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## LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT AND MAINSTREAMING FOR CHILDREN WITH BEHAVIORAL AND EMOTIONAL HANDICAPPING CONDITIONS

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# LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT AND MAINSTREAMING FOR CHILDREN WITH BEHAVIORAL AND EMOTIONAL HANDICAPPING CONDITIONS

## I. Introduction

It is common practice in many school districts to mainstream most students with physical handicapping conditions and provide support services within the general education classroom. The same is not true for children with behavioral or emotional handicapping conditions, who are usually placed either in self-contained classrooms or segregated educational settings. These children are the "most neglected" of any handicapped population.

There are many troubling issues surrounding the identification, evaluation and placement of children as "emotionally" or "behaviorally" disabled. Chief among these are racial, cultural and/or linguistic biases of the teachers and clinicians serving students and the evaluation techniques and instruments used to classify them. African-American, Latino, and students with limited proficiency in English are overrepresented among this population. Also important are teacher training programs that don't teach successful classroom management techniques.

A recent report by researchers from the Bank Street College of Education provides the first comprehensive look at the quality of school life being provided to these children. It describes a group of children who are failing academically and dropping out, or being pushed out, at disproportionately high rates.

Proposals currently pending in Congress include new grant programs to improve educational services to this population. This paper outlines current problems in provision of services; recommendations for studies; and suggestions for improved training programs for teachers and clinicians serving these children.

## II. Requirements of Federal Law

The Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1412(5) requires states to provide a free, appropriate public education to all handicapped children in order to qualify for federal educational assistance for such children (Section 1412 (1)). Where appropriate, states must "mainstream" children with handicapping conditions, and must take care to avoid discrimination in referring children for evaluation or placing them in special education programs. According to federal law, the state must ensure that:

to the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children...are educated with children who are not handicapped, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or the severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily...(Section 1412 (5)(b)).

Finally, the state must establish:

procedures to assure that testing and evaluation materials and procedures utilized for the purposes of evaluation and placement of handicapped children will be selected and administered so as not to be racially or culturally discriminatory. Such materials or procedures shall be provided and administered in the child's native language or mode of communication, unless it clearly is not feasible to do so, and no single procedure shall be the sole criterion for determining an appropriate educational program for a child. (Section 1412 (5)(c)).

The EHA also defines the term "handicapped children" to include:

...mentally retarded, hard of hearing, deaf, speech impaired, visually handicapped, **seriously emotionally disturbed**, orthopedically impaired, or other health impaired children, or children with specific learning disabilities, who by reason thereof require special education and related services. (Emphasis added).

### III. Implementing Regulations

The United States Department of Education regulations implementing the EHA, 34 C.F.R. Part 300, more specifically define the obligations of states and localities with regard to the education of children with handicapping conditions.

In particular, the regulations define "seriously emotionally disturbed" as:

...a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree, which adversely affects educational performance:

- (A) An inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
- (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
- (C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
- (D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or
- (E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems...

...the term does not include children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they are seriously emotionally disturbed. (Reg. 300.5(b)(8))

For a child to be identified as having an emotional handicapping condition, s/he must exhibit at least one of the five identified characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree, and the characteristic(s) must be shown to adversely affect educational performance. (1) However, "educational performance" includes not only academic progress but also everyday functioning in school and the ability to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships. (2) Poor school attendance, poor motivation, hostility to school authorities, use of drugs or alcohol, or even a rejection of school and a wilful refusal to learn, are not sufficient to designate a child as "seriously emotionally disturbed." (3)

The regulations provide strict guidelines for the evaluation and placement of children with handicapping conditions. Tests and other evaluation materials must be provided and administered in the child's native language. They must also be validated for the specific purpose for which they are used, and administered by trained personnel in conformance with the instructions provided by the producers of the tests. Further, assessment techniques must be selected and administered to ensure that the test results accurately reflect the child's aptitude or achievement level rather than the child's impaired sensory, manual or speaking skills, or the child's different linguistic or cultural background. Finally, no single procedure may be used as the sole criterion for determining an appropriate educational program for a child, and the evaluation must be made by a multi-disciplinary team. (Reg. 300.532)

In making placement decisions, teams must draw on information from a variety of sources, including tests, teacher recommendations, physical condition, social or cultural background, and adaptive behavior. The placement decision must also be made in consideration of the least restrictive environment requirements of the EHA (Reg. 300.533) and should ensure both that the placement is as close as possible to the child's home, and that the child is educated to the maximum extent possible in the school she would attend if not handicapped (Reg. 300.552).

This provision evinces a strong, albeit not absolute, Congressional preference for educating children with handicapping conditions in regular settings alongside children without such conditions, i.e., "mainstreaming."

The Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit has enunciated the standard that should be used to determine the extent to which mainstreaming is required:

In a case where the segregated facility is considered superior, the court should determine whether the services which make the placement superior could feasibly be provided in a non-segregated setting. If they can, the placement in the segregated school would be inappropriate under the Act. (Emphasis added.)

Roncker on behalf of Roncker v. Walter, 700 F.2d 1058, 1063 (6th Circuit), cert. denied, 464 U.S. 864, 104 S. Ct. 196, 78 L.Ed.2d 171 (1983). See also Briggs v. Board of Education of the State of Connecticut, 707 F. Supp. 623 (D.Ct. 1988).

The statutory preference for mainstreaming requires, to the maximum extent possible, the integration of handicapped children with non-handicapped children (Manuel R. v. Ambach, 653 F. Supp. 791 (E.D. N.Y. 1986)). The educational system must make more than token gestures to accommodate children with handicapping conditions in the general education classroom, but it must consider both the overall educational experience of the child and the effect of his mainstreaming on the regular classroom environment and the education of non-handicapped students in making mainstreaming decisions (Daniel R. v. Texas Board of Education, El Paso Independent School District, 874 F. 2d 1036 (5th Circuit, 1989)). A regular class placement with necessary supplemental aids and services must be tried first, until a lack of progress proves that the regular class placement is inappropriate. (Thornock v. Boise Independent School District No. 1, Supreme Court of Indiana, 1988).

As parents, educators and courts have noted, mainstreaming provides significant benefits to all children. These include the opportunity for disabled children to learn with children without handicapping conditions and to develop social skills through interaction with those children. It is also important for non-handicapped children to interact with disabled children so that they can learn to accept other children with their limitations.

In Briggs, supra, the court further held that schools must:

"...accord the proper respect for the strong preference in favor of mainstreaming while still realizing the possibility that some handicapped children must be educated in segregated facilities because the handicapped child would not benefit from mainstreaming, because any marginal benefits received from mainstreaming are far outweighed by the benefits gained from services which could not feasibly be provided in the non-segregated setting, or because the handicapped child is a disruptive force in the nonsegregated setting."

#### VI. Least Restrictive Environment

Further court decisions have established the principle that, given two or more alternative educational settings, the child with handicapping conditions should be placed in the least segregated or most normal appropriate setting, i.e., the "least restrictive environment," which may or may not include full- or part-time mainstreaming with non-handicapped children. Thus, the placement of a child in a public, nonresidential school is less restrictive than a private school placement because it provides for contact with non-handicapped students throughout the school day (Springdale School District v. Grace, 693 F.2d 41, Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, 1982), even if the student is in a self-contained classroom in the regular school building.

But the requirement for placement in the "least restrictive environment" must be balanced with the student's individual needs for an "appropriate education" (Roncker v. Walters, supra; Wilson v. Marana Unified School District No. 6 of Pima County, Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, 1984), and therefore means the least restrictive environment in which educational progress, not regression, can take place (Board of Education v. Windsor Regional School District v. Diamond, 808 F. 2d 987, Third Circuit Court of Appeals, 1986).

To carry out this mandate, school systems have developed "continuum of services," ranging from the provision of services in the regular education classroom (least restrictive) to the provision of services in segregated settings (most restrictive). A continuum of services is required so that placement of an individual child, particularly a segregated or restrictive placement, is not based on lack of availability of appropriate, less restrictive placements or on administrative convenience. (4)

Although the continuum of services offered by the various states are similar, there is a dramatic variation in the use of each type of program, particularly with regard to segregated placements. Nationwide, about 6% of all students with handicapping conditions were educated in programs outside the regular school building. The average state places nearly six times as many students in separate school settings as do the five states that place the fewest students in such facilities. Seven states place students in separate settings at more than 10 times the rate of the five states placing the fewest students in separate settings. (5) The reasons for this wide variation have not been studied or explained.



In New York State, for example, 43% of students with handicapping conditions are placed in separate classrooms and an additional 14% are placed in segregated buildings with no opportunity for interaction with non-handicapped students. (6) In New York City, 47% of handicapped students are in separate classrooms and at least another 15% are in segregated buildings.

Once placed in separate classes, very few students are mainstreamed for significant periods during the school day. The New York City Division of Special Education's 1986 survey of academic mainstreaming in elementary and junior high school revealed that only 5% of the 36,408 mildly or moderately handicapped children surveyed had any academic mainstreaming.(7)

New York City high school data from the fall of 1988 indicated that the vast majority of high school students in programs for mildly or moderately handicapped students (MIS I and MIS II) are mainstreamed for only 1-2 periods a day, primarily music or physical education. On average, mildly or moderately handicapped New York City high school students are academically mainstreamed for less than 1/2 class period a day. (8)

Unfortunately, sufficient resources are not committed to achieve mainstreaming goals. Once students are mainstreamed they are often not provided with appropriate academic and behavioral supports, including content- and language-appropriate instructional materials. For mainstreaming to succeed, general education teachers need extensive training, class size must be reduced, and consultation time must be made available for the mainstream and special education teacher.(9) There must also be sufficient bilingual general education classes in which to mainstream the growing numbers of LEP students.

## V. Behavioral Handicapping Conditions

The concepts of "mainstreaming" and "least restrictive environment" for children with physical limitations have been explored at great length in litigation and commentary. However, the extent to which "mainstreaming" and "least restrictive environment" requirements apply to children with behavioral handicapping conditions is less clear. There are few court decisions addressing this issue, although there are numerous U.S. Department of Education and state education agency rulings.

These rulings indicate that students with emotional or behavioral handicapping conditions may not be placed in self-contained classrooms without first determining that they cannot be educated in the regular environment. (10) The intent of the "LRE" requirement is to maximize the opportunity of handicapped children to interact with nonhandicapped children, if appropriate based on their individual needs. (11) Therefore, if a seriously emotionally disturbed student demonstrates an ability to benefit from instruction in the mainstream class, the school district must provide him with individual assistance rather than placement in a more restrictive environment. (12)

However, if the educational progress of a student with behavioral problems would be adversely affected by her contact with non-handicapped students, or the student presents a danger to herself or others if she is not placed in a more restrictive environment, she may be placed in a self-contained classroom within a school, even if it is in a special wing of the building (13); or in a segregated school placement (14), including a locked residential facility. (15)

Further, a school system may place a student in a more restrictive setting when his unmanageable behavior consumes excessive time and attention of the general education teacher and he needs a highly structured program to achieve educational success (16). Federal and most state regulations allow a consideration of the needs of other children without handicapping conditions in determining the appropriate, least restrictive environment. (17)

However, a district may not place students with emotional or behavioral handicapping conditions in a restrictive environment based solely on negative staff attitudes towards them (18), or on collective bargaining agreement provisions restricting the number of handicapped children that may be placed in each general education classroom. (19)

Given the growing number of students classified as "emotionally disturbed," this issue will assume greater significance in the coming years. Nationwide, over 9% of students with handicapping conditions - over 400,000 students - were classified as emotionally disturbed during the 1987-1988 school year, according to the Department of Education's Eleventh Annual Report to Congress. (20) In urban areas the percentage of children was even higher, especially among racial and linguistic minority children.

In New York State, 16.2% of children with handicapping conditions were classified as "emotionally disturbed;" almost 20% of handicapped students in New York City were so classified. (21) Half of the students labeled "emotionally disturbed" in New York City were placed in segregated educational environments, representing two-thirds of all students so placed. (22)

## VI. Identification of and Services to Children with Emotional Handicapping Conditions

Two recent reports (Serving Handicapped Children: A Special Report, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; At the Schoolhouse Door, Bank Street College of Education) examined special education services provided for disabled students under the EHA. The authors concluded that there are serious gaps in the provision of the entire range of evaluative and educational services for children whose emotional problems interfere with learning.

### A. Identification and Referral

Many factors influence a teacher's decision to refer a child for evaluation. Too often, teachers lack the training and support they need to handle discipline problems in the classroom. In a Gallup Poll of teachers throughout the state of New York, the vast majority cited "managing disruptive children" as the most stressful problem in their professional lives, regardless of their age, type of school district, sex, marital status, or grade level. (23) These findings were confirmed by a survey of Chicago teachers. (24) Few teacher-education programs have courses devoted to handling discipline problems or the complex interaction between students and the teacher. Instead, teachers are taught to develop lesson plans and maintain a tidy classroom and bulletin board -- which have little impact on disruptive incidents in overcrowded classes. (25)

In addition, many teachers across the country, particularly in large urban areas where children face the most stressful living conditions and where educational systems are underfunded, overburdened, and overcrowded, are inexperienced and in some cases have not taken any education classes.

This is especially true in school districts that offer

"unattractive locales, lower salaries, and/or difficult working conditions. In these districts, some vacancies go unfilled [adding to overcrowded classrooms], or teachers with incomplete or inappropriate credentials are hired to teach classes they have not been prepared to teach." (27)

This problem will only increase with the general shortage of teachers predicted for the early 1990's, as the school age population increases and too few teachers are produced to replace those retiring or leaving the profession. (28)

These untrained, inexperienced teachers are placed at the front lines with little support or resources. They must balance the needs of their "misbehaving" students against the needs of "behaving" students, in classes of students facing a wide range of social and economic problems. (29)

Teachers are also often from different communities, backgrounds, and cultures than the students they teach, and unfamiliar with important cultural issues and attitudes that affect children's behavior. Teachers may ascribe different meanings to the same behavior depending on the race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status of the student displaying it. (30)

"Data indicates that whether or not a student is identified has as much to do with local tolerance for difficult behavior, attitudes toward special education, and resources, as it does with a student's needs." (31)

Just as importantly, school staff are often isolated from parents, and do not adequately inform and involve parents regarding their children's education and behavior. This may be due to language problems, staff fear of parents, parental fear of staff and the school environment, racism, or ignorance.

Well-meaning teachers may also refer children to special education to obtain services that should be, but aren't, available in general education due to the severe constraints on funding for general education in the last decade.

"...[M]any of the support services for both teachers and students that helped schools sustain children in the regular classroom have been withdrawn. Faced with large classes and students with learning and behavior problems, teachers, frequently with the support of administrators, too often have used special education 'as an extremely expensive, and potentially harmful, safety valve.' The cumulative result has been a progressively narrowing definition of the normal child and the regular classroom." (32)

Thus, it is not surprising to find high rates of teacher referrals for evaluation of students in urban areas, particularly students from different racial, ethnic, or cultural, backgrounds than their teachers, and students whose limited English proficiency contributes to their educational, emotional and behavioral problems.

The law requires a determination that a student's severe behavior management problems are not due to language or cultural issues that could be addressed in a mainstream environment, but this determination is rarely made. Opposition to bilingual programs, and shortages of trained bilingual teachers, contribute to over-referral of language-minority students.

Because 92% of all referrals result in formal testing, and almost 3/4 of those evaluated are ultimately placed in special education classes, it is vital that students not be inappropriately referred (33).

## B. Evaluations

Overburdened clinicians rarely have time to do thorough evaluations, including structured observations of the referred student in their general education classroom. Such observations could reveal problems with teaching methods or the classroom environment that cause or exacerbate a student's behavior problems. The focus on the child as "abnormal" also contributes to the clinician's inability -- or unwillingness -- to scrutinize the teacher's behavior and techniques.

Appropriate structured observations include what is being taught in the classroom, the teacher's technique, the student's interaction with other students in the class, the comparable behavior and performance of other children in the class, the physical environment of the classroom, the number of children, and other relevant factors. Thorough reports of structured observations incorporate all factors which influence the student's ability to function in the environment, and are not restricted to student-specific factors. (34).

A focus on the learning environment, as well as on the child, would help the clinician identify ways in which inadequately prepared teachers contribute to problems that result in special education referrals -- and then recommend change in teaching method or classroom environment that could help maintain the child in the mainstream classroom.

"Many do not know how to work with low-achieving students, nor how to structure learning tasks that allow students to remain on-task. Too many teachers lack skills in...modifying curriculum to respond to the differing needs of individual students...Not all students who get referred need special services. Some need better teachers." (35)

The issue is further complicated by the severe shortage of bilingual evaluators across the country. Approximately 20% of children in the New York City public schools are Limited English Proficient, yet only 13 % of the psychologists are bilingual (36).

Many recommendations for restrictive educational environments for LEP children are made by monolingual clinicians who have performed evaluations with the help of a translator -- a poor compromise at best. (This is also applicable to African-American and Caribbean children whose cultural norms - and language - may differ significantly from those of the white professional evaluators) (37). A classroom observation by a clinician who doesn't speak the student's language or understand the student's cultural background is not merely pointless but actually detrimental.

Well-meaning clinicians are also faced with declining availability of services to students in general education.

"Faced with a student whose needs are substantially similar to those of students with handicapping conditions, the evaluators must choose whether to retain the child in a regular education system that lacks the services and supports to help that student, or to mislabel the child as a means of securing the kinds of services that students with handicapping conditions are entitled by law to receive. In either case, the child loses." (38)

Numerous court cases across the United States have raised the issue of inappropriate academic assessment and psychological evaluation of Limited English Proficient children. (39)

Initiatives are now under way in Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington D.C. to abandon a reliance on standardized assessments and evaluation procedures designed for white, English-speaking, United States-born children.



In some of these localities, abandonment or modification of these standardized assessments is also being considered for English-speaking, U.S.-born children. (40).

According to some experts, 40-50% of the Limited English Proficient students in special education have been mislabeled. (41). This is in part because few publishers have adapted standardized assessment instruments for even the largest language minorities, and even fewer have renormed the adapted tests. (42)

Another contributing factor is the unfamiliarity of teachers and clinicians with the cultural behaviors and norms of immigrant children and children from varied ethnic, racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Elba Maldonado-Colon, coordinator of the Hispanic bilingual special-education program at San Jose State, performed a review of a checklist of about 100 behaviors by which students are often identified as learning-disabled or emotionally disturbed. More than half of these characteristics, such as short attention span, disorganization, confusion, anxiousness, shyness, uncooperativeness, defiance, inconsistent academic performance, and poor recall are typical of children learning a second language or undergoing a cultural transition (43).

### C. Educational Services Provided

In Beyond Special Education: Toward a Quality System for All Students (Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 57, No. 4, November 1987), Gartner and Lipsky conclude that there is no compelling evidence that segregated special education programs have significant benefits for students. In fact, there is substantial evidence to the contrary. The mean academic performance of mainstreamed students is consistently higher than that of segregated students.

Some studies seem to indicate that grouping together students with emotional and behavioral handicapping conditions, particularly acting out behaviors, reinforces and exacerbates the acting out behavior, despite the smaller student to staff ratio. There is no opportunity for the student to observe appropriate behavior or incentive to model his behavior after the behavior of appropriately-behaving students in the classroom. (44)

Given the overplacement of minorities in special education, and the history of racial segregation in schools, placing minority students in self-contained classrooms because of behavior management concerns - especially when those classrooms are in buildings that do not house students in general education - raises troubling questions. This is even more disturbing when one considers the fact that, once in special education, very few students are ever declassified. In New York City only 5% of special education students are ever decertified. (45) Students in segregated buildings have little chance of ever returning to the mainstream environment.

Another disturbing issue is the quality of instruction and services offered to students with emotional handicapping conditions in self-contained classrooms or in segregated buildings. Such programs often fail to recognize the special instructional needs of students with "normal" academic potential which may be blocked by emotional problems. They may attempt to impose a standard academic model, modified only by a change in the student to adult ratio, rather than developing a model incorporating emotional, management and academic needs. (46) They often fail to ensure regular interaction between the teacher, clinician and service provider, a crucial element in successful programs.

In the alternative, some programs, especially those for children with severe emotional handicapping conditions, concentrate solely on behavior management and place little or no emphasis in academic areas such as reading and math. Children in these programs develop serious deficits in all academic areas, and age out of the educational system with neither the academic nor the vocational background they need. Only about one-third of students identified as emotionally or behaviorally handicapped function at or above grade level, and the majority drop out of school. (47)

In addition, the focus in such "behavior management" programs is rarely on teaching children how to control themselves but instead on a "curriculum of control." When students "age out" of or graduate from the school system they have not learned to internalize the behavior controls that have been externally imposed in their special education program. Thus, students advance neither academically nor behaviorally.

Students with emotional and behavioral problems also need special related services. Unfortunately, more than half of school districts do not provide required mental-health related services, primarily because of the prohibitive cost of such services. (48) Parents may send their children to residential programs far from home because outpatient programs aren't available in their communities or because state educational and mental health systems will not pay for less restrictive care.

In other school districts, the necessary related services are not provided because there are insufficient service providers to meet the need. This is even more of a problem for limited English proficient children who require bilingual services.

## VII. Recommendations

For these reasons, it is vital that educators, clinicians, and lawyers address methods of retaining such children in less restrictive environments, including mainstreaming, while continuing to provide the necessary support services to enable them to learn. Such methods must include the training of clinicians and teachers in more culturally-sensitive evaluation and teaching techniques. However, they must also give consideration to realistic appraisals of the capacity and limitations of the teacher in the general education classroom to educate all of the children in the class.

### A. Improved Training Programs & Increased Collaboration

The recently-issued report by Bank Street College of Education, At the Schoolhouse Door: An Examination of Programs and Policies for Children with Behavioral and Emotional Problems, summarizes the results of their study of more than 150 educational programs serving this population. The authors call for improved training programs for and increased collaboration among all professionals serving children with behavioral and emotional handicapping conditions.

Training programs for teachers and clinicians must draw on the results of this study and others comparing schools that do a good vs. bad job of mainstreaming, other factors being roughly equal, and isolating the factors that characterize successful programs. Such programs must also demonstrate how those factors can be transferred to other districts.

In addition, all teachers must learn how to understand, accept, and work with the diversity of the students they will have in their classrooms:

"...[I]t is imperative that all teachers be able to work with students with a range of learning and behavior patterns. Teachers should learn how to identify learning problems correctly, and should know how to use classroom-based intervention strategies in a systematic manner before turning to special education referral. At the same time, teachers must also know how to detect learning and behavior problems that genuinely warrant referral.

When students are entitled to special education services, teachers should know how to support the evaluation process and how to work with the students once services are being provided. Teachers who have students with difficulties that are not the result of handicapping conditions should know how to help them-- both within the classroom and by securing additional resources to help the student.

All teachers should know how to make the classroom not just the "least restrictive environment," but also the "most enabling environment" for all students...Such a classroom should 'maximize opportunities for the handicapped student to respond and achieve,...allow the teacher to interact proportionately with all of the students,...and provide opportunities for good relationships to develop between handicapped and non-handicapped individuals.'

...Prospective teachers need to learn the process of collaboration with other professionals. They need to understand the different discipline-based perspectives of their colleagues and how to integrate into educational planning for their students the multidisciplinary information produced by a team approach." (49)

Teacher preparation programs must also address the special needs of racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic-minority children. Many such institutions have yet to respond adequately to the need to prepare personnel specifically for service in diverse geographic, cultural, and socio-economic settings. (50)

Evaluators and service providers must also be prepared to appropriately evaluate and serve children from all backgrounds, and to work with teachers in the classroom. Several programs studied by Bank Street maintained the majority of children with emotional problems in general education with clinical support.

The increased collaboration between clinicians and teachers in these "successful" programs varied. St. Paul elementary school students are assisted by a "behavior management" team consisting of a psychologist, a paraprofessional trained to be a "behavior manager," a special educator, and the classroom teacher. The team, funded by general education, temporarily "moves into" the general education classroom to help the student and teacher. Only 1.5% of the 300-400 students referred to the teams each year are eventually labeled "emotionally disturbed."

Project Wraparound in rural Vermont, uses doctoral-level psychology interns as "integration specialists" in the school. These interns work with family-support specialists, trained with state human resources funds, to help parents develop home-based strategies supporting the school-based efforts.

Children with emotional handicapping conditions in self-contained special education classes in Montgomery County, Maryland, participate in daily "classroom therapy," or problem-solving, sessions led by teachers and consulting mental-health professionals, who work in close collaboration. When students leave the self-contained classes to return to the general education classroom, they are allowed to continue their participation in these daily sessions to ease their transition.

The development of stronger mental-health-care capabilities within school buildings is also needed. The School-Based Mental Health Program of Children's Hospital in Washington, D.C. provides culturally-appropriate mental-health services to children and their families in public schools during and after the school day. These services include crisis intervention, individual and group therapy, and parent education.

**B. Studies of Referral, Evaluation and Placement of Children as "Emotionally" or "Behaviorally" Disabled**

In order to more appropriately serve the children identified as "emotionally" or "behaviorally" disabled, and to eliminate or reduce racial, cultural, ethnic and linguistic bias in their referral, evaluation and placement, studies must be done to determine:

(1) The reasons for the wide variances among states in numbers of segregated placements, and the extent to which behavioral and emotional handicapping conditions contribute to these variances;

(2) The extent to which African-American, Latino, and other cultural and language minority students are recommended for and placed in segregated placements due to behavioral and emotional handicapping conditions, as compared to English-dominant white children;

(3) The rate at which minority children are recommended for less restrictive environments once placed in a segregated placement, as compared to English-dominant white children;

(4) The frequency and impact of evaluation by a clinician proficient in the LEP child's dominant language, as compared with translated evaluation by monolingual clinicians, in terms of type of placement;

(5) The impact of segregation due to behavioral and emotional handicapping condition on children's abilities to learn to interact with the non-handicapped community.

The results of such studies will be invaluable in ensuring the least restrictive, appropriate education for children with behavioral and emotional handicapping conditions.

## VIII. Conclusion

The EHA requires that students with handicapping conditions be mainstreamed or placed in the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent possible given their educational needs. The meaning of this requirement for the almost 10% of children in special education programs with behavioral and emotional handicapping conditions has not been fully explored by legislators, educators, courts, or state educational systems.

Racial, cultural, and language-minority children are overrepresented among children with these handicapping conditions, at least in part due to racial, cultural, and language differences between these children and their teachers and evaluators.

Many such children are placed in segregated settings with no opportunity for interaction with children in general education, although there is a wide and unexplained variance among the states in the extent to which they utilize segregated placements.

It is vital that we study and determine the relationships of race, culture and language to evaluation as behaviorally or emotionally disturbed and to placement in restrictive, segregated educational environment. It is just as important that we study programs that successfully educate such children in mainstream environments, and replicate those programs in school districts across the country. These actions will help us to develop more culturally-sensitive evaluation and teaching techniques, provide training to teachers, clinicians, and service providers in those techniques, and increase mainstreaming and less restrictive, appropriate educational settings for children with behavioral and emotional handicapping conditions.



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