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Review

Public policy and the education of exceptional children

Frederick J. Weintraub,
Alan Abeson, Joseph Ballard, and Martin LaVor, (Ed.),
Public Policy and the Education of Exceptional Children. (Reston, Virginia: The Council for Exceptional Children, 1976) Pages: 378.

The 1970s have signaled the advent of a new era for the education of the handicapped child. Concepts such as *right to an education, least restrictive environment, due process* and *individualized education plan* emanating from litigation and legislation have had a significant impact on the education for the handicapped. The public policy arena in which these changes have occurred and will continue to evolve is the focal point of the Council for Exceptional Children publication titled *Public Policy and the Education of Exceptional Children*.

Through an examination of topics which include the rights which have been obtained for the handicapped, current federal and state policy, avenues for policy change, operation of the political process, and the rights and responsibilities of professionals, the editors have compiled a resource book not only for the exceptional education advocates but also policy makers. Tracing the historical movement of education for the handicapped to the present through legal decisions and legislation as well as exploring implications for the future enables the reader to gain additional insight into the relationship between education of the handicapped and education in general.

For organizational purposes the book is divided into five sections with a total of 20 authors contributing to the product. With a number of authors examining similar topics, there is a certain amount of overlap and repetition in the discussion of the various court cases and federal legislation; however, this detracts little from the overall book as each section can be read or viewed as an independent component.

One of the most valuable sections of the book from an administrative aspect is the first section. In this section, the educational rights of exceptional children are delineated according to recent court decisions and legislation. The section which consists of seven chapters includes an examination of the right to an education, due process of law, educational placement and confidentiality and record keeping. The chapters are permeated with summaries and discussions of the key court cases and their implications for education. In addition, the editors have concluded the section with a chapter containing excerpts from these cases.

The section on state and federal policy for exceptional children provides a useful compendium of past and present laws especially at the federal level. Most notable, Public Law 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, is explored in detail and included in its entirety. Although the rights and financial assistance conveyed by this law were expounded, there was no discussion on compliance problems which states may encounter in applying for this aid. A comprehensive chapter on financing exceptional education explores the costs of special services and programs, patterns of state and federal aid, and the role of the three levels of government in funding special education. The author has succeeded in providing a concise overview of the issues involved in exceptional education finance.

In the third section litigation, legislation, attorney general opinions and administrative policies were identified as the major avenues for effecting public policy change. The purpose of this section is to familiarize the reader with the procedures that must be followed to achieve gains for the exceptional child in these areas. Resulting from this effort is a practical handbook or "how-to-do-it" approach. For example, the litigation chapter covers such questions as these: When is litigation appropriate? What is the issue? Does the plaintiff have standing to sue? What factors should be considered in selecting an attorney? How is the appropriate court selected? and so on.

The section devoted to understanding the political process aptly succeeds in demonstrating that educational changes are not apolitical. Although politics is a complicated and often frustrating process, the authors present a primer of basic strategies, procedures and practical advice from experience to enable the reader to operate more effectively as a change agent in the political environment.

Addressing the issue of professional rights and responsibilities appropriately concludes the book. This issue has been and continues to be a nebulous area for the professional educator since a firm legal base has not been established. Cases which have implications for the special educator are reviewed; however, the reader is admonished to proceed with caution in applying interpretations to other situations.

It is imperative that educators and policy makers familiarize themselves with the educational "rights" of handicapped children—rights which often have been ignored or misinterpreted. This book provides a comprehensive source for initiation into the public policy area where these rights have evolved.

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