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Making Integration Happen: Essential Competencies for Teacher Education

As the major educational resource available to a school is the skill and knowledge of its teaching staff, the movement towards integration must raise questions about the adequacy of existing teacher education and training programmes. A study conducted in Australia points to the need to identify a 'cluster of capabilities' as a minimum competency which would become an integral part of all teacher training.

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INTRODUCTION: AUSTRALIAN DEVELOPMENTS IN INTEGRATION

The acceptance by the State Government of Victoria of the Ministerial Review of Educational Services for the Disabled (Integration Report) in 1984 heralded an orientation to integration which suggested that all children have a right (a) to be educated in the regular classroom and (b) to expect the education system to provide adequate resources to meet all their educational service requirements. In special education the reform efforts have largely been government inspired and administratively driven. There was intense concentration on efforts to reorganise schools and district level governance systems and the manner in which fiscal and personnel resources were allocated to programmes and utilised at the school site (Dunstan, 1988; Hayward, 1993; McMurdo, 1992). And yet as important as these elements are, integration, hailed as a Bill of Rights by some, begs a very basic and fundamental question: Has integration into the regular school produced a real change for disabled children in the classroom or has it simply perpetuated the myth of educational reform and renewal ?

THE CHALLENGE TO TEACHER EDUCATION

For more than a century teacher education has developed and helped to maintain a dual and parallel system of education. Preservice training programmes for regular programs educators have tended to foster attitudes, knowledge and skills germane to a restricted range of children; those thought of as falling "within the normal range". As the major educational resource available to a school is the skill and knowledge of its teaching staff, the movement towards integration must raise questions about the adequacy of existing teacher education training programmes.

The State Government of Victoria in accepting the recommendations of the Integration Report (1984) then attempted to address them in various ways. However one aspect of this issue which has not received much attention was the preparation of teachers who were to work with the disabled child in the regular school. It can therefore be stated with confidence that one of the guiding principles of the Integration Report - all children can learn and be taught - could not be realised if the teaching was not effective, meaningful and relevant to the needs of the disabled child. It does not require a quantum leap in logic to accept the corollary that "teaching will not improve much without dramatic improvements in the field of teacher education" (Holmes, 1986) and that the connection between the way we prepare teachers and the needs of schools is a matter for urgent attention (Carnegie Forum, 1986).

NEW WAYS FOR OLD PROGRAMMES ?

Traditionally teachers and teacher educators viewed input from outside as a treat to their autonomy and a sign of incompetence (Conley, Schmidle, Shedd, 1988). The obsession with ideology of non-interference which pervades the teaching profession (Ost, 1989) was camouflaged by a legitimization mechanism of in-house accreditation procedures which resulted in old programmes being presented in new packaging. Although research has identified new modes of implementing promising and current best practices (Fox, 1989; Halvoet, 1989,) direct service providers continue to express frustration when attempting to implement them with individuals with disabilities. Consumers have likewise expressed dissatisfaction (VPSEC, 1986). These questions then emerge: How then can we identify alternative formulations of programme development? Can other vested interest groups such as parents of disabled students and practicing teachers contribute to the quantum of knowledge that exists about is needed for effective instruction? How can the energy and knowledge of this force be combined and harnessed for constructive participation and involvement? One effective

technique is needs assessment (Kuk,1980; Scriven, 1980).

NEEDS ASSESSMENT: POINTERS FOR TEACHER COMPETENCY

Needs assessment is a systematic process of determining discrepancies in an educational system, for setting levels of criticality and for establishing priorities. Inherent in needs assessment is the concern for involvement of lay persons and its acceptance of community involvement. The literature dealing with collaborative professional culture (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1991; Leithwood et al, 1991; Pillay, 1992) has pointed out that teachers' motivation for development is enhanced when they set internalised goals for professional growth. Deci and Ryan (1985) and Poplin (1992) tell us that growth in any individual is promoted by being conscious of what drives one to become the best one can. Pillay (1992) reported a study that considered the confluence of needs of three vested interest groups: teacher educators, teachers and parents of disabled students. He considered the variables that affected their interaction in the planning, content, determination and delivery of programmes. Respondents had to rate thirty items on a questionnaire, titled ANISA - PAT and rank order six categories thought to underlie teacher competency in the education of disabled students. To bridge the chasm that existed in the continuum of professional teacher preparation and the needs of the disabled child the study pointed to the "need to identify a 'cluster of capabilities' as a minimum competency which would become an integral part of all teacher training."

What follows is an attempt to describe this basic cluster of capabilities. While the cluster is based on Pillay (1992), supportive evidence for its inclusion has been derived from a selection of comprehensive sources from the conceptual and research literature in the field of disabilities. The result of this process represents to a degree best thinking about best practices.

A COMMON BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

The expectation set by the integration imperative is of a competent teacher who has the skill to provide direct support and remediation for disabled students in academic and social areas. In addition the teacher should be able to convey information to assist parents and other teachers in the modification of curriculum and instructional strategies. Pillay (1992) grouped thirty skill areas into six clusters of capabilities. They were:

CLUSTER OF CAPABILITIES

- 1. Parents' and children's rights as expressed by law and government policy.**
- 2. Conducting assessment and communicating assessment data and results.**
- 3. Programme planning, implementation and evaluation and classroom management.**
- 4. Knowledge of resources that parents might use for their children.**
- 5. Knowledge of family dynamics.**
- 6. Communication and personal interaction skills.**

Each section dealing with the “capabilities” has a similar organisation. First a rationale is offered to place the particular “capability” within a framework. This is followed by a short description to explain the essentials of the concept. Finally a set of examples is presented to clarify the meaning of the competency.

COMPETENCY 1 : PARENTS' AND CHILDRENS' RIGHTS

Rationale

As the twentieth century moved on, a number of social and technological movements coalesced and challenged the traditions and thinking that informed and influenced educational and curricular practices. The revolution in the curriculum was but a reflection of the revolution in society. A knowledge of the social movements, laws and government policy of any society is therefore necessary for an understanding of the rationale for changing attitudes towards the contemporary disenfranchised.

The Integration Report (1984) and Ministry of Education memoranda No. 80 and No. 142 made specific and detailed provision for the education of the disabled child. Guiding principle No. 1: Every child has a right to an education in a regular school, set the tone for integration. It emphasised the rights model and called into play what the literature refers to as “active accessibility.”

Description

This competency requires an understanding of the philosophical and theoretical aspects of the social movements and historical events and the technical aspects relating to the laws and regulations that have impacted on the genesis and development of the full complement of services for people with disabilities and the integration imperative.

**TEACHER COMPETENCY OBJECTIVES:
PARENT'S AND CHILD'S RIGHTS**

- 1. The teacher is able to explain government policy, the law and state educational regulations for compliance which guide decision making concerning the right to education for all disabled persons.**
- 2. The teacher can interpret and respond to the challenge of the five guiding principles of the Integration Report which govern all decisions relating to the integration of disabled students into regular schools.**

COMPETENCY 2 : ASSESSMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Rationale

One of the most important areas for special education teachers is assessment. It provides insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the child. The first step of the assessment process is to determine exactly what skills are within the child's repertoire. Assessment techniques should obtain information that leads directly to an appropriate, educational programme. Information about assessment has to be conveyed to the parents. What information does the parent or guardian need? What tests are used and why? What is the best way to present the information in a meaningful way to parents and other professionals? Responses to questions such as these provide an indication of what could be introduced in a programme for all teachers.

Description

This competence is related to the ability to assess the school based instructional demands being placed on the disabled person and determines the extent to which the disabled student is able to meet those demands. In addition it helps to ascertain what needs to be done to meet the established criteria. Within this competency the teacher is a member of a multi-disciplinary team and provides input for the development of a comprehensive profile of the disabled learner so that a meaningful and responsive programme might be developed.

**TEACHER COMPETENCY OBJECTIVES :
ASSESSMENT AND COMMUNICATION**

- 1. The teacher can select/develop, modify, administer and evaluate appropriate assessment and evaluation techniques for various purposes but especially for determining the educational needs of disabled students.**
- 2. The teacher is able to interpret the assessment and evaluation results for individualised education programme development and to report the findings to parents and other educators.**

**COMPETENCY 3 :
PROGRAMME PLANNING AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT**

Rationale

Programme planning, implementation and evaluation and classroom management are two discrete but nevertheless closely related sets of activities that describe effective teaching.

The individualised educational programme is the major focus of special educational practice. It brings together the primary vested interest groups to formally design a programme and clearly sets out what is to be taught, by whom it is to be taught, how it is to be taught and how the programme and the child's progress are to be evaluated. What makes special education so special is the teacher's ability to select and modify instructional methods and materials and to use alternative instructional strategies to meet the individual needs of a disabled child. In this way the "what to teach" becomes as important as and closely linked to "how to teach." Thus all teachers need to have the ability to apply individual and group management skills that consider flexible scheduling, alternative student grouping and teacher directed instruction.

Description

This competence is related to the ability to use individual, small group and whole class management techniques to effectively accommodate the needs of the

disabled child. In addition the teacher has to be able to apply teaching strategies that respond to the unique needs of the disabled student.

**TEACHER COMPETENCY OBJECTIVES:
PROGRAMME PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT**

- 1. The teacher is able to use appropriate individual, small group and whole class management skills to create a supportive environment for the conduct of lessons.**
- 2. The teacher is able to translate the results obtained from assessment into a responsive and effective educational plan with appropriate activities to enable the specified objectives to be achieved**

COMPETENCY 4: KNOWLEDGE OF RESOURCES

Rationale

Parents have looked to the helping professions for the provision of effective services to reduce the stress of living with a disabled child. Attention therefore should be given to the informational needs of the parents. Information about the child's abilities and future plans yield changes in parental expectations. The opportunity to share with others and to learn from them in parent organisations served to reinforce the family in its tasks. Involvement in this type of voluntary organisation provided emotional support and practical advice (Edge & Davis, 1992). Concerns today have to do with how disabled persons might best be served in an open society and how services might be organised and delivered to facilitate the greatest degree of community integration within the frameworks of social justice, equity of access and the right to a humane effective and integrated service.

Description

This competency relates to the ability to know what resources are necessary to respond to the challenges facing disabled persons and their families and what are available. In addition it includes knowledge about the roles of resource personnel and the established procedures to access the resources.

TEACHER COMPETENCY OBJECTIVES: KNOWLEDGE OF RESOURCES

- 1. The teacher is able to demonstrate the ability to make appropriate referrals for support services.**
- 2. The teacher is able to incorporate the support provided by outside agencies within the total programme developed for the disabled person.**

COMPETENCY 5: FAMILY DYNAMICS

Rationale

The birth of a child is classified as a severe emotional stress for parents (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Given the psychological and cultural pressure to produce unimpaired offspring, the birth of a disabled child is seen as traumatic. An understanding of that stress is important for everyone dealing with such parents.

The theoretical generalisation that all parents responded to a disabled child in the same manner is unsound. The desire to make a complicated situation simple has resulted in artificial order. There is need to understand that the way in which a family responds to situations is an individual matter. Each parent and family has to be known and understood for himself or herself.

The underlying principle in family dynamics is that the emotional state of parents enhanced or impeded their ability to be involved meaningfully with their child and the school. The reflective teacher and the effective school can therefore help parents and families to progress toward understanding and acceptance.

Description

This competency relates to the ability of the teacher to develop non-traditional approaches to parent/family involvement and interaction and to acquire a greater understanding of the cultural diversity in society. The uniqueness of families is reflected in the need for individualised services and programmes for a particular family.

TEACHER COMPETENCY OBJECTIVES: FAMILY DYNAMICS

- 1. The teacher is able to respond to the unique service needs of the parents of disabled students by leading the school's attempts to reach out and collaborate with parents in developing responsive school help and family help programmes.**
- 2. The teacher is able to demonstrate the appropriate manners and courtesies of significance in different cultures and to make all parents feel welcome and comfortable in the schools.**

COMPETENCY 6: COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Rationale

The integration imperative ushered in a new era in parent-professional interaction. Parents were no longer on the periphery of the process by which decisions were made about their children. They were involved directly in the planning and implementation stages. Thus parents and teachers should be seen as partners rather than combatants and both should understand that working together is more productive than blaming each other.

Being able to communicate effectively with parents especially when interviewing or conferring with them is most important. There are three very important aspects of communication: (1) Building a trusting and positive relationship; (2) Sharing information; (3) Active listening.

Conflict resolution strategies which lead to a win-win situation for both parents and teacher should form an integral part of all professional training programmes.

Description

This competency is related to the teacher's ability to develop a positive relationship with the parents of a disabled student so that they could collaborate in programme development and implementation. Included in this competency is the ability to "share information, share decision making, share action and share responsibility".

**TEACHER COMPETENCY OBJECTIVES:
COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

- 1. The teacher is able to demonstrate the ability to communicate with the parents of students with disabilities.**
- 2. The teacher is able to contribute to parent education and training programs that relate to the development of programmes for disabled students.**

CONCLUSION

The integration imperative expressed in policy, legislation and school practice by the mainstreaming of disabled students into regular schools has thrust new demands upon teachers for which they have not been adequately prepared. It therefore becomes necessary that teacher education must be the instrument that triggers change if teachers and teaching are to be effective and relevant to the needs of the profession and the disabled child. The knowledge explosion grown out of research and technology coupled with the broader shift towards accountability and the reconceptualization of special education as a service delivery system provides us with an excellent opportunity to meet the challenge of integration. Within this context the professional culture of teachers assumes a major significance. It requires, however, an effective pre-service awareness of the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and competencies that all teachers should have to make integration effective.

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