

Chapter One

Overview

In today's research, terms related to the field of special education are frequently used interchangeably. *Children with special needs, disabled, and exceptional* historically have been used throughout the literature. For purposes of this reference text, the terms are used synonymously because all indicate services and education for children that fall outside of the regular education classroom. To develop insight into the vital issues and challenges concerning special education in the United States, one needs first to understand *special education* as it relates to *regular education*.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF REGULAR EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

The desire to educate young citizens equally in the interest of a developing society became a cornerstone philosophy of America's forefathers. Though the Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gave states jurisdiction over education matters, no state required school attendance until 1840, when Rhode Island passed a compulsory school attendance law. By the mid-1880s, public schools throughout the country had adapted an age-grade level system, categorizing students into grade levels according to chronological age. Differences between students placed in this system became very obvious; strong students graduated to the next grade level while poor students were retained in the same level, or "flunked." In the early 1900s the National Education Association, a national organization for teachers, endorsed the Stanford-Binet Scale of Intelligence Tests as being a useful predictor of school success or failure. The tests introduced the concept of intelligence quotient (IQ), which became a significant factor in student stability placement. Through the 1940s and 1950s educational concerns emphasized nutrition (subsidized school cafeteria facilities were enacted in 1946) and proficiency in math and science. Not until 1965, with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, were any federal educational programs in place to address the needs of children from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The Head Start program was one result of this act; it was developed in the belief that early educational intervention would increase the likelihood of later school success.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

For most of our nation's history, schools were allowed to exclude certain children, especially those with disabilities. How the process of exclusion developed and where it began is quite a narrative.

Prior to the 1800s, superstition drove the treatment of persons with obvious disabilities, such as the severely retarded, mentally ill, deaf, blind, and physically disabled. Many children with disabilities were abandoned and left to die. Witch hunts, burnings, and exorcisms also were common means to an end for such "problem" children. Advocates of humane treatment for the disabled were few and far between. They include a Spanish monk named Ponce de Leon, who during the sixteenth century successfully taught deaf students to communicate; Juan Pablo Bonet of Spain, who developed a method of finger spelling for the blind during the seventeenth century; and Jacob Rodriguez Pereire, who simplified sign language and invented an arithmetical machine to teach students how to calculate. The English philosopher John Locke distinguished between idiocy (mental retardation) and insanity (mental illness) in 1690 by advocating the idea that there is no basic human nature, that our minds at birth could be opened to all kinds of stimuli.

In 1799, Jean Marc Itard, a French physician and educator, expressed his belief that idiocy could be treated through educational intervention. He went so far as to begin describing the concept of individualized intervention, sensory stimulation, and systematic instruction. He did so by taking responsibility for Victor, a 12-year-old "wild" boy found in the woods by hunters near Aveyron, France. The boy had developed no language, exhibited uncontrollable behavior, and was described as savage or animal-like. Hoping to cure his condition, Itard put Victor through a program of sensory stimulation. After 5 years, Victor had developed some verbal language and had become reasonably socialized to his new environment. This demonstrated two things: (1) learning could take place, even for individuals determined by professionals to be hopeless; and (2) appropriate treatment could be continued and expanded on by others (Hardman, Drew, Egan and Wolf, 1990).

The Spanish artist Diego Velazquez in several of his most famous paintings exhibited another example of a more humane attitude toward the disabled. Dating from the 1630s through the 1650s are Velazquez's famous depictions of court dwarfs. Unlike court jester portraits of earlier artists, these dwarfs are treated with respect and sometimes appear in the same painting as the royal family. An example of this is Velazquez's masterpiece "Las Meninas,"* or "The Family of Philip IV," completed in about 1656. In this enigmatic painting of Spain's royal family appear the child Infanta Margarita, two maids of honor, the king and queen of Spain, and most important to this issue, two attendant dwarfs.

Velazquez created other paintings depicting these members of the court. "El Nino de Vallecas" (1636) shows a dwarf named Francisco Lezcano, with additional characteristics of the mentally handicapped, seated on an outcropping of rock; the painting of a jester entitled "Calabacillas" (mid-1640s) depicts a dull-faced, crossed-

* See images preceding this Overview.

eyed subject without mocking or exaggeration; and “El Primo” (1644) shows a jester who was in charge of the king’s royal stamp. These paintings demonstrated that the dwarf—a disabled person—was capable of maintaining an esteemed role in royal society. Another painting by Velazquez, “Sebastian de Morra” (1643/4), shows how “Despite being deformed and a dwarf, his face and his straightforward and penetrating gaze show no hint of mental weakness whatsoever, though they do express a rather melancholy, introspective air” (Seraller, 1999, p. 55–57).

Velazquez’s paintings demonstrate a specific effort on the part of the artist—as well as the Spanish court, since it approved the portraits—to give respect and dignity to individuals with special needs. This is both ironic for a society functioning on a class system and courageous for its time.

As though parallel to the gradual chronological development of caring and respect for people with special needs, Velazquez’s work in “Las Meninas” inspired generations of artists to follow. What is significant to special education is that although in the 1600’s the Spanish Court kept “dwarfs” as playthings perhaps because they were [considered] ugly and deformed (Benseeson, n.d.) Velazquez kept them included, as part of this painting. Many painters to follow for example: Degas, Manet, Scottish artist John Phillip, and most profoundly the 1957 work of Pablo Picasso who provided a series of 45 variations of the paintings based on “Las Meninas” (Stratton-Preutt, 2003) continued this inclusion. “There is no doubt that Picasso achieved his goal with the series . . . into his own repertoire of styles.” Picasso, though in his own style replicated the piece of Velazquez and retained all the characters, to include the dwarfs. Picasso painted one dwarf, Maribarbola, as macroencephalic and the other as kicking the dog with his foot (Claustre Rafort i Planes, 2001). In Picasso’s version, the dwarfs actually are exaggerated and have more prominence; this is supported by other paintings in Picasso’s series of 45, which focuses on the individual dwarfs which are studied, one particularly paired with the princess. This emphasis continues to support the high level of acceptance and respect of these figures as part of normal society.

Salvado Dali followed Picasso in 1958 as did English artist, Richard Hamilton in 1973 with continued inclusion of the dwarfs in their art. These artists, like Velazquez, included these special people, in order to level the subject matter, Alberto Gironell paints the dwarf Francisco Lezcano (also known as Nino de Vallecas) alone, wearing Velazquez’s decoration, the cross of the Order of Santiago. The dwarf has now commandeered Velazquez’s position. American photographer Joel-Peter Witkin dedicated his work “Las Meninas,” New Mexico (1987), to Velazquez to include the maimed and disabled.

Special Institutions and Schools

From 1800 to 1900 the first institutions for persons with special needs were developed in both the United States and Europe. Two conflicting objectives prevailed: (1) to offer humane treatment; and (2) to remove these people from general society. In 1817 Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, an American minister and educator, established the first American residential school for the deaf. In 1832 Samuel Gridley Howe, an American physician and educator of the blind and deaf, founded the Perkins Institute for the blind. Additionally, Howe advocated public financial support for education

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and treatment of exceptional populations. In 1834, Louis Braille, a French educator, developed a system of reading and writing for the blind that is still used today. In 1837, Eduoard Seguin, a French physician and educator, developed the first school for the intellectually retarded in Paris using the sensory motor method of application. In 1854, Seguin helped establish the first residential facility for the retarded in the United States.

In the mid-1880s, Dorothea Dix, an American educator and social reformer, secured reforms for mental institutions. She helped the American public view those institutions as hospitals for the “sick” rather than as prisons for the criminally insane.

Toward the end of the 1880s, Maria Montessori, an Italian physician and educator, developed theory, curricula, and instruction for early childhood education of normal and exceptional populations. This developed out of her experiences with the mentally retarded and the poor.

Also at the century’s end, Alfred Binet developed the Binet-Simon Intelligence Test, the first scale for measuring intelligence and for determining mental age. Lewis Terman revised the Binet-Simon Intelligence Test for use with English-speaking children, which became known as the Stanford Binet Intelligence Scale. Terman also produced the first longitudinal study of gifted children.

As the twentieth century dawned, Alexander Graham Bell, while speaking to members of the National Education Association (NEA), suggested the establishment of public school annexes for the education of the deaf, blind, and mentally challenged. In 1902, Bell urged that public “special education” be provided for children with disabilities so they could remain in their homes and communities. Work with Helen Keller, her teacher Anne Sullivan, and Captain Keller, Helen Keller’s father, influenced Bell’s philosophy of education. He grew to oppose segregated schools for students with learning handicaps.

Nationwide compulsory school attendance in the early 1900s flooded schools with thousands of new students, and policymakers had to find ways to deal with children who did not fit the mold. Many stayed in school until they could legally withdraw. In an agrarian society, there were plenty of jobs for unskilled and uneducated workers, so the social or economic ramifications of dropping out of school were few. But as the world changed, so did the issue.

Gradually, more public schools promoted special classes for children with learning handicaps. With the increased use of intelligence tests, it became easier for educators to diagnose children with potential academic difficulties.

In the first half of the 1900s, Alfred Strauss described the learning-disabled child, (identified by the term “Strauss Syndrome”) thereby marking the beginning of the field of learning-disabilities research. Slowly, more regular classrooms began to accept mildly handicapped students, and school achievement for the disabled proved greater; however, it wasn’t until the 1960s that the federal government took major legislative action to support special students in the educational process.

Growing Awareness of Special Needs

Since the 1960s there has been an avalanche of development concerning special education in the United States. Numerous court decisions and legislative acts now protect

those with disabilities and guarantee that children receive a free and appropriate, publicly supported education.

It is important to remember that parents and families are often the heroes in this effort. Politicians such as President John Kennedy publicly shared information about his mentally retarded sister with the country, as did Hubert Humphrey regarding his grandchild with Down's Syndrome. As a result of this sharing, individuals with handicaps have become part of our public awareness.

Buehler and Dugas (1979) in their *Directory of Learning Resources for Learning Disabilities* give examples of famous people with learning difficulties, including the following:

Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875), author of children's books: Wild variations of spelling and word formation in the handwritten manuscripts of this young man have led clinicians to conclude that he had a language disability—a fact that one might logically suppose would bar him from a literary career. It did not.

Thomas Edison (1847–1931), inventor: As a boy Edison was unable to learn in the public schools of Port Huron, Michigan. His parents withdrew him from school, and his mother undertook the slow, painstaking job of teaching the “three Rs” and other basic curriculum at home.

Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924), twenty-eighth president of the United States: Wilson did not learn his letters until the age of eight or learn to read until he was eleven. Letters from relatives consoled the parents because they believed the boy was so “dull and backward.” At school, he excelled only when the subject had to do with speech. But then, wrote a biographer, “it has been noted that dyslexics not infrequently become fluent speakers, perhaps, in part, as a compensation for poor facility in reading and writing.”

Winston Churchill (1874–1965), prime minister of England: This Englishman had considerable learning difficulties as a child. Recently, a “dummy” application was sent to his old boarding school, it was a duplicate of the application his family had actually submitted many years before, with only the name and personal data disguised. The school rejected the application out of hand, saying that the boy clearly would be unable to meet the school's standards.

George S. Patton (1885–1945), general and commander of the U.S. Third Army, World War II: Severely learning disabled, Patton could neither read nor write at the age of twelve. He overcame his difficulties to a sufficient extent to win appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, but even there, he had to hire a “reader” to help him get through his studies.

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940), one of America's leading novelists: As a boy Fitzgerald exhibited dreaminess, poor concentration, and a seeming inability to learn anything that did not present immediate, vivid interest. These characteristics caused his parents to doubt his ability to progress in school or in the world.

Nelson A. Rockefeller (1908–1979), governor of the State of New York, vice president of the United States: After watching a program on learning disabled children, this public figure wrote the following in *TV Guide* magazine: “I was one of the ‘puzzle children’ myself—a dyslexic or ‘reverse reader’—and I still have a hard time reading today. But after coping with this problem for more than 60 years, I have a message of encouragement for children with learning disabilities. . . . Don't accept