Who Are Exceptional Children?

- Exceptional children differ from the norm (either below or above) to such an extent that they require an individualized program of special education.

Four key terms:

- Impairment - The loss or reduced function of a body part or organ
- Disability - Exists when an impairment limits the ability to perform certain tasks
- Handicap - A problem encountered when interacting with the environment
- At risk - Children who have a greater-than-usual chance of developing a disability

Why Do We Label and Classify Exceptional Children?

- Possible benefits of labeling:
  - Recognizing differences in learning and behavior is the first step to responding responsibly to those differences
  - A label can provide access to accommodations and services
  - May lead to more acceptance of atypical behavior by peers
  - Helps professionals communicate and disseminate research findings
  - Funding and resources are often based on categories
  - Helps advocacy groups promote more awareness
  - Makes special needs more visible

How Many Exceptional Children Are There?

- More than 6 million children and youth with disabilities, ages 3 to 21, received special education services during the 2005–2006 school year.
- Children in special education represent about 12% of the school age population.
- The percentage of students receiving special education under the learning disabilities category has doubled (from 23.8% to 45.3%), whereas the percentage of students with mental retardation has decreased by significantly more than half (from 24.9% to 8.9%) since the government began collecting data in 1976 - 1977.
Why Do We Label and Classify Exceptional Children?

- Possible disadvantages of labeling
  - Focuses on what students cannot do
  - May stigmatize the child and lead to peer rejection
  - May negatively affect self-esteem
  - May cause others to have low expectations for the student
  - Disproportionate number of culturally diverse groups are labeled
  - May take the role of fictional explanatory constructs
  - Takes away from the child’s individuality
  - Suggest that there is something wrong with the child
  - Labels have permanence
  - Basis for keeping children out of the regular classroom
  - Requires great expenditure that might be better spent on planning and delivering instruction

Why Are Laws Governing the Education of Exceptional Children Necessary?

- An Exclusionary Past
  - Children who are different have often been denied full and fair access to educational opportunities

- Separate Is Not Equal
  - Special education was strongly influenced by social developments and court decisions in the 1950s and 1960s (e.g., Brown v. Board of Education)

- Equal Protection
  - All children are entitled to a free, appropriate public education

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Six Major Principles of IDEA

- Zero Reject: Schools must educate all children with disabilities
- Nondiscriminatory Identification and Evaluation: Schools must used nonbiased, multi-factored methods of evaluation
- Free, Appropriate Public Education: An IEP must be developed for each child
- Least Restrictive Environment: Must be educated with children without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate
- Due Process Safeguards: Parents’ and children’s rights protected
- Shared Decision Making: Schools must collaborate with parents

Other provisions of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

- Extending special education services to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers
- Related services and assistive technology
- Federal funding of special education
- Extended school year
- Related services
- Disciplining students with disabilities
- Right to education
Related Legislation
- Gifted and Talented Children
  - The Gifted and Talented Children’s Education Act of 1978 provides financial incentives for states to develop programs for students
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
  - Extends civil rights to people with disabilities
- Americans with Disabilities Act
  - Extends civil rights protection to private sector employment, all public services, public accommodation, and transportation.

No Child Left Behind
- Accountability for student learning
- Emphasis on what works based on scientific research
- Implications for students with disabilities

Special Education as Intervention
- Special education as intervention
  - Preventive: Designed to keep minor problems from becoming a disability
  - Primary prevention - designed to reduce the number of new cases of a disability
  - Secondary prevention - aimed at individuals who have already been exposed to or are displaying specific risk factors and is intended to eliminate or counteract the effects of those risk factors
  - Tertiary prevention - aimed at individuals with a disability and intended to prevent the effects of a disability from worsening
- Remedial: Attempt to eliminate the effects of a disability
- Compensatory: Enable successful functioning in spite of the disability

Special Education as Instruction
- Special education as instruction
  - Who - the exceptional children whose educational needs necessitate an individually planned program of instruction
  - What - Special education can sometimes be differentiated from general education by its curriculum
  - How - Special education differs from general education by its use of specialized, or adapted, materials and methods
  - Where - Special education can sometimes be identified (but not defined) by where it takes place.
Current and Future Challenges

- Close the research-to-practice gap
- Increase the availability and intensity of early intervention and prevention programs
- Help students with disabilities transition from school to adult life
- Improve the special education—general education partnership

The Process of Special Education

- Prereferral Intervention
  - Provide immediate instructional and/or behavioral assistance
- Evaluation and Identification
  - All children suspected of having a disability must receive a nondiscriminatory multi-factored evaluation
- Program Planning
  - An individualized education program must be developed for children identified as having a disability
- Placement
  - The IEP team must determine the least restrictive educational environment that meets the student’s needs
- Progress Monitoring, Review, and Evaluation
  - The IEP must be thoroughly and formally reviewed on an annual basis

Collaboration and Teaming

- Collaboration
  - Teachers are better able to diagnose and solve problems in the classroom when they work together
  - Coordination - ongoing communication and cooperation to ensure that services are provided in a timely and systematic fashion
  - Consultation - team members provide information and expertise to one another
- Teaming
  - Multidisciplinary team - composed of professionals from different disciplines who work independently of one another; each member conducts assessments, plans interventions, and delivers services
  - Interdisciplinary team - characterized by formal channels of communication between members; although each professional usually conducts discipline-specific assessments, the interdisciplinary team meets to share information and develop intervention plans
  - Transdisciplinary teams - Members seek to provide services in a uniform and integrated fashion by conducting joint assessments, sharing information and expertise across discipline boundaries, and selecting goals and interventions that are discipline-free

Collaboration and Teaming (cont.)

- Co-teaching
  - One teaching/one helping
  - Parallel teaching
  - Station teaching
  - Alternative teaching
  - Team teaching
Individualized Education Program (IEP)

- IDEA requires that an IEP be developed and implemented for every student with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21.
- Individualized family service plans are developed for infants and toddlers from birth to age 3.

The IEP team must include the following members:
- Parents
- Regular education teachers
- Special education teachers
- LEA representative
- An individual who can interpret evaluation results
- Others at the discretion of the parent or school
- The student (age 14 or older must be invited).

IEP Components

- The IEP must include:
  - A statement of present levels of educational performance
  - A statement of annual goals
  - A statement of how the child will be assessed
  - A statement of special education and related services
  - An explanation of the extent to which the student will not participate with non-disabled children
  - Individual modifications
  - The projected date for the beginning and duration of services
  - Beginning at age 16, an individual transition plan must be developed.

IEP Functions and Formats

- IEP formats vary widely across school districts.
- The IEP is a measure of accountability for teachers and schools.
- The IEP is not the same as curriculum; IEP objectives are not comprehensive enough to cover the entire scope and sequence of what a student is to learn.

Least Restrictive Environment

- LRE is the setting that is closest to a regular school program that meets the child’s special educational needs.
- The IEP team must determine if the annual goals and short-term objectives can be achieved in the regular classroom.
- Removal from the regular classroom should take place when the severity of the disability is such that an appropriate education cannot be achieved.
- Placement must not be regarded as permanent.
A Continuum of Services

Inclusive Education
- Inclusion means educating students with disabilities in regular classrooms
- Placement in a special education setting does not guarantee that a child will receive the specialized instruction he or she needs
- Cooperative learning activities provide a strategic approach for integrating students with disabilities in both the academic curriculum and the social fabric of the classroom

Arguments For and Against Full Inclusion
- Pro
  - LRE legitimates restrictive environments
  - Confuses segregation and integration with intensity of services
  - Is based on a readiness model
  - Supports the primacy of professional decision making
  - Sanctions infringements on people’s rights
  - Implies that people must move as they develop and change
  - Directs attention to physical settings rather than to the services and supports people need
- Con
  - Placing a child in a general education setting is no guarantee he will learn or be accepted
  - General education teachers are often not sufficiently trained
  - System of supports often not available
  - No clear definition of what inclusion means

Where Does Special Education Go from Here?
- The promise of a free, appropriate public education for all children with disabilities is an ambitious one, but it will make educational opportunities a reality for all disabled children
- IDEA has far-reaching effects; in place of the once-prevalent practice of excluding children with disabilities, school now seek the most appropriate way of including them
Support for Parent and Family Involvement

- Parents and the family:
  - Are the child’s best advocates
  - Are a child’s first teachers
  - Know certain aspects of their children better than anyone else
  - Have the greatest vested interest in seeing their children learn
  - Must live with the outcomes of decisions made by education teams all day, every day

Three Factors Responsible for an Increased Emphasis on Parent and Family Involvement

- Parents want to be involved in their child’s education
  - Parents were an important catalyst of PL 94-142
- Educational effectiveness is enhanced when parents and families are involved
  - Repeated research and practice demonstrates the benefits
- The law requires collaboration
  - Each reauthorization of IDEA has strengthened and extended parent and family participation

Benefits of Family Involvement

- Increased likelihood of targeting meaningful IEP goals
- Greater consistency and support in the child’s two most important environments
- Increased opportunities for learning and development
- Greater access to expanded resources

Understanding Families of Children with Disabilities

- Adjustment process includes feelings of:
  - Shock, denial, and disbelief
  - Anger, guilt, depression, shame, and overprotectiveness
  - Acceptance, appreciation, and pride

- Educators should refrain from expecting parents to exhibit any kind of typical reaction
The Many Roles of the Exceptional Parent

- Caregiver - Additional needs of an exceptional child can cause stress
- Provider - Additional needs often create a financial burden
- Teacher - Exceptional children often need more teaching to acquire skills
- Counselor - Must often help their child cope with the disability
- Parent of Siblings Without Disabilities - Meet the needs of their other children too
- Behavior Support Specialist - Some have to become skilled behavior managers
- Marriage Partner - Having a child with disabilities can put stress on a marriage
- Information Specialist/Trainer for Significant Others - Must train others
- Advocate - Advocate for effective educational services and opportunities

Principles of Effective Communication

- Accept parents’ statements
  - Respect parents’ point of view
- Listen actively
  - Respond to the parents with interest and animation
- Question effectively
  - Speak plainly and use open-ended questions
- Encourage
  - Describe and show their child’s improving performance
- Stay focused
  - The purpose is the child’s educational program and progress

Professional Roadblocks to Communication

- Treating parents as vulnerable clients instead of equal partners
- Keeping professional distance
- Treating parents as if they need counseling
- Blaming parents for their child’s condition
- Disrespecting parents as less intelligent
- Treating parents as adversaries
- Labeling parents

Breaking Down Barriers to Parent-Teacher Partnerships

- Conflict resolution through dialoging
  - Reflect
  - Explain
  - Understand
  - Negotiate
Potential Barriers on Working with Parents and Families from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds

- Language skills
- Home-school partnerships
- Work interference
- Knowledge of the school system
- Self-confidence
- Past experiences

Understanding and Respecting Cultural Differences

- Many families are English-language learners
- Many families live in low-income and poverty
- Practitioners should understand that, although parents may not have finished school or cannot read, they are “life educated” and know their child better than anyone else
- If families are undocumented immigrants, they are naturally fearful of interaction with anyone representing authority
- Families from culturally diverse backgrounds tend to be family-oriented
- Culturally diverse families may have different experiences with and views about disability; and some may hold idiosyncratic ideologies and practices about the cause and treatment of disability
- The educational system may be intimidating to the family

Culturally Responsive Services for Families

- Have native-speaking staff members make initial contacts
- Provide trained, culturally sensitive interpreters during parent-teacher conferences and IEP/IFSP meetings
- When a language interpreter is not available, use a cultural interpreter whenever possible for conferences and family interviews
- Conduct meetings in family-friendly settings
- Identify and defer to the decision makers in the family
- Recognize that families from diverse cultures may view time differently from the way professionals do, and schedule meetings accordingly
- Provide transportation and child care to make it easier for families to attend school-based activities

Home-School Communication Methods

- Parent-teacher conferences
  - Build rapport
  - Obtain information
  - Provide information
  - Summarize and follow up
- Written communication
  - Happy Grams and Special Accomplishment Letters
  - Two-way home-school reporting forms and dialogue notebooks
  - Home-school contracts
  - Class newsletters and websites
- Telephone communication
  - Phone calls to parents
  - Voice mail messages for parents
  - Transform notes on chart to letters
Other Forms of Parent Involvement

- Parents as tutors
- Parent education and support groups
- Parent-to-parent groups
- Parents as research partners

IDEA Definition of Learning Disabilities (LD)

- A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language
- May manifest itself in an imperfect ability to:
  - Listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do math
- Includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia
- Does not include learning problems that are the result of other disabilities or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage

The NJCLD Definition of LD

- A general term that refers to a group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or math abilities
- Problems with self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may coexist but do not themselves constitute a learning disability
- Although learning disabilities may occur with other handicapping conditions or with extrinsic influences, they are not the result of those influences

Operationalizing the Definition

Most states require three criteria be met to receive services:

- Discrepancy between intelligence and achievement
- An "unexpected" difference between general ability and achievement
- Exclusion criterion
  - The student's difficulties are not the result of another known condition that can cause learning problems
- A need for special education services
  - The student shows specific and severe learning problems despite normal educational efforts
Responsiveness to Intervention

- A local education agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures.
- The responsiveness to intervention approach shifts the identification of learning disabilities from a "wait-to-fail" model to one of early identification and prevention.

Advantages of Responsiveness to Intervention

- Earlier identification of students using a problem-solving approach.
- Reduction in the number of students referred for special education.
- Reduction in the over-identification of minority students.
- Provision of more instructionally useful data than that provided by traditional methods of assessment and identification.
- Increased likelihood that students are being exposed to high-quality instruction in the general education classroom by stipulating that schools use evidence-based instructional practices and routinely monitor the progress of all students.
- Encourages access to early intervention because at-risk students are identified early and an infrastructure for the appropriate delivery of services is already established.
- Service to all students with achievement problems, so that only those students who fail to respond to multiple levels of intervention efforts receive the label of having learning disabilities.

Characteristics

- Students with LD experience one or more of the following difficulties:
  - Reading problems - 90% of all children identified.
  - Deficits in written language - Perform lower across most written expression tasks.
  - Underachievement in math - 50% have math IEP goals.
  - Poor social skills - 75% have social skills deficits.
  - Attention problems and hyperactivity.
  - Behavioral problems.
  - Low rates of self-efficacy.
- Defining Characteristic:
  - Specific and significant achievement deficits in the presence of adequate overall intelligence.

Prevalence

- LD is by far the largest of all special education categories.
- 45.3% of all children with disabilities receive services under the LD category.
- About 4% of the school-age population.
- The number of children identified is growing.
Causes

- Brain damage or dysfunction
  - In most cases there is no evidence of brain damage
  - Assuming a child’s learning problems are caused by a dysfunctioning brain can serve as a built-in excuse for ineffective instruction
- Heredity
  - There is growing evidence that genetics may account for at least some family linkage with dyslexia
- Biochemical imbalance
  - Most professionals give little credence to biochemical imbalance as a cause
- Environmental Factors
  - Impoverished living conditions early in a child’s life and poor instruction probably contribute to achievement deficits
  - Many students’ learning problems can be remediated by direct, intensive, and systematic instruction

Assessment

Five forms of assessment are frequently used:

- Standardized tests
  - Used to measure achievement and IQ
- Criterion-referenced tests
  - Student’s score compared to a mastery criterion to identify specific skills in need of instruction
- Informal reading inventories
  - Used to determine student’s reading level
- Curriculum-based measurement
  - Frequent assessment of a student’s progress in learning the objectives of the curriculum
- Direct daily measurement
  - Observing and recording a child’s performance on a specific skill each day it is taught

Educational Approaches

Explicit instruction

- Provide a sufficient range of examples to illustrate a concept
- Provide models of proficient performance
- Have students explain how and why they make decisions
- Provide frequent, positive feedback for student performance
- Provide adequate practice opportunities

Content enhancements

- Guided notes
- Graphic organizers and visual displays
- Mnemonics

Learning strategies

- Students use task-specific strategies to guide themselves successfully through a learning task or problem

Educational Placement Alternatives

- Regular classroom
  - During the 2005–2006 school year, 54% of students with LD were educated in regular classrooms
  - Some school districts employ a collaborative teaching model to support the full inclusion of students with LD
- Consultant teacher
  - Provides support to regular classroom teachers who work directly with students with learning disabilities
- Resource room
  - A resource room is a specially staffed and equipped classroom where students with LD come for one or several periods during the school day to receive individualized instruction
- Separate classroom
  - A special education teacher is responsible for all education programming for 8–12 students with learning disabilities