

The Principal and Mainstreaming: Ten Suggestions for Success

Pamela V. Cochrane and David L. Westling

If mainstreaming is seen as a team effort, as presented by the principal, the likelihood of success is greatly enhanced. Ten practical suggestions for help are given here.

It has been nearly ten years since the appearance of Dunn's (1968) often-quoted article questioning the appropriateness of special class placement for mildly handicapped children. Since that time, a significant portion of educational literature, both special and general, has dealt with the concept and practice of mainstreaming. General interest in mainstreaming was also stimulated by litigation and legislation that has qualified and restricted the conditions under which children may be placed in special segregated classrooms (for example, *PARC v. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 1972; Education of All Handicapped Act of 1975, PL94-142).

With the passage of PL94-142, there are no longer any questions concerning the advent of mainstreaming as it provides the least restrictive environment; the questions now generated concern the successful implementation of mainstreaming. A key figure in that implementation is the school principal, the person in the position to provide needed administrative support and to ensure success.

Before considering what the principal can do to facilitate the education of handicapped children in the regular classroom, it may be beneficial to briefly state what is meant by "mainstreaming."

Kaufman, Gottlieb, Agard, and Kukic (1975) have provided the following definition:

Mainstreaming refers to the temporal, instructional, and social integration of eligible exceptional children with normal peers based on an ongoing, individually determined, educational planning and programming process and requires clarification of

responsibility among regular and special education administrative, instructional, and supportive personnel (p. 4).

A more detailed definition of what mainstreaming is, as well as what it is not has been presented by Caster (1975):

Mainstreaming is:

- Providing the most appropriate education for each child in the least restrictive setting
- Looking at the educational needs of children instead of clinical or diagnostic labels such as mentally handicapped, learning disabled, physically handicapped, hearing impaired, or gifted
- Looking for and creating alternatives that will help general educators serve children with learning or adjustment problems in the regular setting. Some approaches being used to achieve this are consulting teachers, methods and materials specialists, itinerant teachers, and resource room teachers
- Uniting the skills of general education and special education so that all children may have equal educational opportunity.

Mainstreaming is not:

- Wholesale return of all exceptional children in special classes to regular class
- Permitting children with special needs to remain in regular classrooms without the support services they need
- Ignoring the need of some children for a more specialized program than can be provided in the general educational setting
- Less costly than serving children in special self-contained classrooms (p. 174).

Inherent in these definitions are all the components of mainstreaming, a concept that has more relevant themes than are generally recognized. There will be no simple solution to the

problems intrinsic to the process, but the following suggestions will diminish the intensity of the problems that do arise, and will enable solutions to those problems.

1. *Principals should become cognizant of the characteristics of mildly handicapped children.*

Before a principal can be effective in a direct or supportive role related to educational programming for exceptional children, he/she must be cognizant of their characteristics and educational needs, and of the implications of their inclusion in the regular classroom. As indicated in the definitions of mainstreaming, the process is more than an administrative model. The principal who simply directs the staff to mainstream exceptional children without realizing the educational implications will soon realize there is a low probability for success beyond the simplistic physical rearrangement.

There are a number of ways the administrator may acquire the necessary knowledge. One approach is to enroll in a college or university exceptional child education course. Most special education departments offer survey courses at the graduate and undergraduate level that provide a great deal of information about exceptional children. Another approach would be self-education. Useful readings include Dunn (1973), Hammill and Bartel (1975), Haring (1974), Kirk (1972), Lowenbraun and Affleck (1976), Payne, Kauffman, Brown, and DeMott (1974), Smith and Neisworth (1975), and Wallace and Kauffman (1973). The principal may be surprised to find the wealth of information available on which to base decisions related to placement and programming of exceptional children.

2. *Regular classroom teachers should become cognizant of the characteristics of mildly handicapped children.*

In a study investigating principals' attitudes toward mainstreaming, Payne and Murray (1974) found that principals ranked teachers' knowledge of exceptionalities as the most-needed competency for regular educators. One approach to achieve this goal is to provide in-depth training for regular educators through in-service sessions. The sessions can be offered by special education school personnel (see suggestion #4) or by special education college personnel. Many special education college staff members make themselves available,

on a consultancy basis, to provide in-service training.

The administrator might also suggest that regular educators take college courses in exceptional child education for certification renewal. Generally, colleges and universities offer appropriate courses throughout the year. Some universities even offer such courses especially tailored to meet the needs of regular educators. Regular educators should be encouraged by principals to take advantage of these opportunities.

3. *The principal should provide additional sources of information on exceptional child education.*

Besides suggesting course work in exceptional child education, the principal can provide

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for a continuing source of information by making available appropriate literature. This may include reference lists supplied by the special educator or a consultant, and/or special education journals filed in the teachers' lounge or library. Such periodicals as *Exceptional Children*, *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *The Journal of Special Education*, *Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded*, *The Journal of Learning Disabilities*, and *Focus on Exceptional Children* all provide relevant information. If arrangements are made for one or some of these journals to find their way into the hands of the regular educators, then mildly handicapped children may be better served. Such references can supply the teacher with ideas for materials, techniques, and methods that will facilitate the child's inclusion in the mainstream.

4. *The principal should utilize special educators as support personnel.*

Mainstreaming, as previously noted, does not mean fulltime return of all exceptional children to the regular classroom. Special educators will still be needed to provide direct services to

many children. However, if the principal allows them the time, the special education personnel may be able to offer a number of services that would help the regular educator serve the exceptional child.

These services may take many forms. The most obvious strategy would be for the special educator to spend a certain amount of time in the regular classroom suggesting appropriate curriculum and strategies to facilitate the education of the mainstreamed child or children. Another approach would be for the special educator to provide in-house training sessions during faculty meetings or at other convenient times.

The special educator could also conduct in-service workshops that award points or credits to

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the faculty members who participate. Areas such as curriculum, learning objectives, materials and methods, behavior management techniques, and evaluation could easily be shared by using any of these strategies.

5. *The principal should consider alternatives for support.*

Many alternatives to special class placement have been suggested by educators (Bruininks and Rynders, 1971; Deno, 1973). Among the more common approaches are the itinerant-consultant model, the resource-room model, and the part-time special class plan. Within each of these arrangements some degree of support is offered to the regular educator by special education personnel, and regular and special education personnel have joint responsibility for the education of exceptional children.

In addition to these common mainstreaming tactics, there are others that also may be effective. One approach is the use of paraprofessionals working with the exceptional child in the regular classroom. Ideally, the paraprofessional would

have some training in exceptional child education. Already programs are being developed at junior and community colleges to provide this training (Reid and Reid, 1974). If the paraprofessional lacks skills or experience in special education techniques, in-service preparation may be beneficial. However, as more special education paraprofessional training programs develop, the administrator might wish to consider these individuals and the role they can play in successful mainstreaming.

Other school personnel, usually available in most school systems, who could be utilized to facilitate mainstreaming include the school psychologist, the school counselor, the school social worker, the nurse, the speech therapist, and various curriculum consultants and supervisors. Each principal should be aware of all the personnel resources available within the district, and should encourage their participation when called for. The principal should always remember that mainstreaming is a cooperative effort and that the skills provided by the school staff members should be utilized and shared.

6. *The principal should utilize community resources.*

It is important that the principal be aware of the wide range of community resources available, both local and national. Local organizations that should be assessed for assistance include professional clubs, social and civic organizations, local colleges, parent groups, local businesses, churches, community recreational facilities, and local professionals interested in exceptional children (Smith and Neisworth, 1975). There are also many governmental and nongovernmental agencies that can provide information or needed services. Principals, teachers, and/or parents can write to Closer Look, P.O. Box 1492, Washington, D.C. 20013, for specific or general information. Principals may suggest that parents who are seeking services for their handicapped children write for information from Exotech Systems, Inc., 1828 L Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Many communities have one local organization designed to coordinate community resources, and principals could use this resource as an initial contact as they identify community assets.

7. *The principal should allow for special materials funds for the regular educator.*

As mentioned earlier, serving an exceptional child in a regular classroom does not mean costs will be less. While the child may be able to learn and behave successfully with normal peers, he/she may need special materials to do so. The nature of the materials would depend on the child, and the administrator, of course, must arrange for the funding. Whether or not special education funds are to be used will be determined at the state or district level. It would be a mistake to withdraw funds from a special program if this withdrawal affected the necessary programming for children being served. Such matters must be carefully considered. The regular educator has a right to request funds for special materials, and the concerned administrator has an obligation to respect the request.

Within the past ten years, state and federal agencies have funded many programs organized to disseminate instructional materials and methods designed for use with exceptional children. For specific information concerning this resource within a school district, the principal can write to The National Center on Educational Media and Materials for the Handicapped, The Ohio State University, 220 West 12th Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43210.

8. *The principal should encourage teachers to educate normal children about handicaps.*

Peer acceptance is a crucial "must" if mainstreaming is to succeed. The administrator should request teachers to provide pertinent information to normal children about handicaps and the effects they have on children. Acceptance and rejection are learned biases. The learning may occur incidentally or directly. If someone takes the time and initiative to provide the correct information, these biases and attitudes can be changed.

Ideally, education about handicaps should begin early in life. During the years of formal education, kindergarten is not too early to begin. The nature of instruction can be incorporated into day-to-day activities or an entire unit of instruction can be devoted to the subject. Regardless, normal children need to know certain things about handicapped people. Whether the handicap is physical, mental, or emotional, it can be explained in a context that can be understood by the young person. This may result in the child's accepting a handicapped peer instead of the often-seen outcome of "social isolation."

9. *The principal should provide support for the exceptional child.*

Most children could use help at some time with their interpersonal relationships, but for exceptional children, this help is often crucial. Typically, they must not only cope with the disability that makes them exceptional, whether it be physical, intellectual, or emotional, but must also learn somehow to cope with the negative and sometimes hostile, attitude of the other people in their world. Included among these others who can display a lack of understanding and/or acceptance of handicapped children are their teachers and peers. These negative attitudes are crucial problems for exceptional children, and the problems can be compounded when they are placed in the regular classroom.

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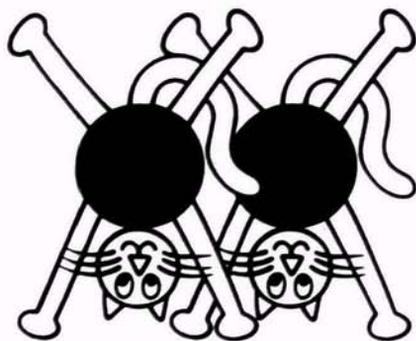
One of the best ways to support exceptional children is to help the significant others in their lives to reach a better understanding of them and their problems. Peers can be prepared to accept someone different during formal or informal sessions (see #8). Teachers can be helped to understand and accept exceptional children by using many of the suggestions presented here.

A handicapped child who has been excluded from the regular classroom will undoubtedly find his/her integration very bewildering. The principal may need to provide support on a one-to-one basis to ease the child's inclusion, and to serve as an advocate for the child.

10. *The principal should provide support for the faculty.*

One element inherent in the role of principal is *leadership*, and this element is of paramount importance during the implementation of mainstreaming. If mainstreaming is to be more than an administrative arrangement, it must be fully and morally supported by the principal, and this should be obvious to the faculty. The principal

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must also be well aware of potential complications inherent in mainstreaming and support the people who must deal with them directly. The teachers must know that the principal is truly in support of their efforts, and that success is expected.

One key to success that a principal possesses is the ability to encourage his/her faculty to work as a team. If mainstreaming is seen as a team effort by the faculty, as presented by the principal, success is much more likely. The onus of responsibility for success is on the faculty, as a team, and should never be on the child. If mainstreaming fails it will not be the child's fault, it will be ours. [5]

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