Curricular Options and Services for Youth with Disabilities

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The purpose of this research was to identify and discuss the curricular options, modes of delivering services, and related instructional matters for youth with disabilities. To carry out that we gathered data in six high schools of various sizes and types. Based on a conceptual framework designed by Goodlad, we identified 12 research questions. Data of four types (observations, interviews, surveys, and documents) were gathered from all six sites in response to those questions. Reports were written for each of the high schools that included several recommendations. These recommendations were explained to individuals at the schools and researchers were apprised of the extent which the suggestions were either considered or put into practice. Results from the six schools with respect to the 12 research questions are summarized.

Since passage of P.L. 94-142 in 1975, and the extension of that law by P.L. 99-457 in 1986, there has been increased attention to the education of high school youth with disabilities. Now, most high schools offer remedial programs, general education programs with and without modification or support, and vocational and community involvement options for those youth, and there are several ways of delivering those curricula. Researchers have expressed grave concerns regarding the quality of those programs, however (e.g., Edgar, 1987).

In order to study the many curricular options, accompanying delivery systems, and related matters for youth with disabilities, we engaged in a three-year study sponsored by the Department of Education. For this research we selected six high schools in the Puget Sound area that were dif-

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ferent in a number of respects and gathered considerable data from them. Those data were mainly qualitative and of four types: observations, interviews, surveys, and documents.

We outline the conceptual framework that guided our study and note the research questions that emanated from it. Following this, we explain our methodology for acquiring data, describe our process for analyzing those data, and for identifying recommendations for each site. We then detail how reports were written for each school and how suggestions were offered to them. Finally, we comment on findings from our study related to each of the 12 research questions.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 illustrates our conceptual framework; which is based on a curriculum model developed by Goodlad (1979). In this model curriculum
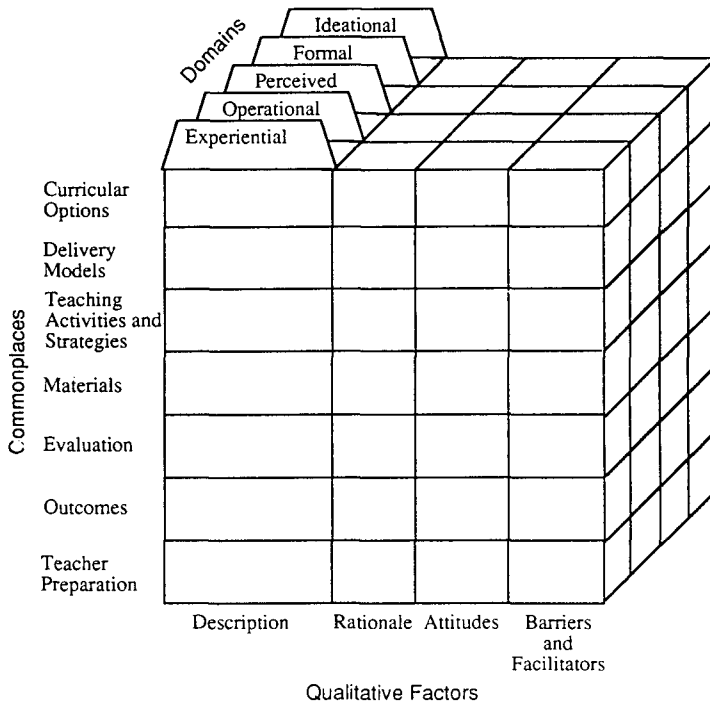

Fig. 1. Conceptual framework for the high school curriculum research. It is based on a design of Goodlad's (1979).

includes more than content and subject matter, and covers several points of view. In fact, three dimensions are required to adequately define curriculum: domains, commonplaces, and qualitative factors. Domains specify the five perspectives that can be brought to bear on viewing the curriculum: ideational, formal, perceived, operational, and experiential. Commonplaces include features that characterize the learning environment and include curricular options, delivery models, teaching activities and strategies, materials, evaluations, outcomes, and the preparation of teachers. Qualitative factors are ways to describe and evaluate commonplaces for any of the five domains. There are four factors: description, rationale, attitudes, and barriers and facilitators.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Following are the 12 research questions derived from our conceptual framework and formed the basis of our study: (a) What curricular and extracurricular options are available for learners with disabilities? (b) Which service delivery models are available to offer the various programs? (c) Which personnel work with these youth in the various programs? (d) To what extent do staff collaborate to design and carry out programs for youth with disabilities? (e) To what extent are parents involved in designing and carrying out programs for these youth? (f) What roles do the Individualized Education Program and the Individual Transition Plan play in students' programs and who is involved in designing and carrying out those programs? (g) What are the anticipated in-school and post-school goals? (h) What are the arranged and suggested instructional practices for these youth? (i) How are student performances evaluated? (j) What are schools' policies regarding graduation requirements and deferred diplomas for students in special education? (k) How prepared are teachers, administrators, and others to carry out programs for youth with disabilities? (l) What could be done to improve the programs for these youth?

SELECTION PROCESS

Selection of Site

We selected eight sites for our study, six of which were high schools and two were facilities for youth with serious behavior disorders. In this paper we are concerned with only the six high schools. In an effort to choose sites that were different from one another and would collectively

represent other high schools throughout the country we took the following factors into account: size, three- or four-year school, urban suburban or rural, and public or private. Brief sketches of the six high schools follow.

Highline High School

This is a four-year school with an enrollment of about 1,000 students, of whom about 7% are students with disabilities. It is one of four high schools in the Highline School District, and the school is located in an urban area just south of Seattle. The demographics of the Highline area, hence the school population, have changed considerably in the past 10 years. There are now more youth of color in the school than before, more dropouts than a decade ago, and a smaller percentage of its youth now attend either a two- or four-year college. There are several ways in which services are delivered to youth with disabilities at HHS. The school has a number of vocational offerings on campus and at other sites throughout the district. In addition, there are self-contained classes for youth with behavior disorders and resource rooms in which content subjects and study skills are taught by special education teachers. HHS also operate basic track classes taught by general education teachers, in which youth with mild disabilities are enrolled. Moreover, a fair number of students at HHS are included in general education classes. Five teachers comprise their special education department.

Tahoma High School

There were five teachers on the special education faculty at THS, a four-year school in a rural area 30 miles south of Seattle. About 11.5% of the school's 1,000 students are classified as disabled. Several types of services are available for those youth: vocational classes, resource rooms, and general education classes. The majority of students with disabilities at THS have learning disabilities, but there are youth with behavior disorders, sensory impairments, and a few with developmental delays as well. THS is the only high school in the district, but the population is growing rapidly in the area. Like many other high schools throughout the country, THS is in the midst of restructuring. They are beginning to integrate certain of their subjects and are moving from a six-period day to one of four or five. Each spring the seniors, including youth with disabilities present their "senior project."

Puyallup High School

There are about 1,200 students at PHS one of two high schools in the district. Puyallup is a small but growing city located about 25 miles south-east of Tacoma. This is the largest school and the only three-year high school in our set. About 9.5% of the student population are students with disabilities. Seven staff members make up the special education staff at PHS, four of whom work with students with mild disabilities. There is a sizable population of youth with severe disabilities at this high school along with a few youngsters with sensory impairments and behavior disorders. Students, depending on the type of disability, are served in vocational set-tings, self-contained situations, resource rooms (where special education teachers instruct content subjects and study skills), and in general education classes. In addition to these service options, there is a school within a school at PHS. A special education teacher is assigned to the school and a few youth with special needs are enrolled in it. The high school prides itself on athletics, and Puyallup is the seat of the Washington State Fair.

Chief Sealth High School

CSHS, a four-year school, is one of 10 comprehensive high schools in the Seattle School District. There are also five alternative high schools in the district. CSHS is located in the west part of Seattle, has an enrollment of about 800 students, of whom 12% are youth with disabilities. About 60% of the overall student population at CSHS are youth of color. With their special education staff of seven teachers, CSHS offers services of sev-eral types, including self-contained situations for youth with severe and moderate disabilities and resource rooms for youth with behavior disorders and mild disabilities. Moreover, several students with disabilities are inte-grated into general education classes. In addition, a number of youth with disabilities are provided instruction at a nearby community college and a neighborhood YMCA. Most of the youth with behavior disorders in the southwest part of Seattle are served at CSHS. A few youth with behavior disorders receive instruction with computers at another location.

Eastside Catholic High School

This four-year Catholic high school of about 800 students is located in Bellevue, a suburb east of Seattle. The focus of our study at ECHS was their "Options" program, in which 20 youth with mild developmental delays are enrolled. An important feature of this program is that the curricular

emphasis is on a standard high school curriculum (e.g., social studies and mathematics) rather than on vocational preparation. During our visit, however, the staff at ECHS began attending more to vocational and transition planning than previously. Another feature of this program, one that makes it different from public schools, is that the staff select the type of youth (i.e., high functioning youth with developmental delays) for the Options program and control the numbers. A related feature that sets their program apart from those in public schools is that parents of the Options children are expected to carry out with consistency a number of responsibilities. In fact, not only the youth but also their parents are screened carefully for this program. Athletics play an important part of this school's culture; their boys' football and basketball teams are generally very competitive.

Eatonville High School

This school is in a rural area 75 miles southeast of Seattle and 45 miles southeast of Tacoma. Eatonville is a small town, one that has experienced a great deal of unemployment in the past five years because of the demise of the logging industry. There are about 400 pupils in this four-year school, 8.5% of whom are students with disabilities. In addition to youth with learning disabilities, there are a few pupils with behavior disorders, severe disabilities, and sensory impairments. There are two special education teachers at the high school, one of whom also works at the nearby middle school. Students with disabilities at EHS are served in resource rooms and general education classes, and several of them work in the community as part of their training. There are two unique and positive features of this high school. One is that the director of special education has an office in the high school and the other is that Eatonville has a behavior disorders specialist who spends a large share of her time in the high school. This is another school that is proud of its athletics, particularly boys' football.

Selection of Study Participants and Classrooms for Observation

The selection process for observing and interviewing individuals for most of the situations is outlined below.

Special and General Education Teachers

We observed classes of all teachers in the special education department and interviewed each of them. In order to sample the general education

staff we followed these steps: (a) Obtained class schedules for all students with special needs. (b) Obtained all teacher' schedules. (c) Listed all the teachers by departments and classes and noted the students with special needs in their classes. (d) Selected at least one teacher in the major departments (i.e., language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) and a few others (e.g., physical education, music, technology, and business). These teachers were identified on the basis of the total number of youth with disabilities they worked with each day and the number of classes in which those students were enrolled. (e) Showed these selections to the chairperson of the special education department. Depending on what she or he said about the representativeness of our choices we occasionally made adjustments. (f) Asked the teachers who were selected if they would participate. If, for some reason one of them declined, we spoke with the department chairperson and selected a replacement.

Special Education Students and Their Parents

We decided to sample at least 10% of the students with special needs in each high school. In order to select a group that was representative of the overall population of students with disabilities, we took the following factors into account: grade level, gender, type of disability, and program. We showed the list of names we had chosen to the chairperson of the special education department, who gave us a thumbnail sketch of each pupil and offered an opinion as to the advisability of including each one in our sample. If he or she thought we should not include certain students or should add others we obliged. Next, we sought permission from parents of the selected pupils by sending them a "request for permission" form. If we were unable to obtain permission, we selected another pupil of the same type with the help of the chairperson.

DESCRIPTION OF DATA SOURCES

Observations

Purpose

Classroom observations were conducted for four reasons: (a) to develop an understanding of the settings in which students with disabilities were served, (b) to provide researchers with a context from which to interview teachers, focus students, and others, (c) to gather information rela-

tive to research questions c, h, i, and k, and (d) to obtain information regarding the focus students selected for the study.

Description

Entries on the Observation Form for recording important aspects of the visit were printed (e.g., date of the observation, subject, period). Beyond requests for that information, two sections comprised the Observation Form; one pertained to the general classroom and the other to the focus student. There were 10 items that pertained to the classroom in general and five had to do with the focus students. In addition, the observer was asked to note anything interesting that occurred in the classroom generally, and with the focus student in particular. A place on the Observation Form also was included on which the observer wrote comments about the observation.

Development and Training

In order to increase the probability that staff members who observed classes took the same events into account and wrote stories that were reasonably alike, except for noting the "interesting" events that occurred, three video clips of classroom scenes were prepared. The vignettes, which ran for about 10 minutes each, were of instructors in high schools who were teaching academic subjects. A trained observer, who had taught at the secondary level, viewed the three tapes and responded to the items on the Observation Form regarding the classroom and the focus student. Another project member then viewed the tapes as he followed along with the Observation Form that was completed by the trained observer. The two of them then discussed the tapes and written comments on the Observation Form. They were generally in agreement with the interpretations of the first teacher. When they disagreed, they rewrote a response to the item.

Those tapes, along with the responses on the Observation Form, were then used as training materials. Observers who were to enter classrooms first viewed the tapes, responded to items on the Observation Form, and checked their responses with those of the model. If their responses were substantially different, they viewed the tapes again and wrote different responses.

Implementation

Observers were instructed to first fill in the information at the top of the form having to do with the classroom (e.g., school, subject, room). They were then asked to write responses that pertained to the 10 queries regarding the classroom and the 5 that dealt with the focus student. Observers also were asked to write notes that had to do with the general happenings of the class. As soon as possible after an observation, and using the notes and comments on other features on the Observation Form, the observer wrote a brief story about the visit. In it, he or she detailed the general happenings of the class. Generally, a staff member visited each of the selected classes for three periods and wrote three stories.

Interviews

Purpose

Interviews provided administrators, teachers, students, parents, and instructional assistants with the opportunity to express their perceptions and opinions regarding the school's special education programs and to offer recommendations for improving them. Interviews with teachers, students, and instructional assistants allowed us to further clarify events that had been observed in classrooms.

Description

Interview protocols were developed for administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, instructional assistants, special education students, and their parents. There were from 9 to 18 questions on the interview forms, the least for instructional assistants and the most for students. Those items related to from 4 to 12 research questions, the least for instructional assistants and the most for special education teachers.

Interview questions varied in format. Some required respondents to name specific events (e.g., "What courses or experiences did you have in your teacher preparation program that prepared you to work with special education youth?"). Other questions called for open-ended responses (e.g., "How would you characterize the experiences of special education students in mainstreamed classes?"). Follow-up questions and prompts were interspersed throughout the interviews to encourage informants to elaborate on or clarify their responses.

Development and Training

The principal investigator had conducted interviews in several settings, and was responsible for training the six others who carried out interviews. Furthermore, with respect to consistency, one individual who transcribed tapes had considerable experience in doing this from previous research. She coached the other transcribers on the process.

Implementation

As indicated earlier, informants were selected through a systematic process. The school principal was generally interviewed first, then the teachers, then the students, and finally their parents. We interviewed instructional assistants and special education administrators in no particular order. All of the student, teacher, administrator, and instructional assistant interviews were carried out at the site, whereas most of the parent interviews were conducted over the phone.

Interviews were conducted by the principal investigator, three staff members, two graduate students, and two faculty members. They were all tape recorded and later transcribed. To begin the interviews, we informed the interviewees of the purpose of the project. We then asked the interviewed school staff to read and sign a consent form that gave us permission to ask questions and record the interview. Following this we asked questions from the various protocols. Most of the interviews lasted about 30 minutes, a few were shorter, and some lasted for 60 minutes. When the interviewees had responded to all of our questions, they were given an opportunity to ask questions.

Surveys

Purpose

All general and special education teachers, counselors, and instructional assistants were asked to respond to written surveys. We also surveyed all the special education students who were not interviewed. The purpose of the surveys was to extend our data base by allowing as many individuals as possible to express their opinions regarding the special education programs.

Description

Surveys given to various constituents consisted of 10 to 20 items, most of which required respondents to rank their answer on a scale of 1 to 5. Some respondents were also asked to check items they agreed with or used. Spaces were included for respondents to add additional items we had not included. In addition, we requested some respondents to indicate percentages of a few happenings, and some open-ended items were included on most surveys.

Development and Training

Surveys for general and special education teachers and for students were designed to replicate items on the corresponding interview protocols whenever possible. In developing the surveys, staff members checked the items on the surveys with those on the interviews to make certain they were the same. Items on the counselor survey took into account their presumed relationships with students with disabilities and were designed to contribute data to the research questions.

Implementation

Surveys for general education teachers were ordinarily passed out at a regularly scheduled meeting of the entire staff. Surveys for special education teachers, counselors, and instructional assistants were given to the chairperson of the special education department who gave the correct form to each individual. Most of the time surveys for special education students were completed in one of their special education classes.

Documents

Purpose

We collected several documents from each high school to furnish us with additional information about the special education programs. Facts and figures from those documents related to many of our research questions.

Description

Ordinarily, we gathered and studied documents of six types: pupil schedules, teacher schedules, the course of study booklet, a listing of the special education students and their type of disability, a listing of the special education students and the type of program in which they were placed, and the IEPs of focus students. We studied information from one state document, the State of Washington Rules and Regulations for Programs Providing Services to Children with Disabilities.

ORGANIZING, ANALYZING, AND REPORTING DATA

Organizing Information for Each Research Question

Described here is the process we followed to organize data from the four data sources.

Observations

In order to organize data from observations, a table was developed that showed data by research question and the source of data. Data from classroom observations responded to Research Questions c, h, i, and k. Whereas only one item from the classroom observations related to Questions c, i, and k, nine items pertained to Question h. Information relevant to Research Question h was gathered from the focus student in each class; in fact, five items pertained to that question.

Interviews

To facilitate the analysis of information from the interviews, a table was constructed to display how the research questions were dealt with from questions asked of the various informants. Since there were respondents of several types (e.g., administrators, general teachers, students, parents, and instructional assistants), research questions could be addressed by several types. Indeed, all the questions were dealt with by at least four types of informants, and a few by all seven types.

Surveys

To aid in the analysis of survey data, we developed a table on which research questions were matched according to the survey questions from informants. The 12 research questions were printed vertically on the table, and the five types of surveyed informants (i.e., counselor, general teacher, special teacher, student, and instructional assistant) were listed horizontally at the top. Within this matrix, each survey question was printed. There was at least one item from a survey that responded to each research question. Most of the research questions received responses from several informants.

Documents

A table was developed to display information from documents similar to those designed for the other three data sources. On this table the 12 research questions were displayed vertically on the chart and the six types of documents were indicated horizontally across the top. Within the matrix, we entered an X when a document related to one of the research questions

Analyzing the Data

Information from all the *observations* was coded by each research question. These coded observations were then summarized by research question and subsequently scanned, along with summarized information from the other data sources, as we wrote responses to the 12 research questions.

In order to work with the considerable information from the *interviews*, we first coded each interview by research question. To do so, we bracketed and labeled all the information that related to the various questions (e.g., curriculum). Next, the information from all interviews for each research question was organized. That gave us 12 stacks of comments from interviews, one for each research question. We worked from those stacks to analyze data and write reports. *Surveys* were summarized by type of individual (e.g., pupils). They were then coded by research question, sorted by research question, and considered along with other summarized data as we wrote reports. Information in *documents* that corresponded to various research questions was likewise coded. That material was grouped by research question and examined along with information from other sources as we wrote reports.

Writing the Reports

Comprehensive reports were written for each site. Those reports were generally made up of five sections: overview, research questions, recommendations, tables and figures, and appendices. In the first section we provided information on the project generally, indicated the research questions, provided demographic information regarding the site, and described our data sources. In the second section, the largest of the reports, we provided information from the four data sources regarding each of the 12 research questions. In the next section, we listed and elaborated on recommendations we offered the site. In the following section we included the tables and figures that were referred to in the body of the report; and in the last section we included our interview and observation protocols.

GENERAL RESULTS

Following are the most common findings from the six high schools relevant to the 12 research questions. Whereas some of them were not unexpected, others were. We derived these results by carefully reviewing each of the six reports, one research question at a time. In addition to reporting those findings I offer a comment for each research question.

Curricular and Extracurricular Offerings

• Most classes in the high schools we visited were available to the majority of youth with disabilities. The extent of accessibility varied, of course, from one high school to another. Classes in which these students were rarely enrolled were foreign language, instrumental music, and advanced placement sections.
• When asked about the most important subjects they take in high school, mathematics was named by most youth with disabilities, followed by language arts and social studies. Invariably, however, they mentioned physical education as their favorite subject.
• Most youth with mild disabilities participate in the majority of the school's co-curricular activities, but their peers with moderate and severe disabilities are not as involved. With respect to all youth with disabilities, the estimates of their involvement ranged from 15 to 20%; whereas the estimated range for youth without disabilities was from 30 to 35%. Those estimates varied widely across schools and types of individuals.

Comment: When it comes to including youth with disabilities in co-curricular activities most schools haven't begun to probe the possibilities. Whereas numbers of teachers are willing to allow youth with disabilities into content classes (whether or not they make special accommodations for them), far fewer are willing to open doors for them into the many clubs and organizations of schools. This is unfortunate, for not only should those co-activities be associated (in some cases at least) with the actual curriculum, they are the events and circumstances that motivate youth. Participation in co-curricular activities is the only reason that some youth stay in school.

Delivery Systems

• Although there is an emphasis on more inclusion in high schools, there are still the usual types of delivery models for youth with disabilities: general education classes, resource rooms, self-contained classes, vocational classes (special and regular), and community placement.

• Preferences of students for one type of location over another are mixed. Most youth with moderate disabilities, who had been in both general and special education situations, preferred special education classes, because, according to them, they received more help and the classes were easier. Most students with mild disabilities opted for general education situations, because, according to them, the classes were more challenging and they learned more.

• About 2/3 of the students with disabilities know why they are in special education. Several reported their type of disability (e.g., learning disability) or a more functional reason (e.g., difficulty reading).

• About 1/3 of the students with disabilities have been in special education for more than 10 years. A great proportion of the students in our high schools have been in special education since third grade.

• About 75% of the parents of youth with disabilities were pleased with special education programs. Although several of them disagreed with the school or certain teachers from time to time, when asked about their overall satisfaction with special education, they were mostly satisfied.

• Most teachers, parents, and administrators are of the opinion that mainstreaming (inclusion) is a good thing. This part of the challenge—the belief that youth with disabilities should be served largely in general education situations—has fairly well been met.

Comment: What with the hue and cry for more inclusion, one would think there would be more co-teaching. That form of delivering instruction, where a special and general education teacher combine their classes and

go about instructing them, seems to be a natural way to include youth with disabilities into regular situations. But in this part of the country there is not much of it. Although there is a fair amount of discussion at several districts about general education teachers co-teaching, in their efforts to integrate curriculum, little interest is shown in forming alliances between special and general education.

Personnel

• There are several types of special education teachers in high schools, those who work with youth with mild disabilities, with moderate, with severe, and others. Their orientations toward the instruction of youth, their communications with parents and general education teachers, their ideas about the futures of the youth, and other matters are often disparate.
• The majority of general education teachers in high schools serve youth with disabilities. There is, however, a considerable range of involvement; our study indicated it to be from about 75% to 95% of teachers in a building. As mentioned earlier, not many instructors of advanced placement classes, foreign language classes, or instrumental music are involved with youth with disabilities.
• There is an increase in recent years of numbers of paraprofessionals in high schools. Not only are there more of them in high schools than a few years ago, they are being asked to take on more instructional responsibilities that are quite demanding. Paraprofessionals are, in fact, the backbone of the inclusion movement in many schools.
• A few districts have engaged behavior disorders and vocation/transition specialists. Those are two of the most vexing problems of districts and a few have seen fit to engage specialists. Some smaller districts are combining resources to provide these important services.
• Many principals, counselors, school psychologists, and others are unfamiliar with the workings of special education. Their perceptions of individuals with disabilities, how they (the professionals) relate to special education programs, and how all that relates to general education have not kept pace with current restructuring and inclusion movements.
• Nowadays we hear a lot of talk about the changing roles of various professionals (most of it from individuals who do not expect their activities to change). The responsibilities of counselors, school psychologists, and special education teachers are topics of these discussions.
  Comment: With the emphasis on inclusion, to whatever degree, it will be interesting to see if school psychologists and counselors will be asked

to carry out different chores in order to expedite the movement of youth with disabilities from resource and self-contained rooms into general education classes. Will they take on new and different responsibilities? Will school psychologists continue giving WRATs and WISCs, and will counselors continue recommending that most youth go to college?

Collaboration

* Everyone wants to do it, collaborate that is. If collaboration is loosely defined as the joining together of two or more individuals who have different but complementary skills to accomplish a common purpose, then there is very little of it in high schools. Time, according to most, is a major barrier to inhibiting these partnerships, but rarely do educators come up with creative ways to collaborate so as to have more time or use what they have more wisely.
* When educators do communicate they rely on the workshop-notebook-overhead projector method. Oftentimes the communicators attempt to communicate too much, and as a result communicatees come away with incomplete and fragmented facts, confused and tangled figures, and fabricated and false information.
* About 50% of general education teachers are pleased with their interactions with special education teachers. Most of them are respectful of the time their special education colleagues put into these endeavors.
* In most schools there is a misunderstanding across general and special education as to one another's roles. Teachers in both groups think they know what the others do, but they really don't. Most administrators are apparently unaware of this pervasive malaise, for they do little to cure it.
* There is a concern about what to tell general education teachers about students with disabilities in their classes. Not a few general education teachers are inadequately informed about certain conditions of special youth (e.g., an epilepsy or diabetes); others are given irrelevant information about real or presumed conditions (e.g., dyslexia and ADD), and yet others are given confusing information about problematic conditions (e.g., single parents and low income families).

Comment. It is interesting that so few individuals actually say *why* it is they want to or should collaborate. Will they be able to help more children more efficiently? Will they feel better about teaching? Will they develop more empathy toward their fellows? Before we move forward with collaborations and partnerships, proper rationales must be created and agreed upon.

Parents

• Parents are not involved much in the IEP process. They do not know
a great deal about the make up of their son's or daughter's document. This
is true in spite of the fact that schools make efforts to involve them. When
asked about goals and objectives for their youth, parents rarely know what
they are. Even less often are parents aware of the particulars in the docu-
ment: how objectives or goals are to be evaluated, where the youth' s edu-
cation will take place, and who is responsible for teaching her or him. This
is true not only of the standard IEPs but of the addenda that apply to
student's transition plans.
• Parent involvement in general is minimal. By the time youth with
disabilities have reached high school, their parents are tired of schools,
teachers, and their children; they want to get the school part of their lives
over with. Not only are parents weary of the whole business of education,
so are their sons and daughters, and to complete the dismal picture, teach-
ers are tired of the students and their parents.
• Numbers of parents are reasonably pleased with special education
programs. In view of the preceding comments this appears to be contra-
dictory, but dozens of parents give credit to teachers and appreciate their
efforts.
    Comment: Most parents have not come to grips with the reality that
they are the *only* persons who will be with their son or daughter throughout
their lives. Scores of them, unfortunately, believe that the system will take
care of their youth with disabilities. That schools are now developing tran-
sition plans for students will surely contribute to these illusions. Parents
must accept the fact that regardless of how competent their youth' s special
education teacher is, how energetic the transition coordinator might be, or
how sympathetic the counselor is, those professionals will not be around
for the entire life of the student. Therefore, it is up to parents to take on
the responsibility as case manager, transition coordinator, and all the rest.

IEPs and ITPs

• Most schools are proud of their IEPs (and no two forms are alike
across districts), and the great majority of the IEPs would pass stringent
state or federal audits. Although many districts are now puzzled about writ-
ing ITPs, they will surely develop suitable forms in time. Some districts
write cumulative IEPs; that is, they take into account the several years that
a youth has been in special education.

• About 50% of special education teachers favor the IEP process. Although most of them complain of the time required to develop the documents, carry out the meetings, and all the rest, a good proportion believe that the notion behind IEPs is a good one.

• About 75% of general education teachers who have youth with disabilities in their classes know a fair amount about IEPs and the related process. Not nearly that many, however, participate actively and consistently in developing the documents and carrying out the programs. The majority are content to keep it that way.

• Most parents, as indicated earlier, are in favor of the IEP process. This, in spite of the fact they don't participate much in the process.

• The great majority of pupils are in the dark about their IEPs. Although most of them know what the process is and generally what it is intended to do, they rarely know about the specifics of their plans.

• Teachers at the private high school in our study wrote IEPs, even though they were not required to. Although their IEPs were much simpler than ones written by public school teachers, they were, for the most part, followed more closely when providing instruction. Private school pupils did not know any more about their plans than did their public school peers, however.

Comment: Following are five conclusions about the IEPs we studied and the related process: (a) There are too many goals and objectives. The averages from the 100 or so we studied are 8 goals and 20 objectives. (b) The goals and objectives are written in arcane educationees, hence are difficult for students and their parents (not to mention some educators) to understand. (c) The methods for evaluating goals and objectives are often simple minded, monotonous, and impractical. (d) There is little relationship between what is taught to youth and what is written on their IEPs. (e) Most students with disabilities (even those who are reasonably verbal) do not know what goals have been written for them, and certainly do not know any of the particulars included in the document.

Goals

• Most "during-school goals" for youth with disabilities are specific: do well on tests, earn good grades, and graduate. They are about the same as those for youth without disabilities.

• Some of the "after-school goals" for these youth are just as specific: be employed and continue their education. Others are somewhat vague: contribute to society and fulfill their potential. Specific or vague, those after-school goals, too, are much like the ones for youth without disabilities.

• There is some disagreement, however, as to goals for youth with disabilities among individuals responsible for their education. Whereas some believe the goals should be the same as those for all youth, others maintain that many youth with disabilities should be more involved in community and vocational pursuits, or have other goals.

Comment: The during- and particularly the after-school goals for youth with disabilities should be more specific, if they are to be obtained. All individuals concerned with the goals should be able to detect, from time to time, the extent to which they are being met.

Instructional Practices

• There is a dearth of instructional practices at the high school level. This observation pertains to both special and general education teachers. When teachers are asked how they would teach some skill, concept, or "essential learning" they come up with only a few alternatives.

• Many of the techniques that teachers do name are not actually instructional techniques. Some frequent responses are these: individualized instruction, one-on-one instruction, cooperative learning, and peer tutoring.

• Moreover, teachers offer clichés when asked about instructional techniques: attend to students' learning styles, teach at their pace, have a number of techniques on hand.

• We did observe more of a variety of instructional techniques in general education classes than in special education classes.

• Neither parents nor pupils know much about instructional techniques or strategies. On occasion, however, pupils suggest rather precise instructional practices (e.g., show me how to do it, be patient with me, tell me more than once how to do it).

• With respect to study habits generally and reading habits specifically, the majority of youth with special needs do not study or read as much as their peers.

Comment: Not only should teachers extend their instructional repertories, but students should be informed as to their most efficient ways to learn. Moreover, students should know how they learn best from books, from lectures, from other means.

Evaluation

• Matters of grading and evaluation are generally left up to individual teachers. Some have a single standard, and youth with disabilities must measure up to it. Others make adjustments in the way they grade these

youth. Several teachers evaluate youth on a pass/fail or credit/no credit basis. When giving grades, numbers of teachers take into account matters other than performance, mentioning attitude, effort, and attendance.

• Related to the preceding comment, most students with disabilities are confused about evaluation. This is particularly true of those who are enrolled in several general education classes in which the methods of grading are different.

• Adjusting grades or the method in which they are given is the most frequently considered adaptation of general education teachers. They are more apt to adjust grades than to make other accommodations or modifications.

• With respect to tests and other forms of evaluation, some teachers are moving from paper and pencil type measures to portfolios and authentic assessments.

Comment. Too often, teachers adjust the type of evaluation without considering that evaluation, grades, goals, IEPs, curriculum, and instructional techniques should all be linked.

Graduation

• Most youth with disabilities are expected to take the same type of courses as others to graduate. They are given these offerings in general or basic track classes taught by general education teachers, or in resource rooms taught by special education teachers.

• About 50% of pupils with disabilities know how many credits are required to graduate, but far fewer know about the proper distribution of those credits. Even fewer are aware that their graduation will be or could be related to their IEPs.

• Most schools defer diplomas for certain youth. Whereas some districts openly discuss this matter, others will not.

• Most general education teachers are unaware of the options for graduation available to youth with disabilities.

• Although there is only one diploma for youth, whether or not students are disabled, there is considerable discussion about the type of transcripts that are given.

• As private schools begin to consider deferred diplomas for youth and wish for them to access transition services at public schools at a later date, they must begin working collaboratively with public schools early on.

Comment: With respect to policies having to do with matters other than graduation, schools have few of them. Rarely, are there policies that pertain to mainstreaming or inclusion. Those regulations could relate to

who will serve youth with disabilities, of what type, how many, and other matters. Related policies might deal with the assistance general education teachers who "include" youth with disabilities in their classes would receive. Not only are there few policies having to do with who will be included, where, and what kind of support is given, seldom are there regulations that focus on the evaluation (or grading) of these youth. Collaboration among personnel responsible for dealing with youth with disabilities and communication with parents of these youth also are areas that lack policies.

Preparation

• Most special education teachers believe they were adequately prepared to deal with special needs youth. Most general education teachers are of the opinion that they were not, and about 50% of the principals, counselors, and school psychologists believe they were.

• Most teachers and others recommend on-site training for those preparing to work with youth with disabilities. They are no more specific about the conditions of those places than they were when asked about the types of instructional techniques they arranged for youth.

• Few teachers (either general or special), administrators, or others were prepared for any of the following: site-based management, integrating curriculum, working with parents.

• Inservice sessions in most districts are poorly planned. The topics are often randomly selected (or so it appears), one-shot affairs, and are without follow up.

• Most universities and colleges do not work closely with schools when it comes to preparing teachers, administrators, or others. At least in this part of the country, the manner in which individuals are placed for their training and supervised while they are there, is no different or better than it was when I was a student teacher in Topeka, Kansas, a few years before Brown vs the Board of Education of that city.

Comment: Just a word or two about instructional assistants. They are the ones who actually do the teaching in many schools. This is especially true for youth with severe disabilities when they are included in general education settings. Although these paraprofessionals are generally ready and willing to take on difficult tasks, their training to carry them out and the supervision they are given for handling them are often woefully lacking.

Improvement

These comments have to do with the suggestions for improvement that came from individuals at the high schools.

• The most frequent recommendations had to do with curriculum, delivery systems, personnel, collaboration, and preparation.

• The fewest recommendations pertained to parents, graduation, instruction, evaluation, goals, and IEPs.

• Administrators offered the most recommendations and pupils the least. Students' recommendations, however, were generally more matter of fact and personal than those from administrators (e.g., a pupil, "Hire teachers who really care about pupils." an administrator, "Move from a 6- to a 4-period day.").

Comment: It was discouraging that there were so few recommendations from school personnel that pertained to instruction, evaluation, and parents. We saw those features as among the ones most in need of deliberation and change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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