

Introduction

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Educators with disabilities as a book topic may, to some people, seem obscure and, perhaps, unnecessary. Yet our own experiences as teacher-educators working with and preparing individuals with disabilities for careers in education and, for one of us, as an educator with a disability, brought us face to face with compelling stories that deeply challenged our professional values and society.

Clay Keller became involved with these issues after an encounter with a student. Sarah, who had been in one or two of his courses and with whom he had been working on an assistive technology development project, wondered if she could talk to him. Closing the door, she seemed upset. She tearfully related how some of her professors in her teacher-education program were questioning whether she should be a teacher. Sarah had had a stroke during her first year of college. As a result, she was paralyzed on one side of her body, had some speech dysfluencies, and acquired learning disabilities that caused some difficulties with reading. One professor wondered how she could be an elementary schoolteacher, because the literature says that young students will become better readers when others read aloud to them. How was she going to handle reading to her students, plus all the memos, materials, and students' work that a teacher needs to do on the spot? She would not be able to get advance copies of all the written materials so that she could have extra time to read them. (Her request for this accommodation in one particular course was rarely met by the professor.) Sarah did not know what to do. At the time, Clay did not know what to say, but tried somehow to console her.

Clay's colleague's questions about Sarah's potential raised a wealth of issues for him at that moment. Why could Sarah not be a teacher? She was extremely bright and a very good student. She was undertaking more than her share of the work on their joint project. Her sense of humor made her easy and fun to work with. She got along with children very well. He had never imagined she could not be a teacher. Sarah's situation prompted a number of questions—Why does the teacher have to read aloud? Why could not parent volunteers, older students, or even books on tape provide this important experience to her students? Whose decision was this, anyway? Are we, as teacher-educators, gatekeepers to the teaching profession? Is it appropriate for us to make such critical decisions about someone's life? Should Sarah make her own decisions about her career? Have other educators who have disabilities had similar experiences?

After Sarah left, Clay went down the hall to another colleague's office to tell him what he had just experienced—Sarah's story, his reactions, the questions. As they talked, they realized that they could name quite a few current or recently graduated teacher-education candidates in different fields who had disabilities to whom they could talk to find out whether Sarah's experience was, hopefully, an anomaly or, unfortunately, the norm.

Ronald Anderson's participation in these issues did not include the type of epiphany that Clay experienced. As a veteran educator with a disability with more than twenty years of experience at the elementary, secondary, and higher education

levels, Ron considers himself to be an advocate of individuals with disabilities as well as a reasonably effective and successful self-advocate. During his years in graduate school and as a professor he encountered both professors and colleagues who had little understanding and tolerance of advocacy for people with disabilities. He could understand the attitudes of some of his professors and colleagues because they had never had contact with individuals with disabilities, as either students or peers. Ron was surprised and greatly dismayed to learn that some of his special education colleagues and professors expressed intolerance toward students with disabilities who wanted to become educators. He also learned later that special education administrators were especially defensive and sometimes hostile toward professional educators with disabilities. The defensiveness was particularly noticeable when educators with disabilities questioned the rationale for the use of a strategy or a particular placement for a student with a disability. Special education administrators and some teachers appeared to have a great desire to exercise control. They suggested that their experiences better equipped them for determining the best course of action.

Ron has found that this paternalistic attitude and need for control has been observed among other professionals who work with people who have disabilities. For instance, Shapiro (1993) noted similar responses as political relationships between individuals with disabilities and professionals who work with them were being developed to achieve passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):

Some disabled people complained that these health-care workers, particularly nondisabled ones, were controlling and paternalistic. Too often, therapists and social workers assumed they knew best instead of trusting the wishes of their clients. Many professionals felt threatened by the new group consciousness of disabled people. They were afraid or reluctant to share decision making or give up power that, in some cases, might even threaten their own jobs. (127)

Educators with disabilities apparently threatened those educators, especially special educators, who have held power and have been paternalistic in their approach with students who have disabilities. Instead of perceiving educators with disabilities as a resource, Ron observed that often teacher-educators and administrators saw them as obstacles and a source of extra work.

Experience has taught Ron that educators, administrators, and professors have different attitudes and beliefs about individuals with disabilities. Some are willing to view people with disabilities as resources, possessing skills and knowledge of benefit to others. Others, however, believe that individuals with disabilities have little to contribute. Despite the ever-present barriers for people with disabilities who wish to become educators, he believes that individuals with disabilities can become highly skilled professionals who can not only teach but also contribute to the understanding and acceptance of human differences in the schools.

Joan Karp's involvement started when she was analyzing the interview data from research on the experiences of educators with disabilities. She soon realized that the issues she and her colleagues were discussing as they analyzed their stories were the same as those she was addressing with a preservice educator who was completing her student teaching. As a researcher, Joan would clinically discuss the factors affecting the interviewees, then she would go into the field and observe Cindy, a student with cerebral palsy. As Cindy interacted with a class of three- to five-year-old preschoolers

with disabilities, Joan would experience conflicting feelings about whether Cindy could or should pass student teaching and hence be licensed.

The cooperating teacher and Joan asked themselves and Cindy whether she could successfully teach students in this age group. Her planning, small-group instruction, and journal observations of the children were superb. It was when she needed to manage the free-play portion of the day that she had the most difficulty. How could she pass if she could not get up from the floor in less than five minutes with preschoolers scooting around her, she could not scan the environment to see where each child was located, and she could not lift or carry children who were unable to move? Were there adaptations that could be made? Although there was a classroom assistant present at all times, the needs of the children were such that at least two people were needed to lift, position, and monitor them. It did not seem responsible to require yet another assistant for the teacher.

The most telling discussion was the one in which Cindy and Joan met for three hours near the end of Cindy's student teaching. She shared how she learned that she could not drive when she took driving lessons. Both she and the driving instructor agreed that her reaction time was too slow for her to be safe behind the wheel. Joan tried to make this same analogy about Cindy's work with preschool children, but she would not accept it. She had spent five years in her teacher-preparation program and was not going to give up until she had attained her goal. She believed she could contribute to the field and was willing to explore any alternatives that would lead to licensure in early childhood special education, including completing another student teaching assignment.

Joan consulted her colleagues throughout the state who also prepared early childhood special education teachers and was astounded to hear their responses. They ranged from a clear statement that no way would a student with this type of disability ever be allowed to enter the program to an equally persuasive statement about other job responsibilities a person with this type of disability could consider and still be licensed as an early childhood special education teacher. Jobs such as an individualized family service plan facilitator or a parent group leader were thought practical. Joan felt compelled to both help this student and inform her university peers about the potential of educators with disabilities. She realized that the issues were complex and involved not only seeing what a prospective teacher with a disability could actually do in courses and educational settings but also her own, the student's, and the school personnel's deeply held beliefs about what is possible.

Cindy did complete an alternative student teaching experience as a parent group facilitator and did receive her teaching license. She is realistic about her chances of securing a position and can articulate both her personal strengths and her limitations as an early childhood special education teacher.

As we encountered and considered the experiences of educators with disabilities, at first independently of each other and then collectively, it felt like we were peeling an intellectual onion. One layer was a story of a person who had a disability wanting to become an educator. Another layer uncovered a story of a successful educator with a disability. The next layer revealed barriers that impeded people with disabilities in their quest to become educators. The following layer exposed variables that contributed to the success of educators with disabilities. Yet another layer produced an educator with disabilities, such as Joan's student, Cindy, who challenged us to rethink our preconceptions about the teacher preparation and employment process.

Removal of each layer revealed new questions as well. Why, for example, have some people with disabilities experienced considerable success as educators and others encountered great difficulty? Why has the presence of educators with disabilities been limited in today's public schools even though people with disabilities represent the largest minority group in the United States? What factors have contributed to the minority status of individuals with disabilities? How have public schools and institutions of higher education responded to the choices and needs of educators who have disabilities? What are the career development issues related to educators with disabilities? Do the requirements and demands of educational positions inhibit or preclude people with disabilities from becoming educators? How do societal, teacher-educator, and administrator attitudes affect individuals with disabilities who wish to become educators? What supports are available to facilitate people with disabilities who want to become educators? What effects does public policy have on educators with disabilities? How does personal advocacy affect one's success as an educator?

These and many other questions also arose through our contacts with prospective and practicing educators who have disabilities, in our conversations with teacher-educator colleagues who wondered how they should respond to students with disabilities in their teacher-education programs, and from others we met during presentations of our work at professional conferences. Our attempts to answer the myriad questions for ourselves and others quickly made two points clear. One, issues involving educators with disabilities are often complex and typically not amenable to simple solutions. As such, they can create confusion, frustration, and even worse results among individuals with disabilities, parents, teacher-educators, administrators, advocates, policy makers, and others. Two, from a scholarly standpoint, we really did not know enough about the experiences of educators with disabilities and other pertinent information to form well-grounded answers.

Our instincts told us that little information was available on educators with disabilities, and those instincts were confirmed after we searched the literature. We uncovered a few separate, individual writings on educators with disabilities, rather than connected products of research agendas. We found little that was data-based, which should not have been surprising as disability statistics are less commonly collected than other demographic data, even by agencies such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which does not count the number of individuals with disabilities who are either employed or unemployed. With the exceptions of the American Association for the Advancement of Science's longstanding Project on Science, Technology and Disability and the multifaceted but short-lived project in the late 1970s on educators with disabilities sponsored by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education under a contract with the American Council on Education's (then) Higher Education and the Handicapped Project, we found no institutional efforts to effect changes to benefit educators with disabilities. (See chapter 13 in this volume for further descriptions of both projects.)

Given the stories we were hearing, we were reluctant to presume that the lack of information meant that educators with disabilities were having little difficulty with their education, employment, and accommodations. We concluded that few educators, researchers, administrators, or policy makers appeared to be interested in this area, even though education has long been a civil rights battleground. Unless you are a person with a disability, particularly one who has tried to pursue a career in education, the topic of educators with disabilities may never have crossed your mind, which is basically what happened with Clay until his meeting with Sarah. The lack of interest, however, quickly disappears once you are drawn as a participant

into the problems faced by educators with disabilities—say, for instance, as a parent who sees her daughter who had had a brain tumor kept from realizing a career choice for which she does have the capabilities and desire, or as a professor who wonders if he did the right thing by talking a student who is blind out of a teacher-preparation program in secondary education, or as a supervisor who is not sure if the provision of certain accommodations to a teacher with learning disabilities will mean that the teacher is no longer fulfilling the responsibilities of her position. In most individuals, interest in these issues is not absent; rather, it is dormant until participation in a situation awakens it.

The topic of educators with disabilities is also an entry point to other, larger concerns, such as: understanding diversity in education, responding to the diverse needs of students in our nation's schools, tapping into overlooked and underused portions of the population to meet the demand for educators, creating opportunities for individuals from groups that are underrepresented in educational professions, and rethinking what teachers should know and be able to do. It extends the concept of the inclusion of students with disabilities into general education classrooms that we are trying to achieve in our schools by saying we also need to consider the inclusion of individuals with disabilities into positions of responsibility as educators and administrators. It enhances diversity in the educational enterprise by bringing an often neglected group back to the table. This is an important group of individuals who provide unique challenges, through their various and different ways of meeting the basic needs of their lives, to society's commonly held notions of what it takes to be a person and, by extension, to be a teacher.

Thus the impetus for *Enhancing Diversity: Educators with Disabilities* comes from three sources: the stories of educators with disabilities, the need for more information, and our own perspectives or biases. The voices and stories of educators with disabilities deserve to be shared more widely. Information is necessary to complement the understandings we gain from their stories and to create more opportunities for educators with disabilities. This latter use of information follows from our bias, which we openly acknowledge here: *We believe there can and should be many more people with disabilities in educational professions.* This is not to say that we think every person with a disability can be a teacher; similarly, we do not think that every nondisabled person can be a teacher. We have professional standards for entrance to and the practice of our professions that educators, nondisabled and disabled alike, must satisfy; we believe that we do not need to add barriers that discriminate on the basis of a person's disability (or gender, race, ethnicity, culture, language, age, or affectional orientation).

◆ THE CASE FOR MORE EDUCATORS WITH DISABILITIES

Before we preview the structure and contents of this volume, we provide the reasons supporting our bias in favor of educators with disabilities. Our rationale is based on arguments in four areas.

First, individuals with disabilities can be successful educators, as the research reported in chapters 2, 3, and 4 of this volume shows and previous research has indicated (Gilmore, Merchant, and Moore 1980 [who surveyed more than nine hundred educators with disabilities]; Tindall et al. 1986; Tindall et al. 1987; Tindall et al. 1988a, 1988b). They hold positions in a variety of educational professions, such as all

types of teaching, counseling, administration, and speech therapy, and have a variety of disabilities, such as learning disabilities, physical disabilities, visual impairments, deafness and hearing loss, medical conditions, and brain injuries.

Yet the presence of educators with disabilities in our schools and educational agencies appears to be small. Gilmore and her colleagues cite the results of a study by the President's Committee for Employment of the Handicapped (later called the President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities) that found that "proportionately fewer disabled people choose a career in education than their able-bodied peers" (Gilmore, Merchant, and Moore 1980, 1). Also, assume a prevalence rate of individuals with disabilities at 10 percent or even 5 percent of the general population; most people's experiences with educators would not include encounters with or knowledge of educators with disabilities at such rates. The fact that actual prevalence rates are not known, that we must approach the question of how many educators have disabilities so tentatively and circumspectly, is perhaps telling. Statistics are routinely collected and reported on the age, experience, gender, and racial and ethnic composition of the teaching force in order to shape and drive policies on issues such as the future needs and diversification of the teaching profession. The apparent lack of information about the number of educators with disabilities means that we cannot take into account the needs of this group of teachers in our planning and actions.

Second, educators who have disabilities are important to our schools. They not only add a unique perspective or dimension of diversity to those responsible for carrying out education's missions but also contribute significantly to solutions to issues our schools face.

One such problem, for example, is the continuing deficit in trained special education personnel across our nation. Information from a recent annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act reported that for the 1991–92 school year, there was a need for 27,282 additional special education teachers nationally (U.S. Department of Education 1994). Also, 13,665 additional nonteaching staff, such as occupational therapists, work-study coordinators, physical therapists, and paraprofessionals were needed in the United States. More than twenty years after the passage of federal special education law, we still do not have sufficient personnel to implement appropriately the mandates of the law. Given the unemployment figures for individuals with disabilities, efforts to foster careers in education—particularly special education and related services—for people with disabilities could aid the efforts to find additional personnel. Care must be taken, though, not to "track" educators with disabilities solely into positions working with students with disabilities, just as we do not track teachers from racial and ethnic minority groups to teach only students from similar backgrounds.

Another problem facing our schools concerns the integration of students with disabilities in general education and the need for realistic and healthy attitudes toward integration among general education personnel. General education personnel are coming in contact with students with disabilities in ever-increasing numbers, given both the continuing trend to educate special education students in general education settings (Bellamy and Danielson 1989) and the impact of the Regular Education Initiative (e.g., Lipsky and Gartner 1987; Reynolds, Wang, and Walberg 1987; Will 1984, 1986) as it advocates for the integration of the special and general education systems. Yet as some have observed (Kauffman 1989; Semmel et al. 1991), surveys of practitioners' views on the Regular Education Initiative show that most of the educators do not support many of its propositions (Anderegg 1989; Semmel et al. 1991; Smith 1988). Unless such hesitant or negative views concerning the integra-

tion of students with disabilities can be changed, efforts to improve the educational services they receive will face a persistent barrier.

Here, educators with disabilities in our schools can provide valuable role models for students with disabilities (Gilmore, Merchant, and Moore 1980), role models both for careers in educational professions and for lives fully integrated into society. Their presence can influence the perceptions and attitudes of both fellow staff members and students as their colleagues and students develop realistic appraisals of not only which limitations do or do not emerge from certain disabilities but also whether these limitations really matter (Johnson and Johnson 1984). More educators with disabilities in our schools would also provide a better interpretation of the inclusion of students with disabilities being promoted.

Third, we have done relatively little to address and remove the barriers we have erected for educators with disabilities compared to our efforts to improve the situations of educators from other underrepresented groups. For example, there are few references to disabilities in major reports of the reform of teacher training and the teaching profession (see, for example, Carnegie Forum 1986; Holmes Group 1986). Several years ago, one of us received a set of recruitment brochures produced by the National Education Association to encourage individuals from underrepresented groups to consider teaching as a profession. These brochures were designed for African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic Americans, but none for Americans with disabilities.

Fourth, the employment problems that individuals with disabilities face are especially serious from a number of perspectives. For example, the National Longitudinal Transition Survey reported that only 46 percent of special education students find employment after high school, with differences among disabilities ranging from 6 percent for students with multiple handicaps to 57 percent for students with learning disabilities (Governor's Planning Council 1992). While the survey also found that almost 70 percent of the students, especially students who are deaf or hard of hearing and pupils with learning disabilities, were as productive as their nondisabled counterparts in the first two years after high school (Behrmann 1992; Governor's Planning Council 1992), other reports suggest such positive outcomes may erode by adulthood. A Louis Harris and Associates poll (1986; cited in Governor's Planning Council 1987) found that two-thirds of all adult Americans with disabilities are not working and two-thirds of those not working would like to be employed. Gerber (1990) quotes a report from the President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities that says that "43 million Americans with disabilities remain the nation's most isolated, unemployed, impoverished, and welfare-dependent minority which is losing ground" (5).

The place of individuals with disabilities in professional-level occupations heightens the already alarming quantitative nature of the employment problems by adding a disturbing qualitative dimension. Professional-level employment provides benefits beyond those associated with work in general. Status, influence, and importance within society, as well as personal rewards such as self-esteem and greater income, accompany employment in the professions. These benefits, and the power and responsibility of the positions themselves, allow holders of such occupations to exercise significant levels of independence and self-determination. Yet research indicates that access to such benefits and opportunities has been limited for individuals with disabilities (de Balcazar, Bradford, and Fawcett 1988; Gottfredson, Finucci, and Childs 1984; Johnson and Hafer 1985; Kiernan and Ciborowski 1986; Moores 1969; Pfouts and Nixon 1982; Smith 1988; Zetlin and Hosseini 1989).

The consequences of such a situation are serious for both people with disabilities and society. Limited professional opportunities underemploy the abilities of individuals with disabilities to their and society's detriment. Lower placement rates in professions deny an appropriate share of responsibility and influence to people with disabilities. Those professions are denied the unique perspectives of those individuals. The situation stifles the aspirations of people with disabilities, affecting their opportunities to exercise self-determination more easily and, because of the financial implications, meaningful independence. The missing presence of sufficient numbers of individuals with disabilities in professions will always signal that society has not achieved full integration for this group of people.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed in 1990, provides an important tool not only to address these employment difficulties in general but also to enhance the diversity of the teaching profession by mandating employment practices that will provide equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities. School districts must face the issues involved in hiring and accommodating educators with disabilities because of the ADA's employment provisions. They may not refuse to hire an individual with a disability who is qualified to perform a particular job, such as teaching, because of that individual's disability. They "cannot discriminate against people with disabilities in regard to any employment practices or terms, conditions, and privileges of employment" (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 1992, I-4). They must make reasonable accommodations in the work environment or in the way matters are typically handled so that the individual with a disability has an equal employment opportunity.

The ADA is valuable, then, in that it forces institutions of higher education, school districts, and the predominantly nondisabled power holders within those organizations to examine and possibly alter their practices relative to people with disabilities already in or wanting to enter educational professions. Lest we forget, however, Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, a precursor to and model for the ADA, also proscribes exclusion from participation, denial of benefits, and discrimination on the basis of disability in any program or activity (such as institutions of higher education and school districts) that receives federal funding. Yet, such inappropriate practices still continue.

THE STRUCTURE OF *ENHANCING DIVERSITY*

The arrangement of this volume reflects the twin needs of (a) telling the stories of educators with disabilities and (b) presenting the information to help us understand their experiences better and create more opportunities. We accomplish these two purposes by interspersing the voices of educators with disabilities¹ among the chapters examining issues pertinent to the recruitment, preparation, employment, and retention of educators with disabilities.

For instance, following this introduction, we present an interview with one educator, Vickie (a pseudonym, as are all the other names used from the interviews), that helps us set the context for the volume by previewing many of the issues found

1. The stories from educators with disabilities, reported in chapter 4, come from the research that we, Joan M. Karp and Clayton E. Keller, conducted with our colleague, Vern Simula, and their assistants.

throughout the book. Then, before many of the scholarly chapters on contextual factors, we draw on our informants' voices to foreshadow and play counterpoint to the themes in the chapters, to show how the factors can be used to facilitate success or create barriers. The interview of Beth precedes the last chapter and shows an educator who received a great deal of support through difficult circumstances in order to continue the employment that meant so much to her as a person. Her story provides a powerful example of what can be achieved by, with, and for educators with disabilities.

◆ CLOSING REMARKS

The old saying that “the world is full of good intentions” can probably honestly describe the mindsets of the various individuals participating in situations involving educators with disabilities. Every one of them most likely holds with the strongest conviction, as we ourselves do, the intentions of protecting the interests and doing what is best for students in our schools and of treating people fairly. The interpretations of what those intentions really entail and the ways to fulfill them, however, can and do vary greatly. Hence we have the other common saying about how the road to a particularly undesirable place is also paved with good intentions.

Good intentions are not enough when it comes to situations involving educators with disabilities. Despite laws such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act and the presence of university and school system policies that prohibit discrimination on the basis of disabilities, discrimination occurs. The decisions made and actions taken by people such as all of us causes us to realize those intentions are critical. We reiterate our earlier point that there are typically no simple solutions in these situations and add that there will never be one answer that fits for all situations or individuals with disabilities (though, again, we ourselves do hold a bias toward some types of solutions over others). The closest we believe we can come to simplicity are the following characteristics for which all of us should strive. The presence of these characteristics can contribute greatly to the quality of the solution-seeking process:

1. *Openness* to our communication
2. *Willingness* to question our own and others' assumptions about disabilities and teaching
3. *Creativity* to generate solutions
4. *Courage* to put solutions to appropriate tests
5. *Honesty* to accept the results of such tests

We hope that the stories and information in this volume not only convince you to adopt these characteristics in matters pertaining to educators with disabilities but also enhance your ability to use them well.

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