

COMMISSION FOR TEACHER PREPARATION AND LICENSING

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TO: Selected Persons Involved with Special Education
FROM: Blair Hurd, Director, Programs and Licensing
SUBJECT: "Special Needs and Regular Classrooms"

BA

Sometime ago we had an opportunity to listen to a tape of a summary report of discussions on the subject "Special Needs in Regular Classrooms". We thought that others might be interested in the content and have transcribed just the part of that presentation (Strand 4) relating to special education.

The attached transcript is the complete summary report of the presentation made at the February 1978 meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). I do not know if there is a tape available of the complete discussion of "Strand 4".

If this is at all helpful, fine. If not, forgive me for wasting your time. It seemed to us that some important unanswered and, perhaps, unstated questions and problems are presented here. I would welcome your comments.

Attachment

EDITED TRANSCRIPT OF A SUMMARY REPORT ON
"SPECIAL NEEDS IN REGULAR CLASSROOMS",
A MAJOR DISCUSSION TOPIC AT AACTE, CHICAGO, FEBRUARY 1978

G. Wesley Sowards of Florida International University will offer us a synthesis of Strands 4 and 5. Dr. Sowards was assisted in preparing this synthesis by Lou Klineman of University of Miami.

Wes --

I think Dean Klineman and I both approached this task pretty much the same way. The theme for the conference was the knowledge base for teacher education and as we sat and listened through Strands 4 and 5 I think we had two questions in front of us: (1) does the knowledge base exist? and, (2) if a knowledge base does exist what does it say to teacher educators and about teacher education?

I am going to make, as the other speakers have, some general synthesizing comments making no effort to connect those comments to any particular speaker or speakers. Let me simply say that the two people who organized these two Strands: Dave Marsh from the University of Southern California in the case of Strand 4 (Special Needs in Regular Classrooms), and Bob Scanlon from Research for Better Schools Inc., in Philadelphia in the case of Strand 5 (Diagnosis and Prescriptive Teaching), brought a powerful cast of characters to the scene - it was almost as though they had called in chits of long standing. The people who came to these two strands indeed heard people speak and were privileged to share in the experiences of people who were very much in the center of these two particular topics. Let me comment first on Strand 4 - Special Needs in the Regular Classroom.

I think realistically one would have to say that a knowledge base doesn't really exist with respect to this particular matter of concern that is before us, namely special needs in regular classrooms. It is much more a belief-based position at the moment than a knowledge-based position that's being taken with respect to the education of children and youth who have special needs of one kind or another.

What we have is really an expression of national social policy - of a change in national social policy - which seems to say that to separate in the educational process those pupils with special needs is somehow, in and of itself, demeaning and therefore, from a human values kind of position, they ought to be in regular classrooms - in the main stream, as the phrase goes, in order to attend to their educational needs.

Clearly there is a good bit of enthusiasm that exists among teachers and educators about this. There is a certain zeal evident in trying to come to grips with both the letter and intent of the federal legislation that moves us towards this, but it was interesting, and of some concern, to hear people who knew much more about this than Dean Klineman or myself talk about the fact that this may have as many deleterious effects as beneficial ones on students in the classroom; that the proponents of it

may be seriously underestimating the cost of the effort and that, unless the effort is indeed properly funded, those deleterious effects may pyramid in ways that will not be pleasant for any of us to observe.

While there is not a strong knowledge base that exists with respect to this move to deal with children with special needs in regular classrooms, all of the speakers were able to either comment on one or more things that they felt inevitably would have to come to characterize those situations and therefore would have implications for the education of teachers or, in some other way, were able to point either to an experience base, at least, that we have in regular classrooms and the experience base we have right now in special classrooms and suggest something that will have to come about in a kind of integrative sense as those things meet each other in the classroom.

For instance there was talk about the very evident need for an even closer partnership than usual between teachers and parents as we move in special need children in a regular classroom.

There was a good deal of talk about the obvious need to affect individualized instruction.

There was a good deal of talk about the obvious need to understand better and to apply a better criterion referenced systems of evaluation insofar as student performance is concerned.

There was a good bit of talk about the need to develop and test models; models of classroom organization and operation on the one hand and then, very specifically within each of those models, models for teaching itself. Various models were casually mentioned and to some extent described - the resource teacher model, the diagnostic teacher model, the consulting teacher model and others.

Some of the speakers called attention to the fact that we are sorely in need, simply, of definitions. We aren't totally sure what we are talking about as we embark on it. And that clarity at the definition stage may indeed help us not only to operate somewhat better but certainly is crucial to the emergence of any kind of knowledge base in this area.

Some of the speakers called attention to the fact that we needed to keep an eye on all of the actors on the stage when we move to this. There is a tendency --- I suspect there will be a tendency for us to look particularly at those children with special needs as they move into that setting but their presence and their emergence in that setting is going to have effects obviously on so called regular students. It is going to have effects on the behavior of teachers, a whole complex of variables that need to be looked at.

Some of the speakers also called attention to the fact that this was a much more significant change, perhaps, than many of us thought and that the organizational change literature, in and of itself, was going to have to be studied and understood and applied in educational settings if this is going to happen.

That this is a deeply significant organizational change as well as a change perhaps in the operations of teaching and teachers in the classroom.

They talked about the need for teacher educators to begin to understand the inevitable revisions that will occur in curricula as those curricula are modified by the presence of a greater range of individual differences in the classroom. They talked about some of the impact this will have on developing somewhat different types of field centers in which preservice teacher education students will be able to experience, now, something very different from what they have had an opportunity or a need to experience before.

A particular point was made of the fact that the two major faculty groups involved in the education of teachers, namely those in special education and those in elementary education, have lived worlds apart and that simply building bridges of communication, and out of those bridges of communication some understanding and some genuine working relationship between those two groups, may indeed be a challenge in and of itself.

So I cannot help but conclude that this is a matter that will be revisited by teacher educators over the next 5 to 10 years a good many times. Perhaps, indeed, if we come full cycle in about 10 years and come back again to the theme "Knowledge Base for Teacher Education" and this particular strand appears on the program, let's hope at least we have moved more from a belief-based system toward a real research based system.