

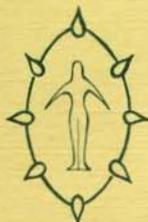
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- Is Special Education Really Necessary?
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MAINSTREAMING AND THE HEARING IMPAIRED
CHILD: DECISION MAKING

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British Columbia's recent decision to educate as many hearing impaired children as possible in or near their home schools caused many Canadian educators of the hearing impaired concern. The focus of this concern was the individual hearing impaired child and the quality of his education. Due to lack of initial explanation and clarification by the B.C. Department of Education followed by professional and public refusal to consider explanation and clarification objectively when they were forthcoming, rumours and misinformation spread across Canada. Teachers, administrators and department of education officials in all provinces turned their attention to British Columbia and Canada's largest experiment in mainstreaming the hearing impaired.

Whether or not the decision to pursue mainstream educators in B.C. possesses more positive than negative outcomes is not known at this time. The experiment is too recent for conclusive empirical evidence to have been gathered if, indeed, it is possible to gather such evidence in this area. The ill-feeling generated by the timing and manner of implementation of the programme is too fresh for rational consideration of available evidence by the various interest groups. One solid piece of knowledge has surfaced however. Neither the government nor its critics could suggest acceptable and useful methods of assessing which children were suitable candidates for mainstreaming and what degree of support an individual mainstreamed child required. The need for an instrument which could forecast probable success in mainstream education and degree of support required for children with differing abilities

is obvious. Equally obvious is the fact that such an instrument is beyond our design resources at this time. The fact, however, need not suggest that efforts to create the best possible assessment device be abandoned.

Existing Models for Decision-Making

A variety of instruments designed to assist in making mainstreaming and mainstream support decisions are available. Two are described in *The Hearing Impaired Child in a Regular Classroom* (Northcott, 1973). The first is the Transitional Instrument employed by the Sterck School for the Hearing Impaired in Newark, Delaware (Rudy and Nace, 1973). This instrument considers intellectual level, achievement level, social adjustment and hearing loss. A child may obtain scores of 25, 20, 15 or 10 in each of these areas. The score obtained depends on how high a score he obtains in the first three and on how much residual hearing he has for the fourth. A cumulative quotient of 75 and above is considered suggestive of probable success in integration, 50-74 of borderline success probability, 49-25 of minimal success probability and 24 and below of such minimal success probability that integrations is not advised.

The Transitional Instrument possesses a number of strengths. It considers social as well as academic achievement. The academic achievement score is based on testing with instruments used widely in education of the hearing impaired and public education. However, in valuing intelligence, achievement, social level and hearing equally, it ignores the fact that the contributions of these four are not equal for the majority of children. Ross (1976), for instance, considers degree of hearing loss to be the best predictor of mainstream success. Proponents of mainstreaming for children being educated through total communication would argue that language ability is paramount. A second weakness of the Transitional Instrument is its failure to consider specific skills such as speechreading and the importance area of degree and type of parent support. A third is its lack of attention to differing degrees of in-school support associated with differing communication and language abilities.

The Integration Profile of the Lexington School for the Deaf described by Blumberg (1973) includes stress on communication skills and parent support. However, its ratings for superior, above average, average, below average and inferior lack the clear-cut demarcations of the Transitional Instrument's point system. Then, too, items in its categories (academic skills, communication skills, auditory skills, social skills, parent support, personality) overlap and cause confusion. Is reading ability an academic skill or a communication skill? Is maturity a social skill or an aspect of personality? Finally, the Integration Profile ignores the problem of differing degrees of teacher support for children with differing communication and language skills.

Nix (1977) presents a Mainstream Placement Question/Check List. The List considers twenty-nine items under Child Parameters, sixteen under Placement Situation

Parameters and six under Family Parameters. Nix states "Some of the parameters are critical and must essentially be high or successful placement will not be achieved" (p.345). He does not indicate which parameters are critical nor does he define "high." The Mainstream Placement Question/Check List shares all of the weaknesses of the instruments mentioned previously but none of their strengths. It is only fair to state that Nix does not advance his List as an instrument specifically designed to assess mainstream success probability. It is somewhat more general than specific but it "is intended as a guide in examining the major parameters which contribute to a successful mainstream placement" (p.345). As such, it is lamentably weak.

Areas to be Considered

Successful mainstreaming for the hearing impaired child demands attention to two major areas. The first is whether the individual child possesses the communication, academic, social and intellectual strengths and the parental supported required to cope with the mainstream situation. The second is what degree of teacher support is required to facilitate the best possible adjustment to mainstream education given the individual child's compendium of strengths.

Educational programmes are most demanding in the area of language arts. If a child possesses strength in the areas of vocabulary, paragraph meaning, syntactical structures, reading and spelling, he has strength in the area which will prove of the greatest significance to his educational success. Ability in this area will be reflected in the content subjects which, while important, are definitely secondary to general language ability. A second area of greater relative significance than strength in content subjects is communication ability. The ease with which a child's speech may be understood and his ability to receive information via speechreading hold significant meaning for his teachers. Related to these skills are ability to interpret auditory signals and attention characteristics. While a child may cope with the demands of mainstreaming without strength in speech and speechreading, possession of strength in these areas would be of unquestionable assistance.

Aspects other than the above must be considered. The social development and personal characteristics of the child are important. High levels of intellectual ability are important as well but relatively less so when we consider that hearing impaired children may be placed with children of like intellectual ability in many mainstream situations. In fact, care must be taken that children are not placed below their intellectual levels with the reasoning that they will find the programme easier. A final important area of concern is degree of parental support. Actively supportive parents can be of crucial consequence in a mainstream programme.

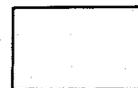
Relative weights which may be ascribed to the above factors are presented in the Integration Rating Scale (IRS) (Figure 1). The IRS reflects a number of major design

Figure 1
Integration Rating Scale

Division	Percentile/Quartile Rating			
	75-100	50-74	25-29	1-24
1. Language Arts				
A. Vocabulary	15	7.5	3	0
B. Paragraph Meaning	15	7.5	3	0
C. Spelling	15	7.5	3	0
D. Reading	15	7.5	3	0
E. Syntax	15	7.5	3	0
2. Subject Achievement				
A. Arithmetic Computation	5	2.5	1	0
Arithmetic Concepts	5	2.5	1	0
Arithmetic Readiness	5	2.5	1	0
B. Science	5	2.5	1	0
C. Social Studies	5	2.5	1	0
3. Communication				
A. Speech Intelligibility	10	5	2	0
B. Speechreading	10	5	2	0
C. Speech Reception				
Aided	5	2.5	1	0
Unaided	5	2.5	1	0
D. Attentiveness	5	2.5	1	0
4. Social Level	25	12.5	5	0
5. Intelligence				
A. Verbal	10	5	2	0
B. Performance	5	2.5	1	0
6. Parental Support Attitude/Assistance	25	12.5	5	0

SUB-TOTAL

GRAND TOTAL



decisions. The first is that divisions are differentially weighted. The weighting is a reflection of the writer's bias based on practical experience and critical analysis of other instruments. Whether or not all sub-sections suggested can be directly assessed, the weighting is to be maintained. A second major decision is the rapid decline in credit as the child exhibits less and less strength in the areas of interest. A hearing impaired child must possess considerable over-all ability if he is to succeed in regular education. The less strength he demonstrates in any area, the less likely his success. Thirdly, no assessment instruments are suggested. Schools and school districts employ a variety of tests. Teachers, audiologists and psychologists place more faith in certain instruments than others and are better able to compare children assessed on their routinely employed instruments. Any test used should be noted on the IRS directly beneath the area assessed by that test. Certain sub-areas suggested do not lend themselves readily to testing with speech intelligibility, speechreading and attentiveness being especially difficult. However, those responsible for completing a scale like the IRS are responsible for assessing the child in these areas. While difficult to quantify, ability here relates directly to mainstream success. If standardized instruments are not available, teacher judgement, informal testing or some other technique must be employed. In all cases mention of what test or system was employed must be made.

Decision-Making

Any integration scale must consist of more than tests and test scores. Decisions must be taken with regard to what the test scores suggest about integration success and what degree of teacher support is required. Figure 2 addresses these concerns.

The writer does not consider a scale such as the IRS to be a sole basis for deciding for or against mainstreaming. It assists in decision-making by suggesting degrees of success and teacher assistance. In the case of the IRS, any child averaging above the third quartile across all assessment areas is considered an excellent candidate for integration. Those above the second quartile are acceptable candidates. Others may be integrated but the risks of inappropriate placement are great.

Communication ability and language ability determine the degree of teacher support required. Three levels of combined ability are related to three suggested levels of support. It is obvious that few children will qualify for minimal support. Unfortunately many districts overload their trained teachers of the hearing impaired with resultant lack of adequate support for the children involved and failure of the mainstreaming programme. The support decision is critical.

Conclusion

Many educational jurisdictions in North America are moving rapidly toward the servicing of hearing impaired children in mainstream situations. Effective decision-

Figure 2
Integration Success Probability

150-200 High
100-149 Acceptable
50-99 Slender
0-49 Nil

LANGUAGE-COMMUNICATION (L-C) Combined Score

90-110 70-89 55-69

INTEGRATION LEVEL BASED ON L-C SCORE

Level I Level II Level III

NOTE:

Integration levels I, II and III refer to degree of teacher support required.

Level I - complete integration with trained teacher consultative support.

Level II - complete integration with trained teacher consultative support in key subject areas. Service to be delivered in the regular classroom.

Level III - integration for whatever subjects possible. Trained teacher teaching support in language, reading and speech in a resource room setting.

making guides are required but few are designed which serve the purpose adequately. While objective assessment of hearing impaired children is difficult, especially in the pre-school and primary stages, such assessment must be attempted.

The Integration Rating Scale suggested should assist educators in making mainstream decisions. It may serve both as an assist in making the initial mainstream decision and as a continuing guide in examining success and changing support needs. The IRS is being piloted in Alberta and Ontario with favourable initial reaction. More time is required to establish its contribution as a reliable guide for decision-making in mainstreaming hearing impaired children. However, such instruments must be used now so that their contribution can be assessed. Our children cannot afford to wait.

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