educational structures, removal of the federal authority that protects equity goals means that competitions for funds "will now be waged in individual states and localities rather than on Capitol Hill" as block grant consolidation "cedes responsibility for federal goals to the very agencies whose inability or unwillingness to address these goals prompted a federal education policy in the first place (McLaughlin, 1982, p. 581).

Intensified Tracking

The potential loss of categorical funds, combined with a political shift away from egalitarian views of education, presents the risk that tracking will be seen as a solution to the problem of delivering enriched instruction to the able. The National Commission report exhorts educators to meet the needs of all students, but, as Howe (1983) pointed out, amid the proposals that both subject-matter and skills requirements be stiffened, no mention is made of how to serve students rejected by this new rigor. Although the word *tracking* is not used in the report, Resnick and Resnick (1983) viewed that omission as

deliberate. "By choosing not to address this issue, the Commission ensured that its analysis and recommendations would be acceptable to broad segments of the American public" (p. 180).

Even without the term, the National Commission's call for differentiated instruction is clearly conveyed:

Secondary school curricula have been homogenized, diluted and diffused (p. 18) . . . We must emphasize that the variety of student aspirations, abilities, and preparation requires that appropriate content be available to satisfy diverse needs . . . The most gifted students, for example, may need a curriculum enriched and accelerated beyond even the needs of other students of high ability. Similarly, educationally disadvantaged students may require special curriculum materials, smaller classes, or individual tutoring to help them master the material presented. (p. 24)

Reports by Boyer (1983), Goodlad (1983), and Sizer (1983) have recommended strongly that achievement tracking be abolished; at the same time, they all acknowledged that, where it is in place, it is firmly entrenched in the system. Boyer found three-way (academic, general, and vocational) interclass (segregation of entire classes) tracking in place among the 15 high schools investigated by the Carnegie team. Goodlad found the same type of tracking in all 13 of the comprehensive high schools and 12 of the junior high schools studied by his team, although at the elementary level he found intraclass (within a group of 25-30 students) division only into reading and mathematics groups. According to Resnick and Resnick (1983), extensive tracking exists in comprehensive high schools but little or none in junior high and middle schools.

As a response to the National Commission report, Resnick and Resnick have proposed "competitive-entry tracking, beginning at about age 15," though they also argued that "the easy way is to begin tracking earlier" (p. 180). Although secondary tracking is usually depicted as a choice made by the student under guidance, Boyer (1983) illustrated that the guidance is inadequate and tends to reinforce the learner's prior school history. Earlier tracking is thus a danger because "students enrolled in remedial classes in the early school years . . . carry learning deficits into the higher grades" (Goodlad, 1983, p. 146).

Surveys of teachers have consistently indicated that they approve of tracking by ability and prefer to teach what they consider to be more homogeneous groups (Madden & Slavin, 1983; Winn & Wilson, 1983). According to Goodlad, segregated schooling has wide appeal as a sensible program: "For many people, tracking appears to be such a rational common-sense solution to a vexing problem that arguments against it are often ridiculed as soft, progressive, fuzzy-headed thinking" (p.

150). "People, especially the more affluent people, like tracking" (Sizer, 1983, p. 682).

Consider what happened the last time the nation embarked on a course of excellence in education. Although ability grouping did not begin in the post-Sputnik period, it flourished in that competitive era of demands for educational excellence. The precedent for tracking was set with the first categorical funds for vocational programs in 1917 (Kaestle & Smith, 1982). Tracking into academic and vocational strands continued through the 1930s but declined over the 1940s and 1950s when jobs became more plentiful. Following the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958, ability grouping was increasingly employed as the means to provide the enriched programs for academically talented thought by reformers to provide the technological skills needed to compete with the U.S.S.R. (Winn & Wilson, 1983).

Between 1917 and 1958, however, a major change had taken place in the population of the public schools. The involvement of labor groups in vocational education and the routing of unemployed youth to schools during the Depression opened the schools to the masses (Kaestle & Smith, 1982). In 1920 only 32% of the 14- to 17-year-old age group was in school, but by 1950 that percentage had increased to 77%, and 57% graduated from high school. Less dramatic growth took place between 1960 and 1978, but the increase was from 86% to 94%—nearly all the youth in that age group in the country (James & Tyack, 1983).

With such growth, of course, the diversity of the student population increased. As a means to deal with this diversity, alternatives to tracking, such as nongraded primary classes and open classrooms with flexible grouping, were explored during the 1960s. But innovations such as these could not overcome the entrenchment of the self-contained, age-graded classroom with its auxiliary practices of teacher training, textbook preparation, testing, and building construction. Longo (1982) has described how resistance to change occurs in schools so that any innovation is rejected if it threatens the complex web of interdependent structures built around the accepted model.

In the wake of the National Commission report, the schools' continuing resistance to changes that might require restructuring of models could be expected to combine with demands for excellence to produce insistence upon more rigorous *traditional* education. Analysts have offered no encouragement that reforms might reconstruct the whole system of education. Pointing out that educators must reflect on what they can learn from the past, Howe (1983) concluded that, "The main lesson

has been that change in educational institutions comes slowly and with great difficulty" (p. 168). Odden (1983) cautioned that desire for economic growth produced the calls for educational excellence, with politicians and business leaders, rather than educators, heading the movement. Clark et al. (1983) expressed concern that educators are working under siege because, in the wave of reform and specifically in the National Commission report, "they are usually defined as part of the problem—not the solution" (p. 192). Furthermore, "The best guess anyone can ever offer about change in organizations, or politics is that the least possible change is the most likely" (p. 193).

Since tracking was earlier seen as a solution to the tensions between increased diversity among the student population and pressure for more rigorous academic programs for able students, it probably will be so viewed again. If the schools couldn't deal with 77% of the school-age youth without tracking, are they likely to handle the diversity of 94% without resorting to that simplistic, low-cost solution requiring no structural change in school models?

COMMON EXPERIENCES OF LOW ACHIEVERS

A rationale for a political and educational coalition between special education and remedial/compensatory education begins with acknowledgment of similar educational experiences. These subgroups share a history of outgroup status that placed them together on one side of a wall, with regular, mainstream education on the other side. Since "special education can be seen as a special case of tracking" (Madden & Slavin, 1983, p. 555), and since both low socioeconomic and racial or linguistic minority membership predict low-track placement (Winn & Wilson, 1983), these subgroups also share the effects of segregated schooling.

Outgroup Status

The barrier between categorical programs and regular education derived in part from the fact that social change was legislated. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 codified claims of previously underserved groups to public education, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and its later amendments extended those claims. The timing of these changes, however, indicates that response to the claims of underserved groups was born out of a crisis of civil unrest in urban areas (Wilson, 1982).

Schools were thrust by liberals into the role of equalizing opportunity for upward economic and social

mobility. According to reproduction theorists, this role contradicted the conservation function of schools in maintaining a stratified society and a permanent underclass of low-wage laborers as a hedge against labor unrest (Anyon, 1981; Giroux, 1983; Pratte, 1982).

Reproduction theories could account for the motivation of the dominant group in relegating poor, minority, and handicapped students to segregated schooling. But to understand the motivation of these subgroups in affirmatively seeking segregation is, in retrospect, much more difficult. Perhaps the economical explanation lies in the timing of the federal government's offers of special funding for handicapped and educationally disadvantaged populations. In the mid-1960s, of course, social changes being implemented through the schools coincided with the peak of the baby boom reaching school age and causing overcrowded classrooms and a severe teacher shortage (Gordon, 1983).

Under conditions of large-group, undifferentiated instruction, the normally developing, middle-class, white students, whose language skills and cultural experiences were the same as the teachers', could achieve academically. Those with more diverse cognitive skills, language, and experiences, resulting from handicapping conditions or cultural differences, could not achieve (Shepard, 1983). Crowded schools thus fostered an achievement gap.

The achievement divergence was genuine, but it need not have led to segregation of low achievers. For that to happen, two other conditions were necessary. First, the group defined as inferior on the basis of low achievement had to accept that outgroup status. Second, parents and other advocates for low achievers had to agree that segregated instruction was in the students' best interests.

Considerable literature is available discussing how a group becomes defined as inferior on the basis of any characteristic that distinguishes it from the ingroup, whose characteristics are always viewed as superior. In the field of psychology, for example, Hornéy (1973) described how a group in power creates an ideology suitable to help maintain its position by interpreting the differentness of a weaker group as inferiority. In social science, for another example, Pink (1982) illustrated how labeling groups as outsiders leads to antisocial behavior, which is then used as an excuse to perpetuate the exclusion.

In the case of the schools, the cognitive learning styles and language skills of the achieving students were defined as the norms and different styles were viewed as deviant. In this way the schools were able to demonstrate that the blame for lack of achievement lay in the deviant

students rather than in the instructional practices and climates of schools.

The next step in the process was the creation of what Pratte (1983) has called a "restricted argument" (p. 22). Although he was discussing cultural difference, Pratte's example also serves to illustrate what happened to low socioeconomic and handicapped students. The argument is this: If a student has a specific liability by virtue of which he or she is less likely to succeed in school, and if some program is deemed able to overcome that liability, and if each student is entitled to receive the program that is best for him or her, then the conclusion is that everyone with the liability is entitled to receive the program. The class that is generated by this process is restricted in number to those demonstrating the defined liability or deficit. "The point is that the host or dominant group in society has rendered a judgment about a class of students," which is a "compensatory or deficit model of education," wherein a selected characteristic of a group requires a specific program "to overcome the liability" (p. 22).

Since only the restricted class is entitled to it, the program must be delivered in such a way as to ensure that only the deficit group participates. Therefore, the group entitled to the special program must be segregated.

This type of reasoning proved attractive to advocates for services for the handicapped and for low socioeconomic groups. The fact that federal categorical funds were tied to the groups' acceptance of the deficit model of education apparently seemed a reasonable trade-off for obtaining smaller pupil-teacher ratios. Segregation was considered to be in the best interests of the participating students because they could thus be assured of a more appropriate education (Madden & Slavin, 1983).

When Dunn (1968) and others offered evidence to question whether self-contained special education classes produced a more appropriate education, and when early achievement outcomes of compensatory education proved insignificant (Mullin & Summers, 1983), it became clear that the trade-off was not in the best interests of the participants. By the later 1960s, however, the concept of special education and compensatory education as add-ons rather than as integral parts of the instructional program had been legitimized and perpetuated by the complex bureaucracy of the federal categorical aid programs. Separate administration, teachers, materials, and accountability requirements all militated against any real chance of integrating the peripheral programs into regular education. Even with the advent of the least-restrictive clause and attempts at mainstreaming handicapped learners, the administra-

tive and managerial structure of special education and compensatory education remained "institutional appendages," never part of general education activities at state or local levels (McLaughlin, 1982, p. 569).

Segregated Schooling

Despite the price paid in terms of outgroup status, separating low achievers into tracked programs did not produce growth in academic achievement. Although considerable literature exists on the negative social and emotional effects of labeling students as deviant and segregating them for instruction (Longo, 1982; Madden & Slavin, 1983; Winn & Wilson, 1983), the *academic* outcome is what is relevant in a discussion of the National Commission report. As Howe (1983) pointed out, the report does not concern itself at all with noncognitive outcomes of schooling. But even if the evidence is limited to achievement outcomes, segregation has had negative effects on low achievers.

For example, a recent review of studies of special-class or resource placement versus regular-class placement for mildly handicapped low achievers (Madden & Slavin, 1983) led those authors to conclude that regular class placement with only minimal accommodations for low achievers was preferable in terms of achievement outcomes.

Esposito's (1973) review of studies of tracking conducted between 1960 and 1972 indicated that, overall, the evidence points to increased differentiation in achievement; that is, whatever the academic achievement gaps at the time separation occurs, the differences increase as tracking continues. Schaefer, Olexa, and Polk (1973) reported, for instance, that between grades 7 and 12 student scores for academic and nonacademic tracks became more widely separated each year. Winn and Wilson (1983) summarized that the direct result of tracking is "increased academic differentiation of pupils."

A widening gap between tracks is, of course, what serves to perpetuate tracking over time. Both Esposito (1973) and Winn and Wilson (1983) documented that only 2% to 7% of students move into a higher track. Most remain stable, but if there is a trend, it is downward.

Stability of track status is usually discussed in terms of reduced teacher expectations for lower-track students. Longo (1982) described how persons perceived as deviant begin to behave in accord with the perceiver's expectations. According to Pink (1982), the public nature of the labels attached to low achievers causes changes in the entire climate of the school toward those labeled, so that low-track students perceive that the school has

no expectations for their success and they give up trying to improve performance. This indicator of school climate holds up after removing the effects of both class and race (p. 58).

Studies of differing allocation of curricular resources show that low-track students are exposed to reduced learning opportunities. Odden (1983) and Pink (1982) cited studies documenting that low-track students were assigned less homework, followed a less rigorous curriculum, and spent less time on task. Madden and Slavin (1983) described special education classes in which students completed half as many lessons and read content material one-fourth as often as regular-class students. After extensively reviewing both special- and compensatory-education studies, Leinhardt and Pally (1982) concluded that restricted settings have a negative influence on academic focus, time on task, and pacing (p. 574).

Goodlad (1983) and Anyon (1981) both reported observations of teachers putting forth reduced effort with low-track students. Teachers interviewed by Goodlad's team expressed candid preference for upper tracks (p. 152). Anyon found teachers openly selecting textbooks that were too easy for the IQ levels of the students in low socioeconomic groups and stressing drill and basic skill work in preference to tasks requiring reflection or critical thought (p. 39). In the case of special education teachers, low expectations for achievement often lead to diversion of the program from academic work to social development (Madden & Slavin, 1983).

Low achievers have thus shared the effects of segregated schooling in terms of minimal achievement resulting from less rigorous standards for performance and reduced teacher expectations. The similarity of these experiences gives subgroups of low achievers a shared interest in eliminating tracking and in lobbying for instructional equity.

PROTECTING THE INTERESTS OF LOW ACHIEVERS THROUGH FEDERAL FUNDING

Consolidation of special-remedial-compensatory education on the basis of shared history and goals appears to be timely. It offers potential as an alternative to unrestricted block grants subject to diversion away from serving the interests of present categorical aid recipients.

How can a period of severe fiscal cutbacks appear to present an opportunity? Tensions between the Administration and the Congress over educational policy seem to offer a chance for negotiation of creative solutions. If accurate inferences have been drawn from recent interviews (Clark et al., 1983), concerns about

limited constituencies such as the handicapped, racial and linguistic minorities, and educationally disadvantaged students continue to attract legislators toward categorical funding. According to Tsang and Levin (1983), when the federal government pays part of the cost of educating students whose needs require more expensive services, such as lower teacher-student ratios, it is because educating such students is in the *national* interest. Students described in the National Commission report as "the Nation's youth who are most at risk" (p. 32) should be viewed as those most appropriate for continuing federal aid.

What is needed is a method to simplify this aid, reduce the bureaucratic inefficiency involved in delivering federal funds for underrepresented groups, and still allow the Congress to protect those constituencies in accord with perceived national responsibilities for education. A coalition of major recipients of present categorical aid could lobby for one consolidated grant.

Details of strategies for consolidating special interests will be matters for diplomacy and negotiation among the activists who take up the cause of low achievers. The following discussion of how to use funds to foster integration of identified low achievers into mainstream education, and examples of how funds might be allocated by states and administered within districts, are meant to be merely illustrative. Agreements and compromises would have to be worked out to develop a lobbying agenda for the proposed coalition.

Purpose

The purpose of lobbying for aid targeted for low achievers is to abolish tracking and obtain instructional equity so that *all* students might achieve excellence in education. The National Commission report provides many of the right words: *excellence* is defined to mean "performing on the boundary of individual ability in ways that test and push back personal limits . . ." (p. 12), and the goal of reform is to "demand the best effort and performance from all students, whether they are gifted or less able, affluent or disadvantaged, whether destined for college, the farm or industry" (p. 24).

Admonitions about federal equity obligations will not achieve the goal of excellence for low achievers. The rhetoric should be backed with federal funds so that low achievers can demand integration into the mainstream in exchange for bringing federal aid to state and local agencies. What should be the major use of the aid? The money should be used to fund extra teacher positions to reduce teacher-pupil ratios and permit heterogeneous grouping of high, average, and low

achievers in smaller classes (Glass, 1980); funds should also be used for specific inservice training for teachers and administrators in applying effective-schools practices (Gross, 1983; Leinhardt & Palfay, 1982) to heterogeneous classes, which offer more promise than segregated schooling for raising achievement levels of all students (Madden & Slavin, 1983).

When the deficit model of education is abandoned so that the characteristic of interest is one possessed by *all* students, an "unrestricted argument" is developed as follows: if students are entitled to receive a special program by virtue of having a specific characteristic, and if everyone has that property, then everyone is entitled to the program (Pratte, 1983, p. 29). Thus:

It may turn out that the most effective mainstreaming methods are those that recognize that all students are "special" in that they have unique academic and social needs, and that classroom organizational forms that are able to respond to these needs in the regular classroom setting are needed for all students, whether or not they have identifiable academic handicaps. (Madden & Slavin, 1983, p. 561)

This model is compatible with instructional equity. As Salomone (1982) described the term *equity*, it is more than equality, which refers to "division, partition, and redistribution." Equity, in contrast, "aims at achieving substantive as opposed to procedural equality" as it "looks toward equal status and not equal treatment as a goal" (pp. 222-223).

If one accepts this definition of equity, the mere provision of adequate fiscal resources for peripheral or add-on categorical programs for subgroups of low achievers must be considered wide of the mark. As long as delivery systems and administration are separate from mainstream education, the outgroup status of low achievers militates against instructional equity.

Instead of accepting segregated schooling delivered through special education, compensatory education, and other pullout programs, advocates for low achievers have an opportunity to join together to demand full integration into regular education for a consolidated category of low achievers.

Identification

For purposes of counting which students are in the category, inclusion should be based upon low achievement without regard to the *cause* of the lowered academic performance. In other words, all that must be demonstrated is that the students have earned scores below a specific cut-off on standardized achievement tests and are performing below average in the classroom. The assumption is *not* that the learners have some deficit

but, rather, that individual cognitive or linguistic styles require adjustments on the part of teachers and administrators to raise the students' achievement.

Would this mean that low achievers now served by special education would no longer be classified under a categorical label? Yes. Special education has been diverting too much staff time to determining which category of exceptionality is appropriate to serve low achieving students (Gardner, 1982).

When the reason for referral is *academic* functioning, a likely speculation is that students may be learning disabled. The literature in this category of exceptionality reveals that identification problems have absorbed the major efforts of numbers of researchers, notably in the Kansas and Minnesota Institutes for Research in Learning Disabilities, for more than five years. Gains have been made in understanding the learning characteristics of this heterogeneous group, but results of all this investigation have failed to disclose reliable methods of distinguishing the learning disabled from other low achievers. In fact, data continue to document overlap in identification profiles, classroom performance, and demographic factors (Warner, Alley, Schumaker, Deshler, & Clark, 1980; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Shinn, & McGue, 1982).

While researchers worked on differential diagnosis, the cost of identifying a learning disabled student was rising above \$600 per placement in wages of personnel for testing and staffings. In contrast, the cost of placing a student on the basis of low achievement scores in a Chapter 1 program was estimated at \$5.00 (Shepard, 1983, p. 7).

In addition to exorbitant costs, evidence has mounted that identification is based on considerations other than student characteristics. For example, districts with greater fiscal resources label more students as handicapped and are more likely to place special services students in segregated settings labeled for emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded. In contrast, districts with less money label a greater proportion of mildly handicapped students as learning disabled, perhaps because "learning disabled students tend to be served in resource rooms, which are shown to be much less expensive than self-contained classrooms" (Nelson, 1983, p. 395).

Classification systems for special education have been accused of masking social decisions based on racial, ethnic, or linguistic differences rather than handicapping condition. The association between socioeconomic or minority status and disproportionate referral and placement rates has been documented for years (Matuszek & Oakland, 1979) and does not seem to have changed

despite national attention to the problem (Tucker, 1980).

Arguments for categorical placement on the basis that differentiated instruction would thus be delivered have been disputed (Leinhardt & Pallay, 1982; Madden & Slavin, 1983). The conclusion that a categorical label is "largely irrelevant for classroom instruction as there is no interaction between diagnosis, teaching program and change in the skill level of the child" (Gardner, 1982, p. 369) is by now both well documented and persuasive.

This argument for simplified identification does not assume the premise that low achievers can be considered homogeneous. Quite the contrary. The assumption that two individuals who share a given characteristic such as low achievement will be alike on another characteristic—say, learning style—is an example of the informal fallacy of false analogy (Kahane, 1980). This analogy has been utilized for years to place students who are alike on a nonacademic feature, such as emotional disturbance, for example, into groupings for segregated *academic* instruction.

As we abandon such reasoning in serving handicapped learners, we would gain nothing by attempting to serve *all* low-achieving students in some sort of homogenized remedial program. The only purpose of identifying low achievers at all would be to count them initially to determine how many teacher positions should be provided through federal funding for a given district. The *identification* step is thus reduced to the educationally relevant question of academic achievement, and staff time is released for instructional purposes. Further investigation of each student's learning style for purposes of planning the *instruction* needed would be conducted by inservice-trained teachers and would be equally thorough for all students in a class, regardless of academic status.

Allocation

Although both Yeakey (1982) and Tsang and Levin (1983) have cautioned against the tendency of federal funds to stay at the level of the agency that initially receives them, this problem can be controlled with restrictions on administrative costs; thus, federal categorical funds should flow through the state. The advantage is that pass-through aid tends to stimulate *additional* state aid for education, whereas both by-pass and matching-grant aid to local education agencies have been associated with state *reductions* in aid (Tsang & Levin, p. 357).

An additional advantage of state agency distribution is that it permits a review step that many states may want to incorporate or that might become a federal

requirement. The purpose of the review would be to ensure that districts applying for categorical funds for extra teacher positions in order to reduce teacher-student ratios actually have in place a plan to integrate low achievers into mainstream education.

As Longo (1982) pointed out, teachers are a long way from implementing individualized instruction in regular classrooms. Therefore, merely reducing class size will not create successful differentiated instruction. Instead, what Longo suggested is that a plan for integration should have several characteristics: it must (1) retrain and reorient teachers and administrators; (2) provide direct support to teachers as they initiate integration; (3) allow long-term planning by building teams; (4) encourage a variety of instructional mechanisms and environments rather than a specific single instructional practice (pp. 164, 176).

In addition to a carefully articulated implementation plan as recommended by Longo, districts should demonstrate that they are planning inservice instruction for administrators and teachers incorporating training in instructional practices associated with increased achievement among handicapped and educationally disadvantaged students. For example, Gross (1983, p. 45) provided a list of promising practices to increase academic learning time. Leinhardt and Pally (1982, p. 572) summarized conclusions from studies of low achievers by listing nine variables associated with increased achievement. Districts must show that research information is being shared with building teams.

Review of the district's proposed plan might involve both professional educators and an advisory council of citizens, with each group providing an independent review and making recommendations. Educators should evaluate the adaptation of promising practices based on research. The advisory council would be broadly representative of groups previously served through categorical aid so that their interests are monitored. The council could be charged with developing a formula for allocating funds similar to those devised for former Title IV-B funds and current Chapter 2 grants. Such a formula might, for instance, specify that low achievers are weighted 1.5 for purposes of determining the number of students assigned to a given teacher or teaching team, so that heterogeneous classes in which low achievers are overrepresented would have fewer total students. When calculations are made to determine how many teaching positions are to be assigned to a given district from federal funds, therefore, districts with higher proportions of low achievers on the initial count, such as in low socioeconomic areas, would gain more teaching positions.

One of the more difficult aspects of distributing the consolidated funds will be to work out a plan that does *not* reward districts for producing high numbers of low achievers but instead rewards reduction in numbers of low achievers over the funding cycle. Therefore, the formula for *reallocation* will have to be based on measurement of gains in achievement of students, classified at the outset as low achievers. For example, the first funding cycle might count for teacher positions all students who scored below the 35th percentile on standardized achievement tests and who are also certified by teachers as performing below average in the classroom. On the basis of this count, districts submitting acceptable plans for integrating low achievers into mainstream heterogeneous classes would receive one teacher's salary for X number of students, depending upon the weighting or formula recommended by the advisory council and endorsed by the state.

For the second and subsequent funding cycles, however, districts would have to demonstrate improvement or an upward trend in the achievement scores of those previously classified as low achievers in order to qualify for the same number of teacher positions. District evidence that low achievers' scores increased relative to achievers' scores (the gap is *narrowing*), or that both sets of scores increased, should be acceptable accountability for funds and lead to refunding for another cycle. Any indication that *additional* low achievers are being identified during a funding cycle should be penalized as evidence of ineffective use of federal funds.

Administration

Central to integration of instruction for low achievers into the mainstream of regular education is the placement of administration of categorical funds within the regular education administrative system. Previous categorical separation of administrators, teaching staff, materials, and accountability procedures has been counterproductive, because it has perpetuated instructional isolation of recipients of categorical aid.

For consolidated funds, the administrative staff at both state and local levels will be considerably reduced if allocation procedures are based on achievement levels only and if funding cycles are realistically spaced. Educators who would review district plans could be contracted and rotated for better representation, leaving limited duties for the federal liaison person at the state level, who could readily hold a regular state administrative position. At the district level, the liaison administrator should be a member of the mainstream education administration, with regular line authority.

Teachers would neither be paid directly by federal funds nor be identifiable as categorical teachers. Instead, nonsupplanting teacher positions would be supported with federal funds for the purpose of reducing teacher-student ratios throughout the district, and each teacher would be held accountable for the achievement of all students assigned to his or her heterogeneous group.

As tracking is eliminated, the question of administrative arrangements for vocational education would have to be resolved. Goodlad (1983) recommended that all students, even the highest-ability school leaders, could profit from vocational courses. According to Boyer (1983), "Eliminating the vocational track does not mean abolishing all vocational courses . . . They provide excellent options for a wide range of students and should be strengthened, not diminished. . . We would eliminate the narrow 'marketable' courses . . ." (p. 127). If funds for vocational education at secondary levels are to be consolidated along with other categorical funds, administrative arrangements for these programs must also be integrated with the mainstream of regular education.

CONCLUSION

This discussion of risks and interests shared by low achievers has proposed a political-educational coalition among groups now targeted for categorical federal funds. The rationale for such a coalition is that it permits greater efficiency, allows more funding to be used for instruction, and thus constitutes a viable alternative to unrestricted block grants to states. Even a change in Administration in 1984 would not seriously affect the prospects of continued consolidation, since decisions already made will take at least five years to run their course (Clark et al., 1983; Cornish, 1977).

Despite the formidable diplomacy required to consolidate efforts, advocates for previously underserved groups must not permit themselves to be fragmented by competition for reallocation of diminishing funds on the basis of special-interest lobbying. The simultaneous (but hardly coincidental) reduction in programs for the disadvantaged and increase of funds for the handicapped in 1982-83 congressional allocations (Yeakey, 1982) is a case in point. Just because the lobbyists for handicapped students were temporarily more successful, they cannot ignore the effects of reallocation on those whose funds were cut, or even the effects on special education. There is good reason to believe that such cuts will increase referrals to special services (Tucker, 1980).

If interest groups are divided, all will lose in the long run. The prediction that internal politics among interest groups will heighten as they compete for the shrinking dollar, leading to "a further splintering of education

lobbyists" (Yeakey, 1982, p. 23), must not come to pass. On the issues raised by the National Commission report and other recommended reforms, "It is not at all obvious that an association will be able to protect its interest alone" (Clark et al., 1983, p. 193).

For too long, mutual needs and goals among regular education, special education, and other categorical programs have been lost because of bureaucratic divisions (McLaughlin, 1982), leading to perceived distances among the groups. All have been vulnerable to the syndrome identified many years ago by Bertrand Russell to demonstrate the connotations of words. According to Russell, people label other people, events, and conditions in accord with perceived distance between themselves and others. Thus, "I am firm, you are obstinate, he is pig-headed" (Hayakawa, 1964, p. 95). It is long past time to acknowledge that the "I-you-he" syndrome is counterproductive. We have a job to do in educational reform toward both excellence and instructional equity.

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Professional update

Applications are being accepted for the California State University, Hayward, 1984 Travel Study Programs in London, July 5-20. Among the instructors will be Dr. Phyllis Kaplan, Dr. Samuel Elkind, and Marilyn Nye, on topics centering on the British perspective and approach to special education. Special tours are included in the package. For further information, contact: Dr. Marilyn L. Nye, Dept. of Teacher Education, Extended Education, California State University, Hayward, CA 94542.