

Introduction and Rationale

**Catherine Richards
& Marquita Grenot-Scheyer**

California State University, Long Beach

In November of 2005, four university campuses¹ in southern California participated in a commemoration of the Education for All Handicap Children's Act (PL 94-142), the first federal special education law. The significance of this law must be emphasized. Prior to its enactment in 1975, students with disabilities were routinely denied educational opportunities with the sanction of the law. "Congress found that approximately one-half of the nation's eight million handicapped children were not receiving an appropriate education and about one million received no education at all" (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1982, p. 19).

The goal of the commemoration was to celebrate the 30-year anniversary of this law and, in so doing, become aware of the history of this momentous law, understand and analyze current best practices in serving students with disabilities, and consider the future for students with disabilities, their families, and their teachers.

During the commemoration, several events and activities occurred across the campuses including panel and individual presentations, movie screenings, discussions, and most importantly reflection on this important law. Audiences and presenters varied across campuses and included teacher education and special education faculty and their stu-

Catherine Richards is a professor of special education and Marquita Grenot-Scheyer is associate dean and a professor of special education, both in the College of Education at California State University, Long Beach.

dents, members of the community including parents, individuals with disabilities and their teachers, as well as other school district personnel. After the commemoration, participating faculty were invited to submit manuscripts for this special issue. This collection of articles exemplify what we had hoped to accomplish through the commemoration and we encourage faculty responsible for the preparation of teachers to consider the historical underpinnings of this law, understand and analyze current best practices, and consider future actions related to teacher preparation.

As many readers of this journal know, both No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (IDEIA) have implications for how teachers are prepared. IDEIA (and its' reauthorizations) continue to identify increasing roles and responsibilities for general education teachers in the delivery of education to students with special needs. NCLB continues to require highly qualified teachers for all students. The intersection of these two legislative acts continues to present a challenge to faculty who prepare both general and special educators to share responsibility for student learning. The implications for special educators are a greater understanding of curriculum and instruction in the general education classroom and for general educators, a greater emphasis on students with special needs and special education policy and practices. And for both groups of teachers, there is growing emphasis on accountability for student learning. The implications of these legislative acts as well as realities in schools requires all teachers as well as other educators to engage in collaboration, evidence based decision making and practice, and early intervening services to support all students including those students at risk for failure and students identified with special needs.

This theme issue of *Issues in Teacher Education* emanated from the activities of the commemoration. The series of articles include two addressing the historical perspective on this major legislation and the impact for students with disabilities, their families, and teachers. Three additional articles describe current best practices regarding educating students with disabilities and suggest future actions. The series concludes with a thoughtful reflection by Barbara Keogh, professor emeritus University of California, Los Angeles. She provides an historical context for the law, describes current practices for us to critically analyze, urges us all to be self-reflective and "make the goals defined in PL 94-142 real" (Keogh, this issue, p. 5). Sara Goldberg Hamblin, our former colleague, has provided a review of the book, *Widening The Circle: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms*, by Mara Sapon-Shevin. We are honored to serve as guest editors for this special issue.

The first major purpose of the commemoration was to revisit and understand the historical significance of PL 94-142. In the first article in the issue, "PL 94-142: Policy, Evolution, and Landscape Shift," Tiina Itoken provides a description of the historical context, more specifically the legislative path of the law, and how it has changed over the past 30 years. In the following article, Jill Leafstedt and colleagues share stories of the impact that PL 94-142 has had on the lives of people with and without disabilities. In the third article, Jennifer Coots reviews findings from a longitudinal study of individuals with disabilities and their families and describes three critical lessons for building bridges with families and honoring the mandates of the special education law.

The second and third major purposes for the commemoration and this special issue are to understand and critically analyze current best practices and consider future actions. Over the 30 plus year history of special education, students with disabilities have not always been provided with instructional and behavioral services that are considered best practices, that is, evidenced based. In response to the emphasis on evidence based practices in NCLB, as well as to better serve the needs of an increasingly diverse population there has been a corresponding increase in the need for evidence based practices in special education as well. Authors of the fourth article, Terese Jimenez, Victoria Graf, and Ernest Rose, describe the rationale and strategies for assisting all students, including those with disabilities to more easily access the general education curriculum. These authors discuss the history of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), current research, and the promise UDL holds in providing this access to all students. In the final article, Catherine Richards, Shireen Pavri, Felipe Golez, Rebecca Dennis, and Joanne Murphy provide a description of a Response to Intervention (RtI) model for identifying students with learning disabilities. The revised law is different in that previously educators were encouraged to use IQ-achievement discrepancy models to identify children and youth with learning disabilities. Educators are now encouraged to use the RtI model to provide early intervention to all students at risk for school failure (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The authors provide the rationale and research base for this policy which is in the most recent reauthorization of IDEA, and then describe how this policy has the potential to truly change how struggling learners are provided interventions and how the roles of teachers in the schools will be impacted.

A salient theme across all of these articles is the need for collaboration among educational professionals, both general and special educators and families. Collaboration is defined by Friend and Cook (1990) as "a style for interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged

in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal” (p.72). In this case the goal is serving students with disabilities, providing them evidence based practices, and thereby increasing successful outcomes. With collaboration as the foundation for best practices we can create an environment of mutual understanding and respect and are best able to meet the social and academic goals of students with disabilities.

Although the commemoration of PL 94-142 prompted this special issue, the issue is especially timely given current school district practices and needs to better serve students at risk and students with special needs. The needs in the schools coupled with recent evidence from a state wide survey are compelling and may result in a re-examination of current teacher preparation models and practices. Over the past several years, surveys of recent graduates across the 23 campuses of the California State University System (CSU) indicate that candidates do not feel well prepared to teach students at-risk and those with special needs (CSU Chancellor’s Office, 2006). This item on the survey has been ranked among the lowest for the years the survey has been administered (2006). In light of such data, we hope that this special issue will spur discussion among IHE faculty regarding high quality teacher preparation to serve all students and that various models of collaborative teacher preparation will be explored and developed.

Note

¹ Participating campuses included California State University, Channel Islands, California State University, Long Beach, Loyola Marymount University, and University of California, Santa Barbara.

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