

This is a time for deep renegotiation of relations with regular education so that, in accordance with CEC policy, special education can indeed “be carried on as one integral part of the total educational enterprise, not separately.” Those are the right words. The hard part comes next, which is to implement *fully* the policy these fine words declare.

Maynard C. Reynolds
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CEC Chapter #367

Your current commentary, “No More Noses to the Glass,” is an important argument for the appropriateness of special education values as the ethical foundation for public education in a democratic and just society. I believe that you have been insightful in placing the argument beyond educational consideration alone, by making the case that such a posture for public education is not only pedagogically sound but politically and morally right. In so doing, you have laid out the framework for the fundamental argument that I believe ought to underwrite the next generation of special education reform.

. . . The field of special education is special because its members place the interests of the clients above the interests of the profession. Although it is true, in principle, that all professionals are assumed to adopt such a posture, it is also true that, over time, professionals tend to confuse the needs of their clients with the services they have to offer them. In fact, I believe that this “means-ends inversion” is the fundamental problem in education today: the entire system of public education has come to favor its traditional mode of schooling over the needs of its clients—a situation which, I believe, has resulted in the over-identification of many students as “handicapped.”

Now, of course, special education is not completely immune to this phenomenon; the categorical nature of our interventions is itself an example of a means-ends inversion, in that such an approach confuses the particular needs of our clients with the services we have to offer them. Nevertheless, I believe that your basic argument is correct. The field of special education *is* special because, more than any other

profession in education, it has placed its clients’ interests over its own, even when such advocacy meant arguing against the established practice of our own profession, as we did in the 1960’s and some of us are doing today. . . .

I believe that the special education professional community needs to expand and democratize its discourse to include at least three additional sets of voices as equal participants.

The expanded discourse I have in mind would include, in the first instance, the voices of fellow professionals who also operate from a client-centered value orientation. Included here would be other special-needs educators (those who work in Chapter I, bilingual, remedial and migrant education programs), as well as the many unsung general educators who recognize the basic contradictions of schooling and attempt to compensate for them by being responsive to students’ individual needs in regular classrooms. In this sense, these general educators are also special-needs educators. Also included would be other professional groups, like social welfare and community psychology, with whom we share a common set of values and a common set of clients.

The second way our discourse should be expanded is by adding, in a more substantial and equal way, the voices of consumers: individuals who have (or have been treated as though they have) disabilities. . . . We desperately need to see our field and our practices from the consumers’ frame of reference. . . .

Finally, we need to expand our discourse to include the voices of scholars in the social sciences and humanities, who, given their critical (i.e., emancipatory) theoretical stance, can help us understand the place of special education in the complex web of social, political, cultural, economic, and organizational interrelationships within which we and our clients live. . . .

I agree with your assertion that our values for children are pedagogically sound and politically and morally right and that, as a profession, our ethics are unique. But, as you suggested in your October message, good intentions are not enough; we must establish a framework for our efforts. I believe that the first step in establishing such a framework for the next generation of

special education is to expand and democratize the special education discourse by opening it up to include the many voices who have something to say about the kind of schools and society we can and must have in America.

Thomas M. Skrtic
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CEC Chapter #430

“No More Noses to the Glass” . . . identifies a major dilemma facing educators, parents, and students with special needs. That dilemma is a conflict between two values important to special educators, one of which proposes that children with handicaps should be educated in the least restrictive environment (i.e., regular education classrooms) and the other which declares that all children must be provided with appropriate education (i.e., educations matched to their abilities and needs). . . .

Using the concept of educating students in the least restrictive environment (LRE), some of our colleagues believe that having these students educated solely in regular education classrooms will reduce their isolation and exclusion. Where is the research that states students with handicaps are universally less isolated or excluded in the regular education classroom? By merely placing them in these classes, do they receive a better or more appropriate education?

. . . Excellent technologies for teaching students with widely discrepant skills are available. The special education research literature is replete with demonstrations of the power of individualized instruction, direct instruction, and specific teaching tactics. In many cases, students with individual differences in learning styles and abilities can succeed in regular education settings, if the teacher is willing and able to adapt materials and procedures. In the majority of states, regular education teachers do not receive training about special education students, their needs, or specific methods and materials required by them to profit maximally from the learning environment. Verified assessment instruments that could judge regular educators' abilities to adequately educate exceptional students with handicaps do not yet exist. Until such time when all regular educators are

more knowledgeable about the needs of students with handicaps and until they can demonstrate these related teaching competencies, placement in regular education settings must be done on an individual basis.

Furthermore, one underlying assumption of the extreme position of LRE is that the regular education curriculum is the only viable option: one that all students should be exposed to and master. For many students with special needs, however, the regular education curriculum does not lead to an appropriate education. . . .

The values set forth by both concepts—LRE and appropriate education—must be balanced for each individual. . . . There is no one answer for all exceptional students. There is no research that provides us with a single answer. The best that regular education has to offer is not appropriate for all students with handicaps, and neither is the best of special education. For many, the best of both is what we desire. . . . Our goals must be to develop a better overall educational system and a solid research base to guide us in making good educational decisions for individual children.

Deborah Deutsch Smith
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CEC Chapter #301

This letter addresses the urgent need for leadership concerning present trends and future directions in the education of handicapped and gifted students. I value your perspective that CEC's directions must come from the membership, to be acted upon by staff and governance. This then is my request, as a CEC member, for strong, specific, and clear leadership regarding the future of education for exceptional students. . . .

I believe that the field as a whole genuinely endorses appropriate integration of students with handicaps into general education to the maximum extent that is compatible with their learning and behavioral characteristics and with sound principles of instruction. . . .

I appeal to The Council for Exceptional Children to exhibit strong, meaningful, visible, and courageous leadership in setting forth such an alternative approach in which the field may