

Unless change can occur in a manner which alters previously held attitudes toward colleges of education, little is gained.

Mainstreaming colleges of education: an opinion

by Edward L. Meyen



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Colleges of education throughout the country are responding to the mainstreaming movement. For the most part, they are attempting to identify the competencies required of the regular classroom teacher to effectively teach handicapped children "mainstreamed" into their classrooms. Once identified, there is an attempt to integrate the teaching of those competencies into the regular teacher training program or through separate modules or courses designed as an option. It is too early to determine whether or not this approach will be effective. Certainly, at first observation it appears to be appropriate. At least, a purposeful response is occurring. But under careful scrutiny such efforts may prove to be totally insufficient.

In the realm of speculation, let us compare the circumstances in the public schools with those in colleges of education as they pertain to mainstreaming or, more specifically, to implementing the principles embedded in PL 94-142.

The public schools are being asked to:

... shift instructional responsibility for the handicapped child from the special education to the regular classroom teacher except where the seriousness of the child's handicap warrants more "restrictive" alternatives.

... reallocate financial resources to accommodate the costs incurred in providing an appropriate education for all handicapped children and youth.

... alter their organizational structure in order to meet the detailed and highly structured due-process requirements.

... implement an approach to individualized instruction for the handicapped which goes beyond what they have been able to do for nonhandicapped students.

... involve their consumers, i.e., parents in instructional planning for the handicapped.

... change the assigned roles of staff members to assure compliance with the requirements and procedural requirements of PL 94-142.

... add one more major responsibility to the many "leadership" roles of the building principal.

Much like the public schools, colleges of education are also facing a set of demands related to the "mainstreaming issue." An examination of the existing climate in both settings reveals a number of similarities. Descriptive quotations from the perspective of local schools and colleges of education are used to contrast the circumstances in the two settings.

1. "I already have 30 students—I don't have time to work with handicapped students and also at the same time meet the needs of my other students."

2. "They have been doing well in our program of special classes—why change?"
 3. "The cost of inservice training and providing support services will be exorbitant. State aid is already insufficient and our local property tax base is overtaxed.
 4. "I am confident that most of my teachers, given the necessary support can do a good job with handicapped children, but it is not going to be easy to convince a third-grade teacher with 25 years of experience to accept "advice," "consultation," or "assistance" from a young specialist who may have little experience regardless of her training."
 5. "To effectively mainstream handicapped children will require a major expenditure of administrative energy. I am not sure we are up to it. We are still struggling with the racial integration, bussing issues, and competency-based testing."
1. "I already have more content to teach in my courses than I can cover."
 2. "Why not either require a special education course or design a new course instead of integrating the teaching of special techniques and skills into the regular teaching program?"
 3. "Universities are currently in a period of austerity. Inflation frequently exceeds increased appropriations. Colleges of education are experiencing enrollment drops and the internal reallocation of resources. We cannot afford to hire new faculty or to establish needed resources for teacher training."
 4. "Justified or not, there is a certain suspicion held of special education faculty members by professors from other departments. For the most part, these feelings relate to the federal support special education departments have received and the benefit this support has brought them while other departments have experienced difficulties."
 5. "Certainly it is important to be responsive to the personnel needs of local districts and changes on our

part will be necessary but . . . we have just completed the process of adjusting salaries due to inequities over the years, we are still faced with affirmative action problems because ethnic groups are underrepresented on our faculties and among our students, we are being told by the University that teachers are in over-supply and that we should be cutting back some programs and the public in general is telling us to guarantee them competent teachers. So . . ."

These comments are obviously contrived, but they are not fictitious. They do describe a general set of parallel conditions which exist in the public schools and in colleges of education. But there is a difference. The public schools really do not have a choice. Not only must they change, but they must do so within a specified time regardless of other concurrent demands for change being experienced by them.

The responses by the public schools have been varied, but there have been responses. The operational responses toward meeting the requirements of PL 94-142 are highly visible. Certainly, the responses are influenced by the enforcement nature of the law and the role of SEA's and the U.S. Office of Education in the evaluation process. The point is that in the face of having to make major changes within the restrictions of a specific time line and in the context of a less than enthusiastic climate, changes are occurring.

Whereas colleges of education may eventually become conspicuous by their failure to change, they are under no mandate to implement specific changes in teacher education which are analogous to those faced by the public schools. *This is not to suggest that changes in teacher education are not essential; they are. But the probability of change is dependent on leadership and not assured as a result of enforceable mandates such as those which exist for local schools.*

The purpose of this article is not to argue for the same level and type of change on the part of colleges of education that is being required of the public schools because of PL 94-142 in the name of "mainstreaming." Certainly, there are changes which ought to occur in the preparation of teachers and administrators as a result of PL 94-142 and some changes will occur in most, if not all colleges of education. But will the changes be sufficient? Not only sufficient to meet the requirements of PL 94-142, but sufficient to satisfy the critics of teacher education generally. Perceptions of colleges of education may vary from campus to campus, but there are many common themes. For example, they are often accused of accepting poorer students and rewarding them with higher grades, overproducing and adding to employment problems, not practicing what they preach "teach", being rigid in their structuring of course requirements and unresponsive to contemporary critical issues. There are even some consumers who believe that school districts should train their own teachers. Regardless of the validity of these perspectives, for those who hold them such perceptions represent reality.

The point to be made is that there may be an advantage in capitalizing on the conditions created by PL 94-142 as a basis for more pervasive change within colleges of education which can address the full array of concerns in teacher education. For example, PL 94-142 is a unique piece of educational legislation; it mandates very specific practices, it represents a statement of public policy, it has received high visibility, and above all the impact of legislation effects individuals from all walks of life. There is also a sophisticated advocacy force emerging to insure close monitoring of its implementation. These conditions give rise to expectations of teacher education, hopefully, this means colleges of education. Why not capitalize on the expectancy of PL 94-142 and institute visible changes which may be under the guise of responding to the "mainstream" issue but which could create a better set of circumstances in which to deal with the broader perceptions previously cited.

Regardless of the achievements that may occur in a college of education, it seems that they are rarely acknowledged or at least they continue to be overshadowed by the prevailing traditional perspectives. Not only does this operate at the program level, but it tends to be a generalized situation. For example, the **Phi Beta Kappa** does not cancel out the student who transfers into education after not being admitted to another field, the outstanding professor does not cancel out the professor who continues to perpetuate the teaching of outmoded content, nor does the progress in developing performance based programs alter the "education" course image of teacher training.

While it would be naive to suggest that reorganizing colleges of education would result in their becoming more responsive or alter their status in the reallocation process within their parent institutions, reorganization may be a necessary condition or context for more purposeful change. In other words, it may require a highly visible effort in order for change in colleges of education to be believable. This is not a criticism of existing colleges of education, it is an observation of the status which appears to have been acquired by colleges of education. Thus, it may not be enough to pursue change related to issues such as mainstreaming, proficiency testing, performance-based training, etc. within the present context. It may be that to fully actualize the benefit of change will require a major overt effort involving reorganization of administrative structure. Restructuring would not be the goal, rather it would serve as the context in which other changes could occur. Thus, the agenda would need to be carefully planned.

For the sake of discussion, let us look at the question of organization. It could be argued that the typical structure which involves departments of administration, counseling, educational psychology, special education, etc. is no longer compatible with the mission of colleges of education or that the structure restricts the responsiveness of colleges of education. The present situation in many cases has nurtured the evolution of miniature self-contained colleges of education under the guise of departments. In many ways, this occurrence serves administrative needs better than the needs of faculty members and/or students. One option would be to organize from the perspective of function, i.e., teaching, evaluation, technology, development and school organization. Using

teaching as an example, you would include in this department faculty members with primary responsibility for teaching methods-type skills. An organizational model which brings faculty together based on their instructional mission would not minimize their need to affiliate with their colleagues in the discipline domain, e.g., special education, educational psychology, elementary education, etc. but that could be accomplished through another level of organization.

A structure with this orientation would have certain advantages. For example such an organization:

- ... Breaks down the emerging practice of departments becoming "self-contained" miniature colleges of education.
- ... Allows for the grouping of faculty talent by their teaching mission; for example, it may be unreasonable to expect to have faculty with strong methods skills in every traditional department.
- ... Enhances the capability for preparing teachers to teach most children.
- ... Encourages decisions on replacement to be made on the need for specific teaching talent in the college rather than in a department.
- ... Provides more flexibility in exigency situations in that emphasis is shifted from traditional department design to programs.
- ... Maximizes investments in instructional resources for teacher training. Presently each traditional department advocates for its own instructional resources and thus causes instructional resources to be dispersed.
- ... Could have the effect of encouraging better research or at least encouraging research which address problems which are less parochial.
- ... Makes visible the emphasis on teaching potential teachers to teach. At the same time, it makes visible the need for resources.

Space does not permit an extensive discussion on potential organizational variations. For purposes of this article, such a discussion is not necessary. The intent of this article has been to suggest that the mainstreaming issue could be used as a vehicle by colleges of education to address a wider array of needed changes. Perceptions commonly held of colleges of education must be dealt with in an almost exaggerated manner if the change is to be acknowledged. The author has argued that programmatic changes will probably not be sufficient unless they are couched in the more visible context of changes in the organizational structure. At the same time, changes in the organizational structure alone would not be sufficient.

The general tenor of attitudes among consumers and the public constituency in general dictates that those who want to be responsive to needed changes in education must deal with a set of political realities beyond the substantive nature of what needs to be changed. Unless change can occur in a manner which alters previously held attitudes toward colleges of education, little is gained. As educators we can argue that those attitudes are dated or unjustified, but the fact remains that for those who hold them they represent reality.