

# FOCUS ON EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

## CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN: A FOCUS ON EVALUATION

### EVALUATION AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING

The heavy emphasis on achievement in our system of education has placed evaluation in a highly regarded position in the hierarchy of teaching tasks. Regular education invests heavily in evaluating pupil growth and program effectiveness. Normative data are available which tell the teacher what to expect from groups of children in most areas of the curriculum. This emphasis on evaluation in education is reflected in the extensive use of standardized achievement tests, involvement of private enterprise in the organization of testing programs, and the obvious position of evaluation in the administrative structure of local and intermediate school systems. A brief study of public education will reveal that evaluation plays a major role in curriculum development in regular education. But, unfortunately, a similar study of special education programs will not yield the same conclusions.

It is evident in all areas of special education that evaluation is a persistent problem. It tends to be a problem which eludes special educators as they attempt to measure the growth and development of exceptional children. The deficits of the child, which served as the reason for the child's need for special education, were initially identified through a process of evaluation. When considering evaluation relative to exceptional children, one is prone to suspect that the problem of evaluation presents a unique situation for children with sensory defects. In reality, the problem permeates all programs for the handicapped. The task of assessing individual progress, coupled with the responsibility for evaluating materials to be utilized in the teaching process, makes evaluation a topic which warrants the attention of special education. For example, in the area of the mentally retarded, the establishment of special classes is promoted. Yet we have minimal resources for assessing academic progress according to established curriculum goals for this group.

Evaluation is generic. It implies assessment, but its application may vary from specific behavior to qualitative statements on comprehensive programs. Every opinion a teacher expresses involves a process of evaluation. Poor judgment may prevail, or a miscalculation may occur, but an evaluative process has been employed. The spontaneous decision of the classroom teacher, as well as the many more far-reaching decisions regarding placement, selection of materials, and promotion, are all greatly influenced by the evaluative skills of the teacher.

The concern in special education is for children who, because of mental or physical defects, require specialized instructional programs. Yet systematic and appropriate methods of assessing academic growth or the nature of the curriculum employed, on a short or long-term basis, are amazingly less than optimal. This is particularly true

in reference to programs for the mentally retarded. Certainly considerable effort has been expended on the design and use of psychometric tests. But the impact of this investment has been felt primarily in classification, determination of eligibility, and/or re-evaluation. These may well be the less important targets of evaluation. If the major concern is for educating the child, then the emphasis should be on the current level of functioning and how the child relates to what takes place in the classroom. Evaluative techniques and skills, which can serve as indicators for the instructional decisions that eventually must be made, should be developed according to the specifications resulting from the knowledge obtained about exceptional children.

From the perspective of persons responsible for programming the exceptional children, evaluation can be considered from two aspects: classification and curriculum. These are not necessarily exclusive, but the dichotomy serves to separate types of evaluative procedures.

FIGURE 1

<u>The Classification Domain</u>	<u>The Curriculum Domain</u>
<i>Medical</i>	<i>Curriculum Decisions</i>
<i>Psychological</i>	<i>Selection of Materials</i>
	<i>Evaluation of Techniques</i>
	<i>Developing Teacher-Made Materials</i>
	<i>Assessing Social Growth</i>
	<i>Assessing Academic Growth</i>

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It is this latter type of evaluation that educators should concern themselves with on a more vigorous basis. The classification domain is the area which to date has attracted the efforts of many researchers. It has also provided much of the data upon which our system of special education is built. Errors in diagnosis, either inherent in the instrument or in the administrative process, can have a devastating effect on the student's future. However, it must also be acknowledged that an ineffective educational program can be equally damaging though less obvious. The quality and appropriateness of instructional programs are directly related to evaluation processes. What takes place within a school is generally assumed to be education, but the lack of proper evaluation techniques within the curriculum is often shielded by what appears to be educational-type activity.

It is within the curriculum domain that the child's educational program is determined. The classification domain tends to serve a function relative to decisions regarding which type of educational program the child will be placed in. The use of individual intelligence tests in placing children is an example. Once placed, however, the curriculum domain becomes the milieu through which the child is educated. It is also the domain which seems to be most vulnerable, thanks to a lack of emphasis on evaluative procedures geared to the instructional program. Unless evaluation processes are applied to techniques, methods, and materials, and organizational structures, there is a danger that systems which may be ineffective can easily be perpetuated.

**A FRAME OF REFERENCE**

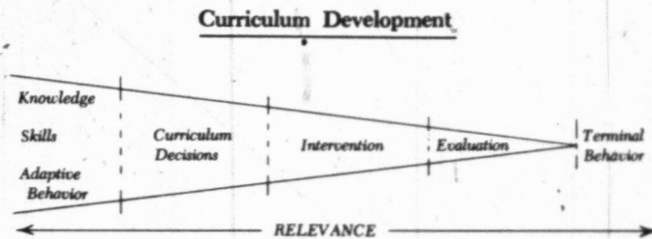
As a frame of reference, let's look at the situation in terms of education of the educable mentally retarded. The underlying ideas, however, are applicable to curriculum development for exceptional children in general.

The prime factor in determining an educational program for exceptional children is the consequence of the child's deficit in terms of learning and educational programming. For example, the mentally retarded represent a group whose major educational problems center around limited intelligence and social ineptness. In structuring an educational program for them, consideration must be given to the influence their limitations will have in terms of curriculum. In other words, we begin by looking at the universe of knowledge, skills, and adaptive behavior which could potentially be included in the public school curriculum. It is apparent that this particular segment of our population requires a circumscribed curriculum. We cannot teach this group all that we might to a higher functioning one.

If the characteristics of the learner are to have an

influence on the curriculum, then it seems that the influence should begin to make its impact early in the process of curriculum development. The model in Figure 2 illustrates one way of looking at curriculum development for exceptional children which takes into consideration the characteristics of the learner.

FIGURE 2



The model demonstrates the process involved in moving from the universe of skills and knowledge which might be included in a curriculum, to a curriculum appropriate to the needs of a particular group of learners. The model assumes a general knowledge of the terminal behavior of the group and the type of individual you want to result from the curriculum. In most cases, the terminal behavior for exceptional children is covered in a number of assumptions.

**Knowledge, Skills, and Adaptive Behavior:** The process of curriculum development begins by determining the universe of knowledge, skills, and adaptive abilities which potentially could be included in the curriculum. The source of influence must be tapped, and the universe organized. For the most part, the participation in this step is so extensive that few people realize the role they are playing. When the concern is for the mentally retarded, it is apparent that the curriculum will be more circumscribed. The retarded will not be taught many of the high level skills, concepts, and subject matter that will be included in the curriculum for their normal peers. Because of this, selective criteria must be established in terms of narrowing the universe from which the curriculum content will be selected.

**Curriculum Decisions:** At this stage, major curriculum decisions are required. The scope of the curriculum must be given dimensions, and at the same time, appropriate sequence must be established. Thus, it is at this point that evaluation becomes essential. This is where we apply much of the information gained from the evaluative processes of the classification domain. If the characteristics of the learner are sufficient to warrant modification

in the curriculum, the differences between the regular and special program should now be apparent. It becomes obvious that errors made at this stage will not show up tomorrow. They will not be discernable until a product has emerged a number of years hence, and then only if we continue to evaluate in order to determine whether or not we have successfully prepared this group of individuals for the kinds of tasks they encountered. Because of this, longitudinal research on the behavior of exceptional adults may be as important to curriculum development as is developmental research on exceptional children.

**Intervention:** Intervention for curriculum purposes takes place primarily within the environment established by the school. The classroom is typically the focal point for intervention. By intervention, we mean the teaching techniques of the teacher, the materials she uses, and the influence of the administration on classroom procedures—in essence, the total realm of experience within the educational setting. Evaluation here should be almost routine, because nothing can be judged as successful or unsuccessful unless it is applied. Evaluation, for instance, should determine whether a practice is perpetuated or a curriculum revision made. Consequently, evaluative skills should be an integral part of the teacher's methods.

**Evaluation:** You may question why evaluation is presented as a separate entity when it is essentially a process permeating curriculum development at all stages. This is done because at certain stages in a child's educational experience it does become a focal point. Generally these evaluative decisions result in significant changes: for example, promotion, retention, or a transfer to another area of the program.

**Terminal Behavior:** The process of curriculum development is aimed at terminal behavior. This terminal behavior must be kept in mind from the very beginning when we make curriculum decisions regarding the dimensions of the program. Unless we can operationally describe the type of person we want to develop, many curriculum decisions will be arbitrary.

**Relevance:** We are concerned at each phase in the curriculum development. The selection of evaluation techniques and decisions on content are guided by this question. Relevance is related to behavior and the products of performance. Subject matter, skills, materials, methods, and administrative structures must all meet the test of relevance.

In addition to the steps involved in curriculum development for the mentally retarded, we must be cognizant of influences affecting our decisions. If we think in terms of the general curriculum and the programs structured for children who progress through it, it is quite apparent

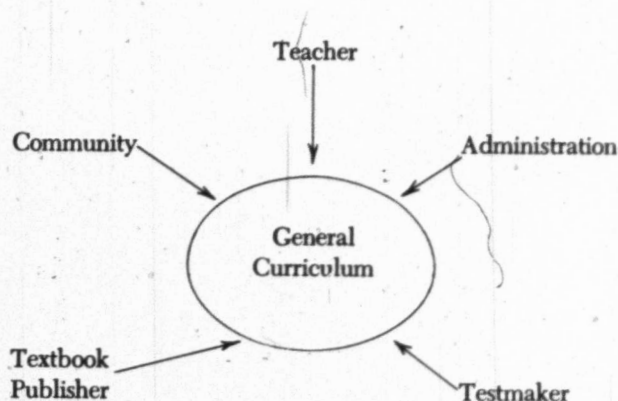


that there are a number of determining influences:

1. For example, textbook publishers exert great influence on curriculum content by virtue of the school's reliance on textbooks and printed materials.
2. Testmakers offer the educator criteria for appraising what is taught. While we are led to believe that the curriculum determines the emphasis of achievement tests, it is probably not unrealistic to acknowledge the influence of achievement tests on instruction.
3. The administration, in many school districts, invests heavily in terms of consultants, curriculum coordinators, and in-service training. They do this to insure sufficient scope and sequence in the curriculum.
4. The community also has an influence. School patrons at least react or respond to innovations, and in some cases request them. They are very cognizant of the general curriculum.
5. The teachers in the regular program have some influence on the nature of the curriculum, but probably less than is desirable.

FIGURE 3

Sources of Influence Related to Curriculum



If we think in terms of these same influences, but focus on curriculum for the mentally retarded, we find quite a different situation. Until recently, the market for printed materials did not significantly attract the investment of publishers. Therefore, materials designed specifically for the mentally retarded exert a minimal influence. The major influence comes from materials designed for other children but used with the mentally retarded. Test-

makers, in light of this, have a negligible influence. The author is not aware of comprehensive group achievement tests designed in accordance with curriculum for the mentally retarded. Instead, we find standardized achievement tests designed for the regular program and geared for children aimed in quite a different direction.

The administration, while it structures special classes, does not invest significantly in consultant services aimed at curriculum development. They are primarily concerned with supervision.

The community's influence on educational programs for the mentally retarded is generally related to the teachers' interpretation of the area's special features. It seldom is a direct influence initiated by the community. In essence, therefore, the special class teacher has basic control of the curriculum. We place far greater responsibility for curriculum and evaluation on the special class teacher than on teachers in regular classes. He or she exerts the most influence. Because of this, instructional programs in many special classes are unique to the teacher. The result is too often haphazard; the quality of the instructional program frequently is strictly dependent upon the quality of the teacher. This is not an indictment of the teacher, but a criticism of the profession and teacher training programs. We ask teachers to make decisions without support. They are neither prepared to make these decisions nor should they be asked to make them independently. (By Edward L. Meyen)

EVALUATION: SOME INFORMAL TECHNIQUES FOR CLASSROOM USE

By Louis F. Brown<sup>1</sup>

There appears to be agreement among educators that evaluation represents a major vehicle for improving educational programs. Provisions for educating exceptional children in our system of public education result in a need for evaluation strategies which focus primarily on the pupil-teacher interaction in the classroom. If improvements are to be made which are based on knowledge gained from sampling classroom behavior, then the

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teacher must assume a significant role in the evaluation process. Too often, attempts are made to apply the isolated results of an annual achievement testing program (formal assessment results) to the techniques and methods employed in the classroom without considering teacher judgment.

Intellectual limitations of the mentally retarded dictate the need for particular attention to be given to assessing their performance rather frequently. The impeding effect of their sporadic academic progress would be lessened if teachers would take advantage of the evaluation situations and tools which prevail in most classrooms. Difficulty encountered by teachers who attempt to employ evaluation practices geared to their daily instruction is typically related to the narrow concept of evaluation held by administrators and, in some instances, classroom teachers themselves. For example, greater emphasis is generally placed on the use of more formal aspects of evaluation such as standardized tests and/or other scales. There is no question about the need for—and the worth of—objective assessment. But the related phase of informal evaluation of instructional objectives should also be included insofar as it can be readily applied by the classroom teacher.

Informal evaluation processes are unique in a number of ways: (1) teacher involvement in judgment is the essence of such a procedure; (2) immediate feedback enables the teacher to make any necessary instructional adjustments should results indicate a need for such action; (3) this type of evaluation is timely as it focuses on the behavior as it occurs; (4) such procedures are typically simple and brief; (5) the nature of the scheme itself fits into the newer concept of prescriptive teaching whereby more effort is made to take the style of the learner into consideration as well as his present level of functioning; (6) it provides a longitudinal record of pupil progress in a broader range of situations than the more formal assessment techniques do; and (7) such a scheme provides a check on the use or the application of skills and information, learned within the specific confines of a given lesson, to other situations.

While informal evaluation techniques may lack the precision of standardized tools, application of a few basic principles by the teacher will maximize the benefits to be gained from this approach. The following guidelines should help the teacher formulate some frames of reference for more effectively interpreting the results of her informal evaluative procedures:

1. Employ your informal techniques frequently in order to gather sufficient information. A single observation may catch a child in an extreme form of behavior which is not typical of his performance.

2. Apply the technique in a variety of situations. It is important to determine how the child performs under different conditions.
3. Retain samples of the student's actual work throughout the year to establish baselines for comparing the child with himself.
4. Record your appraisals in a form which will provide a ready frame of reference for assisting the child in his educational progress.

Informal assessment techniques, while basically simple, do require skill on the part of the teacher. Unfortunately, many teachers will routinely make evaluations even though they are not sensitive to what is significant. This may be partially due to the fact that informal evaluation takes place within the familiar conditions of the classroom. Because of this, the teacher tends to overlook important clues. For the most part, however, the needed skills amount to being aware of what is going on when it is happening. This merely means that the teacher needs to attend to the child as he interacts with his peers, with instructional materials, and in his environment in general. The emphasis should obviously not be limited to focusing on acting out behavior. Assessing academic performance requires the same skills. While a number of informal techniques can be used to assess changes in children's behavior, the three most popular ones will be discussed.

1. **OBSERVATION:** This is a technique employed by all teachers. Few teachers, however, have been taught how to improve or refine their observational skills. For example, observations can be of three types:

A. **Unstructured:** This simply means setting aside brief periods of time (say fifteen minutes) per child approximately once a month at which time the teacher records everything a specific child does for a fifteen-minute episode. Six or seven such microscopic observations, well spaced over a period of a semester or even a school year, can reveal behavior changes not readily discernible any other way. It is a technique frequently employed in child development studies, and has much merit for classroom teachers.

B. **Semi-Structured:** The difference in this approach and the previous one is that the teacher looks for specific kinds of behavior and rates them on a continuum from minimum to maximum degree of manifestation. For example, if the teacher has been working on development of good manners, she might make a concerted attempt to watch a child to see how he interacts with others both in the schoolroom and out on the playground. Based on a week or so of observation she would then rate him on this

aspect of his behavior.

Displays Good Manner to Peers

Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Usually	Always
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C. *Highly Structured*: This approach is characterized by even more structure than the previous one, by listing in considerable detail a checklist of behaviors or skills that could be subsumed under a given category of behavior. For example, in the area of reading for primary age children the following skills might serve as the criteria:

#### Reading Skills

1. Discriminates shapes and colors.
2. Has eye-hand motor movements in left to right sequence.
3. Has ability to manipulate a book.
4. Recognizes beginning sounds.
5. Recognizes rhyming sounds.
6. Recognizes like letters.
7. Recognizes like words.
8. Understands material read at his grade level.
9. Identifies letters of the alphabet.
10. Uses a picture dictionary.
11. Recognizes initial and final consonants.
12. Recognizes consonant blends.
13. Recognizes long and short vowels.
14. Recognizes root words.
15. Finds words in the dictionary by using the first letter as a guide.
16. Alphabetizes by the first letter of words.
17. Uses context cues to attack new words.
18. Has adequate functional vocabulary.

The teacher would merely check those skills a child can do and would indicate the date that she checked them. Later the same check list could be used again to compare growth in this specific content area.

2. *COLLECTING SAMPLES OF CHILDREN'S WORK*: This is one of the best ways for teachers, parents, and children to become genuinely aware of the growth the child has made. It is as concrete and direct a method as can possibly be employed. Obviously, some aspects of behavior are more easily appraised by this technique than others. For example, art work, penmanship, and other types of seatwork readily lend themselves to this type of evaluation.

3. *SITUATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ASSESSING THE APPLICATION OF SKILLS AND INFORMATION*: There are many times during the school day or week when a particular situation affords the teacher an opportunity to check a child's ability to apply information or skills, learned in an instructional lesson, to a new or different situation. For example, during milk time a child's knowledge of simple number facts or counting ability can be observed if he is given the opportunity to ascertain the number of cartons of milk needed, plus straws, napkins, etc., for his group. Other skills, information, or attitudes that have been taught in other areas, such as importance of cleanliness and cooperation, can be observed to see if he is transferring these concepts to daily situations. Application of what a child has learned in one situation to daily problem-solving is, of course, the essence of education for all children. One could cite many examples that occur in all schools daily that are not utilized for such purposes: noting whether or not the children wash their hands before eating, willingly share toys, take turns on playground equipment, etc.

#### SOME USES OF INFORMAL EVALUATION RESULTS

Since the major reason for using any type of appraisal technique is to obtain information about a child's current level of functioning with regard to as much of his repertoire of behavior as possible, the results should be helpful in many ways.

##### 1. *Reporting Pupil Progress*:

Assuming all teachers in a given building carried out the suggestions for implementing informal assessment mentioned above, it is readily apparent that a collection of observations, samples of work, etc., would over a period of several years provide an excellent longitudinal record of changes in a specific child's behavior. Regular, faithful assessment and proper organization of this information would form the basis for a very vivid and graphic record of behavioral changes of each child.

For example, in reporting a child's progress to parents, one of the most difficult things to do is to be specific about a child's performance in any given area. Here again, actual samples of a child's work provide a frame of reference that the parents can actually see, and make it much easier for them to accept the more general statement so often made that the pupil is making progress for his ability and particularly in reference to where he was at the first of the year, or with reference to last year. Such tangible evidence speaks for itself, thus insuring a more successful exchange of information in the parent conference.



Results of informal evaluation are also helpful to the teacher in working up the descriptive type of periodic reporting which is becoming so much more popular in many school systems today. A composite test score—a reading grade equivalent, for example—is not much help in writing up such reports. Relying on one's memory for such information is usually not any more effective than the use of the test scores. Hence the use of information obtained by informal assessment techniques enables the classroom teacher to do a more effective job in writing up this type of report.

2. *As Indications of Need for Outside Help:*

It is sometimes not evident that a child has been displaying a certain behavior rather consistently and over a sustained length of time unless a systematic record of some sort has been kept. Upon reading a collection of observations, for example, extremely persistent maladaptive forms of behavior become much more conspicuous and readily identifiable. In the case of extremely aggressive or isolated behavior displays, the need for referral to the school psychologist becomes more apparent.

In situations where a child's folder does not contain as much material as the other children's do, excessive absences may become more conspicuous. Hence, a cue as to the necessity for referral to either the school social worker or the public health nurse might be indicated.

3. *Implications for Instructional Changes:*

Certainly one of the most fruitful uses of such information will be in reflecting instructional changes that might be warranted. Such changes would be cued by the dearth of progress made in all areas or in certain aspects of the educational program. The changes themselves might be made in several different forms. First, the placement of the particular instructional materials being used; second, employment of an entirely different instructional technique; and third, a complete revision of the ongoing program because of its inappropriateness in terms of a child's particular style of learning and/or overall readiness state.

In summary, it should be noted that the main points being made in this article are:

1. Both informal and formal assessment of children's progress are essential.
2. That some informal assessment is probably carried out by all teachers, but not on as systematic or wide a basis as it probably should be.
3. That such techniques as are mentioned in this paper help the teacher avoid overlooking impor-

tant aspects of behavior that should be appraised.

4. That some of these techniques are better used in certain areas of behavior than are others.
5. That a very systematic and comprehensive record of pupil progress is accomplished by employing all or several of these techniques.
6. That they are the kind of things that teachers can and should do.
7. That the results can be used in many different ways.

## ISSUES & TRENDS

Until recently special class teachers have been hampered by the lack of instructional materials designed specifically for their students. Now, however, teachers are faced with having to choose from numerous texts, supplemental materials, kits, and visual aids which are on the market. Working from a limited budget makes even minor purchases significant, as wrong choices of instructional aids can become costly errors for the children a teacher instructs.

The increased availability of commercially prepared materials is partially due to the growth in educational programs for exceptional children and partially due to the financial resources which are now being invested in the purchase of materials such as funds made possible through the Elementary Secondary Act.

If a teacher has an annual allotment of \$300 to spend on instructional materials, it is important that she have some assurance that the materials she purchases will be effective. As this point, the question of quality control raises its head: Who has responsibility for monitoring the quality and appropriateness of the material advertised on the market as being designed for exceptional children? Are standards needed to serve as criteria for publishers? If such standards were available, possibly the commercial enterprise could monitor itself. This is worth considering.

The alternative to some form of evaluation of materials is to assist the teacher in developing her own evaluation skills. A major change through this approach would require an emphasis on in-service training as well as pre-service training. The situation, now in an embryo stage, will grow to considerable magnitude in the near future, and require positive action. The resources of the Instructional Materials Center network might well be put to use. Certainly the evaluation of materials requires the type of skills being developed by participants in the Instructional Materials Center network.

## RESOURCE MATERIALS

The Project on Recreation and Fitness for the Mentally Retarded is a most comprehensive source of information about physical education and recreation for the handicapped. The American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (AAHPER) initiated the Project in 1965 with a grant received for this purpose from the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation. The original project focused specifically on programs and services for the mentally retarded. In 1968, this project was enlarged to include all aspects of health, physical education, recreation, and safety instruction for children with any handicapping condition.

Several publications dealing with various aspects of physical education for the retarded have been produced as a result of the Project. Others are in the planning stage and will be published when completed. They range from guidelines for programs in physical education and recreation for the mentally retarded to a practical guide for teaching swimming to the retarded, and to possible careers in health, physical education, and recreation for the handicapped. A newsletter is also published which attempts to provide current, down-to-earth, and realistic information to be used by professionals, volunteers, and parents. The prices of the publications run from \$1.00 to \$3.00; the newsletter subscription is \$3.00 per year.

Further functions of this Project are to help prepare leaders, conduct research, coordinate efforts among interested organizations, and interpret the needs in these areas to professional and lay leaders. The Project also provides direct services to schools, residential facilities, day care centers, and concerned agencies.

Inquiries should be directed to Dr. Julian U. Stein, Consultant, Programs for the Handicapped, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W. Washington, D.C., 20036.

### FOLLETT EDUCATIONAL CORPORATION

The Follett Educational Corporation publishes textbooks, consumable workbooks, and kits all of which are total programs rather than isolated units, and are designed specifically for the special student and those with learning difficulties. These materials are developed by a special division set aside from the regular Follett Educational Corporation.

All materials from this division involve the remediation or development of some specific learning problem. They have published materials for trainable retardates, educable retardates, the perceptually handicapped, and the

slow learner, as well as professional books for the teacher and student teacher.

Inquiries may be directed to any Follett salesman or to the Follett Educational Corporation, 1010 West Washington Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois, 60607.

## WASHINGTON REPORT

The Education Professions Development Act of 1967, which is aimed at meeting the increasing manpower needs of education, contains two sections which are of interest to special educators. These are the sections which cover training programs and fellowships. The bulk of the funds (85 percent) for these sections will be allocated to eleven high-priority programs.

One of the eleven is for training teachers of the handicapped in regular classrooms. This program is designed to complement and support the training programs administered by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped. Based on the rationale that the majority of handicapped children remain in regular classrooms, the program will concentrate on training regular teachers to understand and respond to the needs of the handicapped child. Regular classroom teachers who have handicapped children in their classes can qualify for projects funded under this section. The program also supports projects for the recruiting and training of aides to work with handicapped children in special as well as regular classes.

In addition to this specific program, 15 percent of the funds for the training programs and fellowships sections is set aside for projects which directly benefit handicapped children. Other programs in these two sections include: training personnel to train teachers; providing avenues into training and jobs for people with insufficient qualifications for teaching; giving further training in the basic curricular areas; and training personnel to work with young children.

Those interested in further information, such as how and where to apply, should write to the Bureau of Educational Personnel Development, U.S. Office of Education, Washington, D.C., 20202. "The People Who Serve Education," a report by Harold Howe, former U.S. Commissioner of Education, explains the background and some of the provisions of the act. This thoughtful and thought-provoking report gives an overview of the current state of the educational professions. It is available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402, for thirty cents.