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ABSTRACT

An inservice mini course training program at Jackson State University was designed to prepare educational personnel for teaching mainstreamed handicapped children as mandated by Public Law 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act). The mini course approach was selected as it is of short duration and is widely preferred by teachers. Among arrangements which must be made in preparation for the mini course are conducting a needs assessment, selecting instructors, and making plans for follow up on program participants. Priority was given to teachers in the eight countries surrounding the university which sponsored the program. Courses were held for regular educators and support personnel and also for paraprofessionals. Competencies, related to such areas as assessment techniques and remediations programs were selected. The courses ran for 2 weeks with a minimum of 48 hours of instructional supervision required for course credit. The instructional design followed a diagnostic, prescriptive, teaching-involvement, evaluation approach. Post test assessment of the participants' attitudes found that their attitudes were more favorable toward the handicapped following the course. (Author/PHR)

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The Mini Course: A Delivery Approach for Training
Inservice Personnel in the Education of the Handicapped

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The Mini Course: A Delivery Approach for Training
Inservice Personnel in the Education of the Handicapped

Abstract. The timelines as stipulated by Public Law 94-142 for providing a free and appropriate public education for the handicapped found many educators unprepared to meet the mandate. It was discovered through preliminary investigation that a majority of local regular educators had never taken a course in special education or attended a workshop dealing with the nature and needs of handicapped children.

Cognizant of the need for inservice education, the Department of Special Education at Jackson State University launched efforts through its teacher preparation program to impact on mainstreaming the handicapped. The mini course concept was selected as the delivery approach for inservice training. Personnel involved in the training program included regular classroom teachers, support personnel, and paraprofessionals.

This presentation gives an account of the inservice activities conducted by the department. Attention is given to programmatic considerations for inservice training, the established geographical area served, formulation of course content and competencies, recruitment of participants and incentives for participating, thrust of the instructional technique, and data gathered to determine the effectiveness of the inservice activities. Attention is also given to general implications of the mini course as a delivery system for inservice training.

The Mini Course: A Delivery Approach for Training
Inservice Personnel in the Education of the Handicapped

Public Law 94-142 requires that all handicapped children be afforded a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. As a result of this legislation it is incumbent upon educators to mainstream many mildly handicapped children. These children are to be educated in the regular classroom with the services of personnel such as resource teachers to provide specialized instruction for the students and assistance to the regular class teacher (Redden & Blackhurst, 1978).

Programs for mainstreaming are being developed and implemented at a rapid rate (Jones, Gottlieb, Guskin, & Yoshida, 1978) in order for school systems to comply with P.L. 94-142. As might be expected from a suddenly developing trend in education, many questions have been raised relative to how mainstreaming might best be accomplished and what programmatic elements or resources need special consideration to facilitate the accomplishment. For example, in reference to providing inservice education for regular educators in educating the handicapped, concern has been expressed as to (1) the role of various educational agencies and/or entities (Zemanek & Lhrer, 1977), (2) who needs it (Miller, 1977), (3) teaching strategies (Glazzard, 1979), (4) teacher competencies (Redden & Blackhurst,

1978), and (5) program evaluation (Jones, Gottlieb, Guskin, & Yoshida, 1978).

The problem of inservice education must receive due consideration for the successful mainstreaming of handicapped children. Many universities are making preparation for training regular education majors to work with the handicapped in pre-service programs. It is often teachers currently in service who are neglected (Snell, Thompson, & Taylor, 1979).

In addressing the issue of inservice education, Zemanek and Lehrer (1977) assert that university departments of special education, by virtue of position, have the ability to facilitate and mediate the interaction of a diverse number of resources essential to mainstreaming. They challenge departments to go beyond the traditional role as teacher training programs to advocating examination of philosophical, moral, and legal implications of mainstreaming within a universitywide, interdisciplinary framework.

Miller (1977) noted that in addition to inservice education being directed toward teachers, sufficient commitment and resources should be used to help administrators gain new knowledge and skills. It is further stated that inservice education must be (1) cooperatively planned, (2) based on needs assessment, (3) focused on high intensity needs, (4) continuous, (5) activity oriented, (6) sensitive to individual needs, and (7) evaluated.

The delineation of teacher competencies and selection of appropriate teaching strategies are basic concerns for inservice

training. In discussing a simulation teaching strategy Glazzard (1979) points out that inservice training is the first experience that some regular educators will have had with the handicapped. Redden and Blackhurst (1978) provide six functions and 32 competency statements needed by regular educators to effectively teach mildly handicapped students who are integrated with regular students. The functions range from orientation strategies for mainstream entry to evaluation of learning. In making an overall evaluation of mainstreaming programs, not limited to inservice training, a number of practical and theoretical issues pertinent to the evaluation can be found (Jones, Gottlieb, Guskin, & Yoshida, 1978)

Amidst the problems and issues surrounding mainstreaming and inservice training for regular educators in the education of the handicapped, planning and implementation of a program of action must be initiated to meet the requirements of P.L. 94-142. The remainder of this paper presents such a plan.

Purpose

The purpose of this presentation is to delineate various aspects of the inservice program (mini courses) at Jackson State University for training personnel in the education of the handicapped. Attention is given to the need for the training, preliminary arrangements for offering the training, geographical area served, course content and competencies, recruitment, thrust of the instructional technique, and data gathered to determine the effectiveness of the inservice activities.

Rationale for use of the mini course approach

The success of the nation in providing a free and appropriate education for the handicapped will depend to a large extent on the quality of services provided by inservice personnel. More handicapped children than ever before will be under the instructional supervision of regular classroom teachers as the handicapped are mainstreamed.

It was felt that local classroom teachers and other regular educators could profit from inservice education which impacted on specific problems at hand. The mini course concept seemed to be a natural means of delivery. It is of short duration and teachers often seem to prefer mass as opposed to distributed practice in gaining new insight on problems. The latter had been expressed by many teachers receiving inservice training at the university in previous years. Therefore, the mini course concept was viewed as a viable means through which to offer inservice training in the education of the handicapped.

Preliminary Arrangements

The necessary preliminary measures to take in preparation for offering a mini course for inservice training will vary from institution to institution, depending on existing administrative arrangements, the population to be served, the level and scope of support desired, and objectives of the course. Preliminary activities taken by the department in preparation for offering the mini courses included (1) conducting a needs assessment for the inservice training, (2) procuring financial support via a grant from the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped to offer

the courses, (3) finalizing plans and getting on-campus support, (4) preparing an announcement and request for support for the eight county superintendents of education, (5) designing and disseminating a brochure on the courses containing information on the course offering and matriculations, (6) selecting instructors and developing instructional modules for the courses, (7) making on-campus arrangements for admission and registration of students, (8) active recruitment of students, (9) developing evaluation instruments for pre- and post data collection, and (10) making plans for followup on program participants.

Geographical area served

A majority of personnel, except special education teachers, who graduated from institutions of higher education in Mississippi were not required and consequently did not take courses in the education of the handicapped in their teacher preparation program. Therefore, they know very little about the nature of the handicapped and how to design and implement instructional strategies to meet their varying needs. It was thought that without such knowledge on the part of regular educators and support personnel mainstreaming would not be adequately affectuated. With this insight personnel in the Department of Special Education at Jackson State University (MS) requested and received financial support via a grant from BEH to provide training for regular educators, support personnel, and paraprofessionals in educating the handicapped in the mainstream of education.

Priority for selection of participants was given to persons working in the eight most adjacent counties to the university.

The counties included Hinds, Rankin, Madison, Copiah, Warren, Simpson, Yazoo, and Scott. Persons from other counties were invited to apply on a stand-by basis. The objective was to first impact on the area most immediate to the university.

Course content and competencies

During the academic year two separate mini courses were offered to impact on mainstreaming the handicapped, one for regular educators and support personnel and one for paraprofessionals. In formulating the content for the courses stipulations in P.L. 94-142 served as the major reference point with further attention given to information gained from various needs assessments on such personnel in the area.

Instructional modules were prepared for each mini course. The following were delineated for each course: (1) role of the trainees, (2) teacher competencies, (3) learning activities, and (4) practicum experiences. Competencies for regular educators and support personnel related to characteristics and behaviors of exceptional children, assessment techniques, instructional and demonstration strategies, remediation programs, and program evaluation. Learning activities and practicum experiences included mastery of textual materials, use of numerous audio-visual instructional materials and packs, and field observations and practicum encounters with the handicapped.

Competencies for paraprofessionals related to the nature and needs of the handicapped, identification and encounter strategies, roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals, classroom management techniques, instructional media, counseling

the handicapped, constructing teaching materials, and skills in practical areas. Their learning activities included textual materials, computer assisted instruction, lecture/discussions with transparencies, audio-visual materials and observation and practicum involvement with the handicapped.

Recruitment and time schedule

Participants for the mini courses were mainly restricted to eight counties surrounding the university. Individuals for the first mainstreaming course consisted of 30 regular classroom teachers, guidance counselors, speech correctionists, career educators, vocational educators, physical educators, and recreation specialists. The Strategies for Paraprofessionals course was limited to 30 paraprofessionals who worked with the handicapped and supervisors of teacher aides.

Several techniques were used in recruiting participants for the courses. Included were (1) requested recommendations by school superintendents, (2) brochures on the course being sent to principal agencies allied to special education and the schools, (3) announcement of course offering on local radio stations and newspapers, and (4) followup telephone calls.

The time duration for each course was two weeks with classes being held from 6:00 - 9:50 p.m. during week days and/or Saturday mornings. A minimum of 48 clock hours of instructional supervision was required for each course to receive course credit.

Persons selected to participate in the courses had their tuition paid through a grant from the BEH. Each course was for three semester credit hours at the undergraduate or graduate

level as appropriate for the participant. The credits are most often used for teacher license renewal or for credit in a teacher preparation program.

Thrust of the instructional technique

As mentioned above topics inherent in the stipulations of P.L. 94-142 and information from various needs assessments served as the content foci. The mini courses were so designed that a certain number of the topics could be impacted upon each class meeting.

The instructional design followed a diagnostic, prescriptive, teaching-involvement, evaluation approach. While the content framework had been established, more diagnostic information was needed to determine the level of instruction at which to start. From the diagnostic data (mainly informal assessments) a prescriptive plan was established for the class in general and individuals in particular. Readings were designated, activities specified, and observational plans made. The instructional and involvement phase followed. Progress on competencies were monitored regularly and needed assistance by the instructor was provided. In many instances feedback on competencies were provided several times in a given class session.

Effectiveness of the inservice program

Both the regular educators (including support personnel) and paraprofessionals were evaluated on the extent to which they mastered the designated competencies for the mini courses. The summative evaluation mark was reported in the form of a grade.

Over 85% of the participants in the courses earned the grade "A" or "B" with another 10% earning the minimum of a "C". The instructors for the courses felt confident that the courses were a success in preparing inservice personnel for working with the handicapped in the mainstream.

Pre- and post-assessments were also made to determine change response in the attitudes of the inservice personnel toward the handicapped. A questionnaire was designed with items centered around the handicapped in the mainstream as entailed in P.L. 94-142 and what would be considered "good" educational practice for the handicapped. A total of 24 items comprised the survey form.

Statistical measurements were made to determine pre and post assessment ratings on the participants' attitudes. It was found that the attitudes of the participants became more favorable by having taken the mini course.

Discussion

The mini course was selected as a means to provide inservice training for personnel in the education of the handicapped. A description of the course design and operation was provided.

From data gathered it seems reasonably safe to conclude that the mini course did enable satisfactory accomplishment of established objectives for the inservice training.

In perspective, it should be realized that the mini course is by nature a mass practice technique, one that covers a lot in a short time. Participants perceptive of the problems of the handicapped and geared up for intensive involvement seem to profit the most from the mini course. Participants who tend

to have concept-fixation problems, inability to swiftly move from topic to topic or activity to activity very rapidly, seem to profit the least from the mini course.

The mini course does not readily lend itself to extended research activities and long term practicum experiences. It also requires extensive prior preparation on the part of the instructor.

It does seem that the mini course concept is compatible with the timelines of P.L. 94-142. The law dictates that certain actions must be taken within a short period of time and in this respect, the mini course becomes a viable vehicle to make the accomplishment. Personnel at Jackson State University are of the opinion that the mini course has made a sizeable impact on preparing personnel to accommodate the handicapped in the least restrictive environment, where it happens to be the mainstream with regular classroom personnel.

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