Who Benefits from Special Education?

(fixing)
remediating
other people's children

Edited by Ellen A. Brantlinger
WHO BENEFITS FROM SPECIAL EDUCATION?

(Fixing)
Remediating & Other
People’s Children
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WHO BENEFITS FROM SPECIAL EDUCATION?

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Preface

Special education for students with substantial disabilities was very much the vision of parents. They were the ones who brought forward the court cases (e.g., PARC, 1971) based on equal protection clauses of the constitution that mandated that education was a right of all American children regardless of their unique characteristics. Nevertheless, over time parents lost control as the field of special education has become increasingly dominated by a professional class of specially trained teachers, teacher educators, therapists, psychometrists, and funded researchers. Clearly, the number of influential parents was always insignificant compared with the less powerful parents of students identified with high-incidence disabilities (learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, mild mental retardation). These children had regularly been classified as disabled and excluded from mainstream education without their own or their parents’ consultation (see Mercer, 1973).

Unfortunately, parents inevitably see the personalized and unique attributes of their children and think in terms of what is best for them, whereas professionals are likely to have a more abstract and disconnected view, and thus may fail to see other people’s children as individuals. Furthermore, they tend to understand disability from a medical model perspective; that is, they see disability as a problem or deficit in certain children, rather than as an artifact of the general structure of schooling. Based on the prevailing ideology of the necessity of expertise, these professionals may assume that, because of their specialized training, they know what is best for other people’s children.
A related issue is the lack of direct contact between scholars and families or between scholars and school-based personnel. Attendance at special education conferences, for example, is dominated by scholars at research centers or faculty in teacher education programs. Similarly, the myriad of journals that have sprung up in the past few decades are oriented toward university-affiliated professionals, many of whom have little contact with schools or agencies that serve people with disabilities. The authors of journal articles are almost exclusively university professors or members of a complex of individuals paid through “soft monies” (i.e., state, federal, or private grants). The voices of people with disabilities, their families, and even teachers are rarely included in this literature. In this book, we address how researchers and theorists come up with ideas to intervene with (remediate and fix) other people’s children. We articulate our concerns about how professionals (a) are not attuned to the real needs and feelings of children with disabilities and their families, and (b) rarely consult with them about their reactions to their labels and where they would like to be educated.

As is the case with many books, the term fix in the title has two meanings. Fix can mean to remediate, repair, or make better. Fix can also mean to determine a place for certain individuals such as through classification or specialized classroom assignments. The “other people’s children” part of the title is based on Lisa Delpit’s (1995) book, Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom. Delpit observed that Euro-American, middle-class professionals held ethnocentric assumptions about the low-income, African-American children they taught. Because of the overrepresentation of poor children and children of color identified as disabled, and because these children are most likely to be educated in restrictive circumstances, the idea of the cultural disconnect between those providing services and those receiving services—or those doing the labeling and those being labeled—is highly relevant to special education. Finally, part of the title encompasses Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci’s (1929–1971/1935) recommendation that, when trying to understand social practices, it is essential to ask who benefits from them. The authors of chapters in this book attempt to answer this question by noting how professional practice is often a thing in itself, not linked to the real needs and interests of those for whom the practices presumably are designed.

This book is written from a Disability Studies perspective. This means that the included authors challenge the perception that certain human differences are disabilities. They also are wary of the hegemony of professionals who claim or act as if their technical expertise and ideas about effective remediation of so-called problems is more important than the feelings, opinions, and aspirations of those being served through special education. The authors recognize the dangers of normative school practices and structures
that rank and sort school children (see Spring, 1989). The book includes fairly diverse chapters that are united under the general claim that tensions exist between professional ideology (and practice) and the wishes and expectations of the recipients of professional practice—children, adolescents, and adults with disabilities and their families. Although the mainstream professional organizations, journals, and textbooks spin their own versions of best practices—now mostly dubbed evidence- or science-based—the voices of those who receive services have rarely taken center stage in formulating important decisions about the quality and characteristics of appropriate education.

The authors of some chapters in *Who Benefits From Special Education?* deconstruct or unmask mainstream special education ideologies and normative practice, even evidence-based suggestions for practice. Other chapters highlight the personal perspectives of students, families, and teachers. Some authors selected to contribute to this volume are scholars known for their critical and postmodern perspectives on disability (Allan, Brantlinger, Danforth, Erevelles, and Ferguson). Others have recently come to higher education after long-term careers as teachers in public schools (de Waal-Lucas, Harvey-Koelpin, Lewis-Roberton, and Stoughton). Their chapters benefit from first-hand, personal knowledge about the nature of schooling, and especially about the impact of special education and related practices on students, parents, and teachers.

The primary audience for this volume is obviously special education/disabilities studies graduate students and faculty. Although some authors integrate complex theory into their chapters to speak to these theoretically sophisticated audiences, their work was intended to be accessible so that the book would also have meaning for teachers, preservice teachers, and individuals with disabilities and their families. Working within the Disability Studies framework, we believe that the recipients’ ideas about education should be central to designs for schooling. In addition, because we believe that disability is always contextually bound and the context of special education is clearly general education, it is our hope that general educators will read and profit from this book. It is ultimately general education circumstances that must be significantly changed if all school children are to have a fair, just, responsive, and inclusive education.

Chapters 1 through 4 present theoretical and historical perspectives on special education practices. Chapter 1 by Danforth, Taff, and Ferguson examines the way place, profession, and program weave their way through the history of special education. The authors present a critique of the custodial assumptions that have riddled special education since its onset and continue to interfere with the counterdiscourse that all children can learn. They note that, despite Least Restrictive Education mandates, certain chil-
dren from less powerful families are still most likely to be labeled with stigmatizing names and educated in segregated settings.

A common mindset among professionals is that each successive new special education law and intervention contributes to progress in the field. In chapter 2, “Failing to Make Progress,” Julie Allan addresses how visions remain unclear and how vague plans for inclusion have meant faltering progress in the field. She clarifies how it is necessary that the social model of disabilities take hold to counter the destructive trends that accrue from the currently widespread deficit model of disability. Allan confronts the disabling barriers within school environments and the exclusionary pressures that dominate practice.

In chapter 3—on how special education textbooks socialize preservice teachers to adopt restrictive dominant special education viewpoints and scripts for teaching—Brantlinger presents an analysis of 14 current college textbooks designed for the ubiquitous “introduction to exceptional children” course found on campuses across the United States. In this chapter, Brantlinger argues that children become categories and curriculum becomes techniques aimed at remediating the deficits of particular categories of learners. She concludes that these textbooks are neither helpful nor relevant to teaching, but rather are hazards and barriers in terms of teachers eventually providing a democratic, just, and humanistic education for all children.

In chapter 4, Erevelles, Kanga, and Middleton return to the classic question posed to African Americans by DuBois (1901/1065)—“How does it feel to be a problem?” These authors note that scholars’ habit of researching poor children and children of color and their families perpetuates the idea that it is these oppressed individuals who are to blame for discrepancies in the school conditions and school outcomes documented for African-American and Euro-American and for rich and poor students. They unravel the racist and ablest politics of common schools and suggest ways to dismantle racial and disability oppression.

Chapters 5 through 8 are all reports of narrative and interpretive research conducted in classrooms and schools, or with students identified as disabled, their families, and their teachers. The four authors of these chapters have all recently been instructors in public school classrooms, with teaching experience ranging from 3 to 17 years. Three of the authors returned to their schools or former students to do their research.

Ashley de Waal-Lucas (chap. 5) looks at how social studies is taught in a wealthy, predominantly White suburb. She notes that her four teacher participants rarely include topics about race, class, gender, or disabilities in their social studies classrooms. She argues that this omission means that these privileged children are not led to understand the nature of their advantages or the difficult situations facing American children in less affluent
areas. Although her chapter does not directly relate to special education, her findings about the self-absorbed character of schooling for wealthy children reveal the tendency toward selfishness and exclusiveness in American schooling as well as the fallout of this self-centered education for other people’s children.

In chapter 6, Sally Harvey-Koelpin returns to an inner-city elementary school where she taught for 16 years to interview teachers about the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on their teaching and their students. Sadly, she documents that well-meaning, dedicated teachers who previously enthusiastically participated in the voluntary inclusion of children with disabilities at their schools had begun to refuse to have these children in their classrooms on the grounds that their low scores on tests would jeopardize their own teaching careers in the unforgiving climate of high-stakes testing.

Edy Stoughton (chap. 7) taught for 17 years, and her last several years were in a self-contained middle-school classroom for students identified as emotionally disturbed. She draws from her study of former students, who at the time were young adults or high school students, and their parents to focus specifically on Harriet and Marcus. This mother-son duo had intense feelings about the latter’s schooling and articulated these poignantly to Stoughton. The chapter title, “Living on the Edge in School and Society,” highlights the vulnerability of both mother and son as they try to secure a satisfactory place in a racist and classist society.

In chapter 8, “No Place Like Home,” Genell Lewis-Robertson, like Stoughton, follows a former student who is expelled from elementary school as a result of a draconian zero tolerance policy regarding being caught in school with a small amount of drugs stolen from his father. Based on multiple interviews with the child, his mother, and his home school teacher, Lewis-Robertson documents a healing process that, unfortunately, was not available to the child in school. In this case, even school-based remediation was dismissed, and the family was left on its own to cope with a multitude of family problems related to poverty and a history of substance abuse.

In chapter 9, “Winners Need Losers,” Brantlinger expands on the “who benefits” question to explicate the nature of meritocracy in U.S. schools. She points to the standards and accountability movement that pushes a narrow academic purpose for schooling. Brantlinger details a number of parties—many in high and influential places—who benefit from this academic intensification, while the usual suspects—poor children and children of color—continue to be left further and further behind. In chapter 10, “Conclusion: Whose Labels: Whose Norms? Whose Needs? Whose Benefits?”, Brantlinger concludes the volume by deconstructing professional buzz words (e.g., special needs, service delivery) current in special education and by confounding the normative practices that undergird labeling and exclu-
sion phenomenon. She notes that as schools rely more and more on legalized and bureaucratized systems, which in turn demand professional expertise, they become increasingly severed from the voices and realities of affected people and from humanistic moralities that should also guide interactions among people in democratic schools.

REFERENCES


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As editor of this volume, I would first like to acknowledge the caring parents and teachers of students identified as disabled who have always put children’s feelings and opinions first and who have worked hard to ensure that their genuine needs were met and that they were included in comprehensive school settings. Criticism of the system certainly was not meant to undermine the value of their conscious and difficult efforts on behalf of children.

I would like to thank the included authors for contributing valuable and insightful chapters that will, I believe, make a meaningful contribution to the fields of Disability Studies and Special Education.

I am especially grateful to Bill Pinar, Special Series Editor, who suggested that I put this volume together. He was generous in meeting with me on different occasions to convey his ideas about the book and encourage me to get it done when other obligations seemed more pressing. I also want to thank Naomi Silverman, acquisitions editor at Erlbaum, who, along with Erica Kica, patiently worked with me as I bumbled along trying to get the manuscript in shape for publication. I am appreciative of Heather L. Jefferson’s careful editing of the manuscript. Of course I must acknowledge the anonymous reviewers who, although somewhat critical of initial drafts, helped us get our chapters ready for final publication. Along with Bill, Naomi, and Erica, these reviewers saw promise in the volume and gave Erlbaum the go ahead for publication.

—Ellen Brantlinger
December 16, 2004
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Place, Profession, and Program
in the History of Special
Education Curriculum

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One does not have to go that far back into the history of curriculum in special education before confronting an earlier, more fundamental topic. Curriculum comes into play only when teaching is attempted, and teaching is attempted only when learning is thought possible. Only then does the question of “What do I teach?” arise. So, before a curriculum or “course of study” becomes relevant, there must be a presumption that learning can occur. However, it is precisely this presumption that was late to emerge in the history of the education of children with disabilities. Even in its gradual emergence over the last two centuries or so, the presumption has been granted and withdrawn with waves of professional optimism soon followed by new proclamations of irremediability for an unteachable remnant. A largely custodial discourse would then replace the aggressive tone of experimental treatment and active instruction. Certainly each cycle would leave a smaller group consigned to failure than before, but the cycle of optimistic intervention to pessimistic neglect has remained remarkably durable. Even today, while the federal mantra is to have “No Child Left Behind,” and the legislative mandate is that all children can learn and are, therefore, entitled to a “free, appropriate public education,” the course of study for students with disabilities is often governed in practice by a system of presumptive labels that determine what they will be taught, by whom, and in what type of educational setting.

Throughout history, then, the questions asked about the education of children with disabilities have often had a kind of time lag quality about them, distorted echoes of questions already asked and answered for most children. Although the discussion of public support of private schools
through vouchers continues among politicians and policy analysts, there has been a consensus for a century or more that school of some sort is the proper place for children to spend their days. Equally universal is the assumption that in school the children should receive instruction from professional educators. Finally, while debate rages over how standardized and measured it should be, most would agree that there is a broad program of study that schools should follow: a general curriculum that designates in broad strokes what we hope all of our children come to know, value, and use as educated citizens. However, for students with disabilities, these shared assumptions are precisely what seem most contentious. The assumptions become topics of heated debate and conflicting proposals. (a) Where should students with disabilities be taught? Are self-contained schools or classrooms preferred, or should we emphasize general education classrooms? (b) Who should teach these students? Are only those specialists trained to work with specific types of disabilities suitable for teaching such children? Or can elementary and secondary teachers take an active role in their instruction as well? (c) What should these students learn? Should educators focus on a set of functional survival skills and individually designed programs or should we assume that these students should also have access to the general curriculum that their nondisabled peers explore?

In this chapter, we explore how these three topical threads—referred to here as questions of place, professionalism, and program—have woven their way through the history of special education. We argue that these themes have played out over the last 200 years in the United States in a way that provides a helpful explanatory narrative for the evolution of our policies and practices for children with disabilities.

Our narrative looks at three key eras. First, we look at the influence of the French Enlightenment on American social activists in the middle of the 19th century. This was a time when the theme of place held sway as the dominant narrative thread. The optimism of a new generation of doctors and educators emphasized what might be called a curative geography, where the placement of children with disabilities was determinative of outcome. There was a strong belief that new specialized asylums and residential schools would reveal a capacity to learn by children who were deaf, blind, or idiotic. This separation, which began as curative, however, became quickly custodial—the optimism of intervention was replaced by the burden of control and maintenance.

Next we move to the Progressive era and the dominance of the theme of a bureaucratic professionalism and rampant specialization of expertise.\(^1\) In

\(^1\)By the term *progressive era* we refer to something much broader than the Progressive movement within education associated with Dewey and his followers, and instead follow the practice of most historians of the early 20th century in referring to a complicated time of dramatic industrial expansion, governmental reform, and academic specialization. In the words of a
1. PLACE, PROFESSION, AND PROGRAM

public schools, we see the rise and administrative recognition of special education classrooms with specially trained teachers to staff them. As with the earlier period (probably all periods), the reforms of the Progressive era, in how we responded to children with disabilities, reflected the larger culture, with a faith in social engineering as the common answer to both fears of social decay and demands on social conscience.

Finally, we look briefly at the period running roughly from 1975 to 2000, and we review how the final thematic strand of our triad gained prominence. If the middle of the 19th century was led by the creation of new places for children with disabilities, and the Progressive era was strongly characterized by a proliferation and empowerment of professionalization, then the last quarter of the 20th century, and specifically the changes associated with the implementation of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), can be approached as an era when programmatic elaboration came to encompass both place and profession in the context of a mandated and expanded system of public special education. It is this consolidation of place and profession within the purview of the special education system that represents the most fundamental development of the most recent decades.

Our framework is, of course, an idealization of a much messier and complex process. Moreover, our point is not that each era we examine is totally defined by only one of the three themes we identified. We want to emphasize throughout our discussion of all three eras that our three themes—where we should teach children with disabilities, who should teach them, and what they should be taught—may be seen as interweaving threads in the history of special education. Each thread is always present, but more visible in some patterns of official response than in others.

THE THEME OF WHERE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: CURATIVE GEOGRAPHY AND THE INSTITUTIONAL STATE, 1800–1850

The historical development of special education in the United States began in Europe. Prior to the mid-19th century, there was no distinctly American tradition regarding the public care and education of persons with disabilities. Professionals in the United States initially appropriated the majority of

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recent interpreter of this era: “Although concern for order was not new in American history, a characteristic feature of Progressive movements was their tendency to see social control not as a moral or political problem, but primarily as an administrative problem. Progressives sought to depoliticize the growing demands for the protections of a welfare state by promoting reforms that emphasized administrative efficiency and professional expertise rather than substantive changes in the allocation of rights and economic resources” (Sutton, 1988, p. 124).
their approaches from European sources, especially the traditions and methodologies of the French. In particular, it was the dramatic developments of the French Enlightenment and its applications to practice in some of the earliest experiments in special education that have relevance for subsequent U.S. efforts. Indeed in many ways, it is the Enlightenment culture of revolutionary France that first delineated the three themes that, we argue, have dominated the discourse of special education for the last 200 years. It was the French who first viewed their disabled children and adults and thought it worthwhile to ask the central questions of treatment and education: Who does what and where should they do it?

**Place, Profession, and Program: The Emergence of Intertwining Concepts**

By 1800, France had a well-established tradition of public custodial care for their mentally ill and disabled populations dating back to 1656 and the establishment of the *Bicêtre* and *Salpêtrière* hospitals (Shorter, 1997). Previously cared for mainly by the family in the home, children with disabilities began in increasing numbers to move into institutions and specialized schools for the deaf or blind. Although many of these institutions’ schools remained purely custodial in nature, a shift also occurred in how these places were portrayed by the specialists who ran them. Knowing where to treat or teach was the essential evidence of who was qualified to deliver that treatment or instruction. The new facilities were now put forth as convenient laboratories for the great Enlightenment experiment—“improving” people via education (primarily of the senses) and “moral treatment.” An intertwining process of mutual reinforcement developed. The new institutions and schools needed a new generation of trained professionals for appropriate staffing while the burgeoning cadre of specialists needed an equally specialized setting to demonstrate their expertise. Both simultaneously demanded an ongoing elaboration of exactly what would be done by the professionals once established in their specialized settings.

However, in this early era of special education and curative treatment, the trinity of intervention was unified in the obsession with therapeutic placement. Cure could be found through careful arrangement of a specialized environment: a curative geography, as it were. It was this where of intervention that initially subsumed the who and the what in the rhetoric of Enlightenment reforms. Here we see the genesis of a theme that appears consistently throughout the history of special education: the notion that “place”—the location of “treatment” and education—emerges as the first key to remediation and the surest evidence of professional expertise: Control the setting and you can control the mind.
The Delineation of Place

In the first half of the 19th century, the place or location of early special education—as practiced primarily by the emerging profession of psychiatry—was in most cases a specialized institution for “the insane” or “idiots” (as these two groups were called) or perhaps a specialized school for the blind or deaf. It was in the institution—both geographically and functionally—that the notion of a “therapeutic community” developed. In this self-contained and often out-of-the-way setting, professionals and patients acted out the theater of Enlightenment ideology. It is important to remember that, with few exceptions, the customary view held that existence in this place—the segregated therapeutic community—was a tremendously vital contributor toward the “perfectibility” of the residents (Shorter, 1997). Certainly protopsychiatrists (usually physicians with a special interest in mental illness) practiced in small numbers outside the auspices of the institutions, but it was the creation of therapeutic places that truly carried the Enlightenment worldview from abstract intellectualism to concrete practice. Thus, we see the early origins of a “curative geography,” where place single-handedly acts as both a social reform and an individual remedy. It is ironic, however, that the classic therapeutic setting was not so much a community as it was an isolated, artificial, and professionalized configuration—one that came simultaneously to espouse both Enlightenment ideals of perfectibility and equality and their antithesis of deviance and exclusion.2

Before 1800, professional specialization within the medical field was practically nonexistent (Shorter, 1997). Prior to the intellectual and social shift forced by the Enlightenment, mental illness and disability were considered predestined—an innate distortion of nature. As such people with disabilities were “ incurable,” at least in the sense of being largely beyond the help of human intervention (miracles were always possible). This limited any possible impetus for the development of medical professional specialties (Winzer, 1993). However, in the early 1800s, things began to change. The uniquely human attribute of rationality gained acceptance as a force that could literally “change the world” for the better. The consequences of human action on the world became, as it were, more consequential. There was a socially responsible prerogative to meet the scientific and social standards set by the Enlightenment worldview. To meet the needs of a newly egalitarian society imbued with the responsibility of uplifting the weak and disadvantaged, specialized expertise was needed as well as ways to disseminate that expertise on a widespread basis. In France (soon to be followed in

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2 A similar and equally influential development occurred with the Quakers and the development of moral treatment at the York Retreat at the end of the 18th century in England. The work of Anne Digby (1985) is the best source here.
the United States), the first major medical specialty to rise to the challenge of the Enlightenment project was psychiatry (Rothman, 1971; Shorter, 1997).

**Professional Developments: The Emerging Claims of Specialized Knowledge**

Psychiatrists in early 19th-century France concentrated on “perfecting” those with disabilities via sense education and moral treatment, as introduced most notably by Pinel. Moral treatment as a form of therapy was eminently compatible with the concept of therapeutic community because it both appeared benevolent and sanctioned institutional isolation (Dowbiggin, 1991). Enlightenment thinking provided the “therapeutic optimism” (Goodson & Dowbiggin, 1997) that drove early psychiatrists. However, the professionalization of psychiatry was even further advanced by the struggle to allege a somatic or biomedical cause for insanity and “idiocy.” To claim legitimacy in the medical field, a bodily pathology was essential. If madness had no physical basis, then matters of the insane fell into the province of competing groups such as academic psychologists and the Catholic Church. As *physicians*, psychiatrists had been “granted important privileges in the diagnosis and treatment of madness, even though they had displayed no conclusive competence in either capacity” (Dowbiggin, 1991, p. 8). Dowbiggin (1991) referred to the professionalization of French psychiatrists as a continual struggle against marginalization due, in large part, to a glaring gap between bestowed social power (as physicians) and their own lack of technical effectiveness in curing the insane.

By the 1850s, therapeutic optimism began to diminish, gradually replaced by a renewed pessimism regarding the curability of madness. In the context of this pessimism, psychiatry experienced a shift in purpose toward a “collectively oriented moral treatment that stressed surveillance and conformity to moral norms rather than activist therapy” (Goodson & Dowbiggin, 1997, p. 88). This shift in professional function necessitated that psychiatrists become less attentive to residents’ mental health and more concerned with protecting others from the mad through classification, segregation, and other forms of control. Next to this shift, there occurred a subsequent recognition by the psychiatric profession that their legitimacy as physicians was in imminent danger. To combat this legitimacy crisis, psychiatry increasingly catered to those with political and social power, in an attempt to ensure that resources for sustaining the institutional system did not go the way of therapeutic optimism (Goodson & Dowbiggin, 1997).
Programmatic Developments: Curriculum, Methodologies, and Purpose

As we undertake a basic sketch of programmatic strategies utilized in the first half of the 19th century, one must remember that “place” played a defining role in the development of such strategies and provided an environmental context conducive to the type of controlled experimentation that would not have been possible in individual homes. We now turn our attention to perhaps three of the most prominent and influential early professionals who worked with the mentally ill and/or disabled: Jean-Marc Itard and Edouard Seguin in France, and Samuel Gridley Howe in America. In this section, we briefly discuss the curricular approaches and pedagogical methods that each one utilized. We also touch on the extent to which they believed persons with disabilities could be educated, and the purposes of such an education. To begin to answer these questions, we must again journey back to France, where Itard (1801/1962) accepted the challenge of educating the “Wild Boy” of Aveyron (see also Lane, 1976; Shattuck, 1980).

Itard. The Wild Boy of Aveyron embodied all the attributes necessary for the quintessential Enlightenment experiment, supposedly putting Locke’s (1975) theory of tabula rasa to the test. For the French empiricists and the burgeoning scientific community, the capture of an apparently feral child (whom Itard later named Victor) granted access to what had been largely theoretical: an original human—Rousseau’s “Noble Savage,” uncontaminated by the civilizing and corrupting experiences of human society. Itard hoped to prove that Victor’s savagery was not due to some innate inferiority, but to isolation from society (Winzer, 1993). Due to this crucial lack of socialization, Victor needed to be “reeducated” as a human being (Shattuck, 1980). Enlightenment optimism tinted Itard’s belief that what appeared superficially as insanity or idiocy could be replaced by an educated, functional human, perfected if you will through the careful introduction of social experience and training. Itard set out to educate Victor using a five-pronged strategy: socialization, training of the senses, concept development, speech, and transfer of learning (Ball, 1971). Socialization was the prerequisite for any education, as contact with others stimulated the senses.

Itard utilized a wide variety of means in working with Victor, traces of which remain in special education (and Montessori) classrooms to this day. Taken as a whole, Itard based much of his pedagogy on Pinel’s concept of “moral treatment,” especially in the deemphasis of physical restraints and harsh punishment. However, because Victor was starting at a much more basic developmental level than the inmates of the insane asylum where Pinel first elaborated his theories, many of the activities and tools used by
Itard were of his own invention. He made use of extensive drill and repetition, manipulatives, games, gestural communication (although not the sign language learned by the deaf children in the other wings of Bicetre during this same time period and with which Itard was certainly familiar; Lane, 1976), and physical modalities (e.g., hot and cold baths; Shattuck, 1980).

Itard felt that the tools of learning—particularly speech and writing—were based on imitation of sensory input provided to the learner. Therefore, frequent imitation played a central role in the educational process. Observation paired with comparison was another favored pedagogical technique. In fact, this is what Itard considered thinking to be. Comparison served as a type of innovation or concept formation (Shattuck, 1980), in what would today be viewed as a version of social learning theory elaborated by Albert Bandura in the 1960s. Indeed due to his belief in the malleability of humans, his emphasis on close observation, and a systematic use of rewards and punishments in response to Victor’s actions, Itard is often considered an early forebear of behaviorism, although he appeared to be much more holistic in the application of shaping principles than his more modern colleagues (Shattuck, 1980).

**Seguin.** Edouard Seguin—a student of Itard—initially plied his trade at the Salpetriere and, later, Bicetre hospitals. After leaving the Bicetre, Seguin spent roughly the next 6 years running his own private school before emigrating to America, where he would later briefly work in Samuel Gridley Howe’s “experimental school” for idiots, which was the first American public institution specifically intended for this segment of the population (Trent, 1994).

Behind Seguin’s educational strategies were three major influences: moral treatment as espoused by his mentors Itard and Esquirol, a revised Condillacan sensualism, and a thrust toward the educability of idiots (and, although not quite as clearly, to somehow integrate them back into society) garnered from the Christian socialism of the Saint-Simonians (Trent, 1994). Seguin differed in philosophy from the pure sensualism of Itard, however, by suggesting that “notions,” or categories and names, mediated between sensation and knowledge (Seguin, 1866; Trent, 1994).

Seguin’s approach to curriculum and instruction (termed *physiological education*) consisted broadly of three objectives: muscular education, sense education, and moral treatment. *Muscular education*, the first stage of Seguin’s pedagogy, employed a variety of tools, including gymnastic equipment, weights, ropes, swings, and balance equipment (Seguin, 1866; Trent, 1994). Seguin also utilized the muscular component of physiological education, often done in groups, to foster social skill development. Seguin focused on touch as the conduit to the other senses, whereas Itard, for example, concentrated more on sight. Tactile experience afforded students an awareness of their sensations and environment. Thus “awakened,” the
senses paved the way for the student to develop notions, which in turn could extend into active ideas (Trent, 1994).

Seguin’s pedagogy also utilized imitation (although he disdained repetition), music, oral communication with deaf students, oral-motor exercises, “eye training,” and instruction in daily living skills. Seguin strongly believed that the definitive goal of education was independence. To Seguin, independence meant the freedom to associate with other human beings. Therefore, what we now call community-based instruction was a prominent component of his educational system. Once again here we see the influence of the Saint-Simonians, if only vaguely, implying the merits of integrating so-called idiots into the greater society.

Howe. Samuel Gridley Howe was a charismatic figure who led a life filled with philanthropic struggles for the disadvantaged waged on many shores (Winzer, 1993). A physician by training, Howe was also powerfully swayed by Protestant religious principles; key among these was the importance of striving for the betterment of fellow citizens (Winzer, 1993). Moreover, prominent in these religious overtones was an optimism analogous to Enlightenment secularism, but emanating from a distinctly different source. The notion of an immaterial mind was popular with the American clergy at the time, which defined the soul in the same manner (Gitter, 2001; Menand, 2001). Howe took mind–body dualism and applied it to the concept of disability, asserting that a damaged body (e.g., blindness) did not necessarily mean a damaged mind.

Howe, while involved in many facets of educating those with disabilities, is perhaps best known for his work with the blind, particularly his famous pupil, Laura Bridgman (Gitter, 2001). As did Seguin, Howe concentrated on the sense of touch to free Laura’s unimpaired, but dormant, mind. Despite this, Howe was vehemently opposed to the French sense empiricists (such as Condillac). In fact his success with Laura Bridgman was (in his view) proof that the assumptions of the sensualists were mistaken—for how could she have learned language successfully without being able to see or hear (Gitter, 2001)?

As time passed, however, Howe became more pessimistic regarding the educability of disabled children and came to accept the principles of hereditary determinism (Winzer, 1993). The role of heredity in disability melded agreeably with Puritan religious ideology in positing that the “sins of the father” could be the cause of disabling conditions, including idiocy (Howe, 1858/1993). The belief in the heredity of disability carried on even more forcefully into the Progressive era, where the social utility of such concepts was invaluable in addressing the new national crises of immigration, industrialization, urbanization, and the dangerously increasing heterogeneity of the population.
The first half of the 19th century, then, saw the emergence of institutions as healing agents for those with disabilities. Above all, however, there were now state-endorsed places for disabled individuals of all ages, but especially for children who were still capable of education and development. Although this section highlights the primacy of place in our triad of place, profession, and programs, we have also argued that there is an ongoing and intricate interweaving of the three threads throughout the history of special education. Now we shift our attention to the Progressive era, a time in which the geography of special education also situates the soaring ascent of professionalization.

THE THEME OF WHO IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: THERAPEUTIC EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONALISM, 1890–1925

The educational and cultural developments of the Progressive Era in the United States continued Enlightenment themes by enacting an optimism concerning the secular perfectibility of the human condition and society through the application of rationality. Running roughly from 1890 through the first quarter of the 20th century, the Progressive Era was a time when programmatic solutions to complex social problems were built on the promises of social science, efficiency, and the expertise of new helping professions. These solutions provided the theoretical and organizational foundation for the development of the helping professions that we know well today—special educators, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and others—in relation to disabled, disadvantaged, or otherwise troubling children and youth. Although the 19th-century institutions housing people with a variety of disabilities continued to operate, the location of the dramatic development of special education programs occurred within the rapidly changing public schools.

The public schools in the early 20th century transformed in the social and political context of an American society marked by a series of striking characteristics. These characteristics combined in the minds of progressives into an understanding of social problems concerning primarily poor or working class, immigrant children and families living in American cities. The three main characteristics of American society at the beginning of the Progressive Era were (a) industrialization and intensification of social class conflict, (b) urbanization and immigration, and (c) expansion of science from physical to social. The progressive agenda in the public schools and the creation of new professions cannot be understood in isolation of the influential social context surrounding and propelling the social changes of the era.
1. PLACE, PROFESSION, AND PROGRAM

Industrialization and the Intensification of Social Class Conflict

During the early to mid-1800s, the primarily agrarian America of the colonial period shifted to an economy based on industrial production. The development of machines to power factories, foundries, and plants led to systems of mass production that quickly replaced slower, more costly practices of craft work. Corporations reaped profits while workers (including women and children) labored long hours under dangerous and dirty conditions for low wages. Workers in many industries countered by forming unions. During the latter years of the 19th century, a number of dramatic and ultimately violent strikes demonstrated the degree and scope of the conflict between workers and corporations.

Urbanization and Immigration

The population core of the United States migrated from rural to urban areas in the late 1800s. Following the lure of industrial jobs, a great proportion of the population shifted to the industrial ghettos of the major cities. Urban factories employed both rural transplants and vast numbers of European immigrants. Factory workers and their families filled the urban ghettos, overcrowded neighborhoods typically lacking adequate sewer systems, electrical power, running water, and garbage collection. Families lacked basic dental and health care. Disease, malnutrition, crime, and discontent often filled the impoverished neighborhoods of the factory-worker class. Immigrant families struggled with language barriers, the difficulties of understanding and assimilating into a strange new culture, and multiple forms of prejudice (Addams, 1910, 1972; Katz, 1996).

Expansion of Science From Physical to Social

The 19th century in America was an age of mechanical invention—a time when the application of scientific principles to the control of the physical environment yielded astounding results. By the end of the century, railroad trains carried passengers and freight to the far corners of the country. Industrial plants with massive engines produced products thousands of times faster than ever before. Enormous bridges spanned some of the nation’s greatest waterways. Electric power was produced by enormous generators and delivered through wires to homes in many cities and towns. The advanced development of the physical sciences allowed humans to conquer and control nature, molding the physical world to human needs.

If a science of the physical world brought about such fantastic feats of mastery, then imagine what we might do with a similar science of the social
world. Imagine a sociology of urban areas, a psychology of vice and immor-
ality, and administrative science based on the certainty of social engineer-
ing. The progressives set their minds to the tasks of building, using, and
selling the new human sciences as the solutions to the variety of problems
of the urban, industrialized poor.

**Immigration and the Public School**

To turn-of-the-century public schools, especially those in urban areas, the
complex array of social changes in American society came down to a single
issue: too many immigrant students. The public schools struggled to deal
with the challenges of booming enrollments and growing linguistic and
ethnic diversity. According to a 1909 U.S. Immigration Commission study,
57.8% of all students in urban public schools were the offspring of foreign-
born parents (Cremin, 1961). A majority of these immigrants came from
southern and eastern Europe. In New York City, school enrollment rose
57% between 1900 and 1910. At that time, three fourths of the city popu-
lation consisted of first- or second-generation immigrants (Chapman, 1988).
Similar immigration patterns and enrollment growth impacted other large
cities. More than half of all students in major urban public schools were im-
migrants or the children of immigrants. Although English was the language
of schooling, most spoke a foreign language at home (Richardson, 1999).
To make matters more complex, by 1921, all states had passed a compul-
sory school law requiring that children attend public school until a speci-
fied age (usually 14). Increasingly, public school classrooms were filled with
students whom educators simply did not know how to educate.

The schools generally enacted the common ethnic prejudice of the
times that favored prior generations of northern and western Europeans
over the most recent influx of southern and eastern Europeans. In many
cases, students’ and parents’ inability to speak English or understand Amer-
ican cultural norms were interpreted by public schools as indications of la-
ziness, stupidity, and immorality. The all-too-common economic poverty
that marked the lives of these children and families only further contribu-
ted to the general impression of these immigrants as ethically and intellec-
tually deficient.

**Early Public School Special Education**

One of the main ways that public schools handled the enormous number of
seemingly deficient immigrant students was through the creation of special
classes. The first special education class specifically for “mental defectives”
was founded in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1896. Most urban school dis-
tricts soon followed. By 1922, at least 133 school systems provided special
education classes for over 23,000 students considered “mentally deficient” (Lazerson, 1983; Osgood, 2002).

These special education classes in the public schools demonstrated central beliefs of the Progressive Era. A top–down approach to social change united the science of psychological measurement with the efficiency of educational administration. Behind the cool rationality of science and efficiency was a deep prejudice based on ethnicity, race, and class that focused the professional energies on the apparent deficiencies of immigrant youth. The end result was a system of special education that sorted students on the basis of psychological measures and placed inferior students—primarily immigrant, working-class boys—in separate classrooms and schools.

The practice of sorting students based on academic ability or moral standing was not new. In the 1870s and 1880s, a variety of specialized classes—“steamer” and “industrial” classes for new immigrants, programs for “incorrigibles,” “industrial classes” and “ungraded classes” for “laggards”—were created in public schools. According to a study by noted educator Edward Cubberley (1919), public schools in many areas had created ability tracks by the 1890s and segregated programs for “juvenile delinquents,” deaf students, blind students, “cripples,” the “feebleminded,” and non-English-speaking immigrants by 1900.

Classification and segregation practices received a boost of legitimacy and expanded in number when educational administrators started to rely on psychological measurements. Leading psychologists such as Henry Goddard, Lewis Terman, Robert Yerkes, and Edward Thorndike, expanding from Binet’s first intelligence test in 1906, developed the American field of mental measurement as the cornerstone of scientific psychology. At every turn, notions of race or ethnicity and intellectual ability inhered. During World War I, the army hired many top university psychologists to develop and administer intellectual ability scales to military recruits for the purposes of assignment. According to these data, White soldiers were far more intelligent than African-American soldiers, and soldiers of Anglo-Saxon heritage were far more intelligent than eastern and southern Europeans (Brigham, 1923; Yerkes, 1921).

Similar results were found when psychologists administered intelligence tests in public school students. For example, in Terman’s work with the schools in Oakland and San Jose, it was discovered that northern Europeans generally scored well, whereas southern Europeans and Latin students showed high levels of mental retardation (Chapman, 1988). The widespread application of intelligence tests as a scientific method of classification produced school tracks that segregated immigrants, minority culture, and working-class students in special programs.

Springing forth within and in conjunction with public schooling were a host of new professions claiming a legitimacy of science, including psychol-
ogy, social work, psychiatry, and special education. By 1900, scientific ways of viewing social issues and possible solutions had become increasingly popular in the media and the public. The human service professions believed that the problems of poverty and social deviance could be solved by professionals whose practical expertise was based in science (Baritz, 1960; Cremin, 1988; Danforth, 1997).

Working hand in hand with the mental measurement psychologists were the “administrative progressives” (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 105), turn-of-the-century schoolmen who claimed that schools should be run not by local politicians, but by professional leaders who could make decisions through scientific means. Prior to the development of the professional administrator and the science of management, schools answered directly to local political leaders—to mayors, city councils, ward bosses, and so on. This made for a highly politicized way of managing schools. Teachers got jobs through insider favors. Curriculum was created through the battle of disparate social classes, ethnic groups, and political organizations. The new professional administrators said they would pull the schools out of politics by managing them in an objective and unbiased way.

Behind their claims of objectivity and neutrality, the early school administrators were closely linked with the wealthy corporate leaders who served as their advisors and financed the political operations necessary to bring about the switch to the professional management of schools. Many administrators viewed themselves as scientifically reenergizing the traditional educational goal of bringing Protestant values to the poor and immigrant populations. The common value that both the business leaders and the educational administrators gravitated toward was industriousness, the old Protestant work ethic refashioned to meet the personnel needs of factory owners (Cremin, 1988; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

Psychological measurement provided an apparent degree of certainty in the identification of “mental defectives,” while administrative science assured that such students would be placed in classrooms that allowed schools to operate with maximum efficiency and order. In the eyes of the administrative progressives, special education was more than an ethnically based response to immigration and rising enrollments. It was scientific and rational.

Programs and Place: Geography as Curriculum

We believe that in every community, in every school district and in every graded school there are these children. You teachers know them better than I. There are these children that do not get along, that are taking your time and your attention to an unlimited extent, taking it from other children largely. They are a drag upon you, a drag upon the class, and a drag upon the
school, day after day and year after year; and the State is paying the expense of keeping them in the same class, duplicating the work, and still they don’t make progress.

Now we believe that these children must be given that specialized care—in the small special class, that should enable them to attain to that degree of training or education—those things that even the feebleminded can do if they have proper training and have been under proper supervision. (James T. Byers, secretary of the National Committee for Provision of the Feebleminded, 1917; cited in Osgood, 2002, pp. 215–216)

If it were not for the fact that the presence of mentally defective children in the school room interfered with the proper training of the capable children, their education would appeal less powerfully to the boards of education and the tax-paying public. (James Van Sickle, 1979, superintendent of Baltimore Public Schools, 1908-09; cited in Sarason & Doris, p. 263)

There is perhaps no greater demonstration of Rothman’s (1980) concept of the Progressive Era tension between “conscience and convenience” than the educational programming and practices developed in the special classes of the public schools. School and professional leaders espoused special classes as a way to provide instruction at a rate and in a manner more suitable for “mental defectives” and other disabled students. At least in part, these curricular reforms emerged from a social conscience committed to educational improvement. This curricular purpose serves as a forerunner to the current emphasis on instruction designed to meet the “special needs” of the individual child. At the same time, however, school leaders consistently articulated the need for special classes as a way of improving instruction in general education classes. By clearing out the weak and disruptive students, schools could become more efficient in the delivery of curriculum to the nondisabled students. The social conscience of addressing the individual needs of the disabled student was conceptually and practically inseparable from the organizational convenience of ability tracking and segregated programs.

The purposes and quality of the curriculum and instruction in early special education classrooms varied greatly. In some cases, these classrooms were clearing houses where students could be screened for possible relocation to institutions and hospitals. In many schools, instruction in special classrooms amounted to a slower, simpler version of the general class curriculum—a combination of “the 3 R’s” (reading, writing, arithmetic) and lessons on physical hygiene and cleanliness. Some districts added vocational programs for students who were able to learn industrial or agricultural skills. State “schools for the feebleminded” (as the institutions were commonly named at this point), such as Vineland in New Jersey and Rome in New York, ran summer institutes to prepare teachers for their special education classrooms. Yet most special class teachers had little or no prepara-
tion for their work. Districts placed more emphasis on the existence of the special classes than on students’ achievement in those classes (Lazerson, 1983; Sarason & Doris, 1979). Overall, it would be difficult not to say that the main focus of early special education programs was on the improved efficiency of general education classrooms left behind after the removal of the difficult students. It was the legitimation of special education as a distinct area of educational specialization that granted the pursuit of this outcome as a basis in professional expertise.

ELABORATING THE WHAT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION: BUREAUCRATIZING DISABILITY THROUGH PROGRAMMATIC REGIMENTATION, 1975–2000

If the middle of the 19th century was led by the creation of new places for children with disabilities, and the Progressive Era was strongly characterized by a proliferation and empowerment of professionalization, then the last quarter of the 20th century—and specifically the changes associated with the implementation of IDEA—can be approached as an era where programmatic elaboration came to encompass both place and profession in the context of a mandated and expanded system of public special education. As we have emphasized in our discussion of the earlier eras, this characterization does not mean that the threads of professionalism and place did not continue to weave their way through the developments in special education from 1975 to 2000. However, in many ways, the pattern of educational change during these years is dominated by the growth of special education as the governing system within which parents, professionals, and children with disabilities have come to define their interactions with each other.

Regardless of the theme of emphasis, however, the last quarter of the 20th century is certainly one of dramatic changes for people with disabilities: the emergence of the disability rights movement (Barnatt & Scotch, 2001; Pelka, 1997); the deinstitutionalization of large numbers of people with psychiatric and cognitive disabilities (Rothman & Rothman, 1988); and the passage of significant antidiscrimination legislation in fields of employment, transportation, and community accessibility (Fleischer & Zames, 2001; Wehman, 1993). For most children with disabilities and their families, however, the single most influential event during this period has to be the passage and implementation of what is now called the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1998). Passed in 1975 and fully implemented by 1978, this law in some ways simply represented a federal recognition and consolidation of changes that had been emerging at the state level and through a number of important court decisions, consent decrees, and model statutes over the previous decade (Crockett &
Kauffman, 1999; Lippman & Goldberg, 1973). However, in many other ways, the law stands as a clear demarcation point for a dramatic new era for special education.

Some accounts of this most recent era in special education have focused on the provision of the new education law for students with disabilities to be educated in the least restrictive environment. The interpretation of this phrase has led to an ongoing debate about where along the cascade or continuum of placement options children with disabilities should be educated (Reynolds & Birch, 1977; Taylor, 1988). Indeed in one such review, the placement issue is seen as supersedes all others in importance during the last quarter of the 20th century.

The hottest issue in special education during the 1980s and 1990s was where, not how, students with disabilities should be taught in the schools and classrooms they should attend, not the instruction they should receive. (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999, p. 1)

Although we agree that the discourse around the implications and applications of such terms as mainstreaming and, more recently, inclusion have generated at least as much heat as light among special educators and family advocates, we would argue that in the long run the era can be viewed more helpfully as one in which the power of the special education system as a whole became institutionalized. So while the discussions over the appropriate place for disabled children to receive their education did rage, the truly new context was that the entire range of placements was now the legal responsibility of local and state school districts for the first time. It is in the “post-IDEA” environment that the placement of children—whether largely custodial and self-contained or optimistically remedial and inclusive—was permanently located within this continuum of public school services that was supposed to match the educational needs of the child with the least restrictive setting possible. Equally important, we also acknowledge that this last era has also seen the continued growth and specialization of special education as a fully elaborated profession. However, what is truly remarkable is how that professional development has in many ways become the fuel that feeds the ever-growing demands for specialists of the special education system. The profession of special education not only became segmented into proliferating subspecializations, but now came to include all types of therapeutic specializations as well as part of mandated, interdisciplinary teams within school systems coordinating the whole array of services and instructional technologies provided to each child. In many ways, the tensions of previous eras were not so much overcome as overwhelmed—subsumed under a bureaucratic umbrella of rules, rights, procedural safeguards, and systemic structures that inevitably shaped what was taught, by and to whom, and where that instruction was to occur.
The Evidence of Expansion

A few indicators of the dimensions of the changes suggest how all encompassing the special education system has become in a fairly short time. Prior to the passage of IDEA (originally called the Education of All Handicapped Children Act or PL 94-142), most states continued to exclude significant numbers of children from attending public school programs of any kind. In many states, there were provisions of minimum abilities without which a child was deemed unable to benefit from a public education (e.g., one state’s “permissive” legislation said that a child could be excluded from public school if he or she was not ambulatory, continent, and able to follow simple directions). More important, those who were served by the public schools were covered by a crazy quilt of different laws, programs, and eligibility criteria across the 50 states. However, with the passage of IDEA, there was a new federal mandate that states must provide a “free appropriate public education” to all children regardless of the type or severity of the disability. If states wanted to continue to receive federal funding, they had to adopt a zero reject policy for children with disabilities up through the age of 21.

By 1979 (1 year after the full implementation of all provisions of IDEA), the federal government reported that almost 4,000,000 (3,919,000) children between the ages of 3 and 21 were being served by the special education system (U.S. Department of Education, 1980). By 2000, that number had grown some 62% to almost 6,254,000 students (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). If one looks at only the 6 to 21 year age range, the percentage of children receiving special education for 2000 has grown to 11.4% of the total school population. Within that general heading, there has been a dramatic shift in terms of the percentage distribution by disability category. So in 1979, less than 30% of the children in special education were said to be learning disabled (LD), with another 31% identified as speech impaired and 23% mentally retarded. By 2000, these percentages showed the dramatic growth in the use of the LD label, with over 50% of the school-age children in special education having this label. Speech impairment actually slipped in percentage to slightly less than 20%, and mental retardation was more than halved to just under 11% (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

In terms of placement, we see a movement of children into regular class placements. By 2000, almost all children (96%) were educated in regular school buildings, with almost 50% (47.4%) spending most of their time in regular classes.

Three Dimensions: Complicating the Numbers

However, as you break down these aggregate percentages by disability category, the picture shows that most of this movement in placement has occurred among those children identified as having a specific learning or
speech disability. The placement patterns for children labeled *mentally retarded* have remained largely unchanged for at least the last decade, and the story is similar for other categories of children. Although placement has seemingly been at the forefront of change in special education since 1975, there are several strands or dimensions along which it is clear that, instead of dramatic reform, we have seen the illusion of change in the midst of bureaucratic sprawl. It has been a period of history that is described by the historian David Fischer (1978) with the label, *involutionary change*, where things become “more elaborately the same” (p. 101). We briefly identify three of these strands of elaborate sameness.

1. *Disproportionality: the displacement of racial segregation into special educational programming.* Although place as a theme in special education has moved within the context of the public school system, the demarcations within that context continue to play out the social tensions of whether children should be taught together or separately. Indeed the impetus to move children with disabilities into more inclusive settings and give them access to the general curriculum that exclusion had previously denied them has inevitably invested the remaining self-contained placements with at least a tinge of the educational failure that came to characterize the institutional placements of earlier eras.

   This is most clearly seen when one uses the lens of race and ethnicity to look at the pattern of special education placement. The overlap of racism and ableism has been a constant within U.S. history (e.g., Gould, 1996). Although there has been some progress in the last 25 years in the statistics of overrepresentation, the disparity remains troublingly large. A recent study noted the persistence:

   After more than twenty years [of tracking by the federal government], black children constitute 17 percent of the total school enrollment and 33 percent of those labeled mentally retarded, . . . During this same period, however, disproportionality in the area of emotional disturbance (ED) and the rate of identification for both ED and specific learning disabilities (SLD) grew significantly for blacks. (Losen & Orfield, 2002, p. xvi)

Not only are African-American students disproportionately labeled for special education services, but, once receiving those labels, also spend disproportionately more time in more segregated settings than students from any other racial category. According to the most recent federal data available, while over half of the White students in special education spend most of their time in regular class settings (defined as 80% or more of the school day), that percentage drops to 34.8% for African-American students (U.S. Department of Education 2001).
2. *The apparent conflict of professionalism and inclusion: untrained in special, but also uncertified in the classroom.* Professionalism in special education also continues to play out the assumptions noticed most clearly emerging in the Progressive Era. As with issues of place, these issues of professionalism now occur within the context of IDEA and its call for inclusive programs whenever appropriate. Faced with the prospect of having children with disabilities included in their classrooms, general education teachers reflect their own preparation by complaining that they have not been professionally trained to educate such children. From this perspective, it is not only difficult to manage children with disabilities in general education classrooms, it is simply unprofessional. The cult of expertise inherited from the Progressives defines *educational professionalism*, in part, as the possession of a specialized knowledge particularly suited to teach specific types of children.

This strand of resistance to inclusion as unprofessional can be seen in the words of a set of teachers from different eras. In a survey from 1913, general education teachers opposed what we now call inclusion as distracting her from what she was trained to teach: “The teacher’s time is wasted in maintaining discipline with the defective.” . . . “Mingling the backward with normals is a drag on everybody.” (A. Johnson, 1913, pp. 100, 101)

Some 66 years later, faced with the “least restrictive environment” clause of IDEA, an elementary teacher made much the same complaint: “I hear rumors about these changes. Someone in the building told me I would be responsible for language arts for all the handicapped kids. I said, ‘You’ve got to be kidding! I’m not trained for that’” (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1980, p. 48).

This mixed message of professionalism as specialized expertise and inclusion as preferred educational policy is compounded by this classroom reality: Huge numbers of those providing the instruction in special education are not certified as professionals in that field. According to the 23rd Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), the national shortage has produced a situation where over 10%—or almost 40,000 teachers—of those employed to provide special education services to students with disabilities were not certified in any area of special education. Indeed in many cases, the instructors had no teacher certification of any kind. The situation is often worse in the most rural and urban districts. In the city of St. Louis, a reasonably typical example, there are some 6,500 students identified as eligible for special education and some 850 special education teaching positions. In its most recent announcements, the district reports that some 135 of these positions are filled by individuals with “emergency” teaching certifications (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education,
2002). This means that 34% of the special education teaching positions in
this urban district are filled by officially unqualified persons. One recent
study found that, as of October 1, 1999, there were over 12,000 special edu-
cation positions left vacant or filled by a substitute. The same study found
that another 33,000 special education teachers were categorized as not fully
certified for their main teaching assignment (Carlson, Brauen, Klein, Schroll, & Willig, 2002). The message to the parent and the child with a dis-
ability, then, is an educational Catch-22: You cannot have access to inclusive
programs because you need specialized professionals for your instruction,
but you may not have access to this specialized instruction because of the
shortage of certified teachers.

3. The imposition of the IEP: the individualistic bias in the planning process. At
the center of the programmatic dominance of the special education system
over the last 25 years is the document demanded by IDEA to be in place and
updated annually for every child with a disability: the Individualized Educa-
tion Plan (IEP). It is through the process that produces the IEP (as well as
the document) that all of the key elements of special education program-
ing as we know it today are demonstrated: categorical definitions, family
involvement, least restrictive placement, measurable objectives, ancillary
supports, therapeutic services, and so on. The IEP process has been instru-
mental in establishing a standard of accountability and individualized cur-
rriculum design that have undeniably benefited the quality of instruction re-
ceived by a generation of students with disabilities. It is through the IEP and
its due process features that parent advocates have been able to negotiate
with school systems from a position of strength (at least in principle) and
identified rights.

However, in its ubiquity, the IEP process has also obscured for many
years the programmatic individualism that it has in essence required of
teachers and administrators. It is ironically through this programmatic indi-
vidualism that the system of special education has come to dominate the era
and resist the structural reforms that some have promoted. A partial list of
the ways in which this individualism plays out in the programmatic deci-
sions for children would include the following:

- The IEP often drives families and educators to think of inclusive place-
ments as something to be accomplished one child at a time, without dis-
turbing the larger control of the special education bureaucracy.
- The IEP context tends to push a diagnostic/prescriptive paradigm
based on a “defect” of “medical” model of disability.
- The IEP demands a continued reliance on behavioral objectives that
have the appearance of individualized learning goals while substantively en-
dorsing a programmatic bias in how we choose curricular goals and design
instructional methods. Instead of beginning by asking how can we help this student access the general education curriculum, the IEP structure encourages us to ask, “How can we fix what’s wrong with the child?”

- Finally, the IEP fosters an overreliance on specialized discourse that effectively denies effective participation in the planning by general education teachers.

We are left with a situation where the system of special education has swallowed whole the debates and dilemmas of previous eras without resolution of the underlying tensions that originally produced them. The tensions of where children with disabilities should be educated (place) and by whom (professionalism) have been, in a sense, superficially trivialized by the terms with which the special education system requires those tensions to be discussed. The tensions are real and fundamental, but remain trapped and obscured within a programmatic bureaucracy that distorts the debate.

**CONCLUSION: RECONCILING THE TENSIONS**

Our intention in the preceding discussion was to illustrate the historical progression of, and exchanges between, the three recurring themes of place, profession, and programs within the context of the American special education system. That the tensions surrounding student placement, professional roles, and programs persist today in assorted ways is not in doubt. Rather, the question that remains is, “Where do we go from here?” Perhaps the most obvious answer to this question would be to eradicate the tensions created by the interactions of our three threads. However, the history of special education reform is one of change that is often illusory and superficial and still arises under (and is limited by) the watchful eye of the governing structure that drives the profession. Within this context, the tensions surrounding place, profession, and programs tend to be static and, at times, destructive.

The special education system has been—and continues to be—compelled by an overarching philosophy of programmatic individualism. This philosophy narrows and constricts the focus of potential reforms by placing them in a milieu where they are void of connections to the larger social world. Caught in the social vacuum of programmatic individualism and the “cult of expertise” that drives it, special education has marginalized and isolated itself from the greater arenas of education and society.

So how can we address these issues? We have room for only the sketchiest of responses to this crucial question. Instead of attempting to eliminate the tensions, we suggest a different approach. We do not advocate dissolu-
tion of tensions (or the governing system that produces them) because this would amount to what Marcuse (1964) referred to as the “grand unification of opposites” (p. 225)—a situation that tends to stifle the possibility of qualitative change. Eliminating the tensions, if possible in the first place, would not result in a scenario more receptive to reform. In our opinion, the key is to further illuminate the fundamental nature of existing tensions and facilitate a shift from static and destructive toward dynamic and less antagonistic. To accomplish this, we must first create spaces for discourse within the governing system of special education and the larger framework of school and social reform. Inside these discourse spaces, the destructive tendencies of the tensions could be more carefully understood.

In practical terms, that probably means moving further toward the unification of special education and general education at the “central office” level of district administration. It means that conversations about school restructuring, curricular reform, authentic assessment, and accountability for student achievement need to incorporate those who are familiar with students with disabilities—not as an adjunct to the larger conversation, but as an organic part of the conversation about helping diverse learners succeed in the classroom. It probably also means that students with disabilities, their families, and their advocates need to develop a better vocabulary for talking about the need for specific techniques and supports without isolating through language what is being integrated in practice. Individualizing education to meet student needs does not have to be covered by a specialized jargon that only specific professionals understand.

Finally, reform must not be initiated primarily from the individual level. Because the programmatic elements of the special education system have subsumed all other aspects of that system, the more appropriate center would be at the macro level, where there is a transformation from an individual focus to a vision of systematic reform at the convergence of social, school, and disability agendas. Just as we would want disability viewed in terms of diversity, special education should be considered as just one of many players within the arena of whole school reform, not as an isolated entity that utilizes its history of professional expertise as the vehicle for segregation from the larger community. Such a challenge is immense, but nothing less will adequately engage the tensions inherent in the place, professionalism, and programs that surround the education of children with disabilities.

REFERENCES


1. PLACE, PROFESSION, AND PROGRAM


