



Educating Children With Multiple Disabilities: A Collaborative Approach

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Provides proven strategies and guidance for educating students with severe and multiple disabilities in a variety of settings. For undergraduate and graduate students. Previous edition: c1996. Softcover. DLC: Children with Disabilities--Education.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Fred P. Orelove, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, Special Education and Disability Policy, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia

Dr. Orelove founded and served as director of the teacher preparation program in severe disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University from 1981 to 2011. He also served for 20 years as Executive Director of the Partnership for People with Disabilities, Virginia's university center for excellence in developmental disabilities. Since the 1970s, Dr. Orelove has taught children and has directed numerous training and demonstration projects related to individuals with disabilities. In addition to this book, he has co-authored two books on teamwork and one on inclusive education. In his retirement, Dr. Orelove is engaged in non-profit work in Richmond, Virginia, including working for an inclusive performing arts program and volunteering with children who have been traumatized.

Dick Sobsey, Ed.D., Professor Emeritus, Educational Psychology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Dr. Sobsey has worked with children and adults with severe and multiple disabilities since 1968 as a nurse, teacher, and researcher. He taught courses on teaching students with severe disabilities and inclusive education at the University of Alberta from 1982 to 2005. He also served as Director of the J.P. Das Centre on Developmental and Learning Disabilities from 1994–2008 and the John Dossetor Health Ethics Centre from 2006 to 2011. He is the father of an adult son with severe and multiple disabilities due to MECP2 (methyl CpG binding protein 2) duplication syndrome.

Rosanne K. Silberman, Ed.D., is a professor in the Department of Special Education at Hunter College, The City University of New York in New York City, where she coordinates the graduate teacher preparation programs in blindness and visual impairment and severe disabilities including deafblindness. Currently, in addition to serving as Project Director of a training grant from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) in Severe Disabilities including Deafblindness, she is Project Director of a long-term training grant from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) in Rehabilitation Teaching/Orientation and Mobility. Dr. Silberman also is project director of training grants from private foundations including The New York Community Trust, the Allene Reuss Memorial Trust, and the Lavelle Fund for the Blind. She has served as a consultant for many school districts and has conducted educational evaluations of preschool, elementary, and secondary-level students with visual impairments and multiple disabilities in general education classrooms. Dr. Silberman is a member of the Board of Trustees of The New York Institute for Special Education, a member of the advisory board of DB-LINK, and a consulting editor for Deaf-Blind Perspectives. She is co-editor with Sharon Z. Sacks of *Educating Students Who Have Visual Impairments with Other Disabilities*

(Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 1998). Dr. Silberman is the recipient of several distinguished awards including the 2000 Harold Ladas Award for Exemplary Teaching in the School of Education at Hunter College and the 2002 George E. Keane Award for Distinguished Service and Contributions to the Field of Blindness and Visual Impairment from the New York State Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

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Curriculum and Instruction

Deciding what to teach students with multiple disabilities and how to teach them may seem to be insurmountable tasks. Most children have so many things to learn that team members may find it difficult to determine which goals are most important for a given school year. Other children have limited response repertoires and multiple sensory and motor impairments which challenge the creativity of instructional staff to design teaching strategies.

Fortunately, the rapid maturation of the field of educating learners with severe disabilities since the 1980s has resulted in a variety of models and practical solutions to the challenges described above. Federal and state grants and other incentives fueled an explosion of demonstration initiatives and research studies that gave rise to a host of effective practices. At the same time, the field was undergoing a sea change in philosophy and values the worth and role of individuals with multiple disabilities (cf., Meyer, Peck, & Brown, 1991).

It is safe to say that the single biggest driving force behind these changes has been the promotion of the philosophy and practice of inclusive education (i.e., serving children with disabilities in general education classes with their same-age peers). The effect has been obvious, dramatic, and wide reaching. Hundreds of children who formerly were placed in noninclusive classrooms or schools often had few expectations placed on them have been active members of general education classes and have shown academic and social gains (cf., Downing, 1996; Haring & Romer, 1995).

Although the authors of this chapter recognize that many educators and some parents have not embraced inclusion, the multitude of success stories and research data suggest that inclusion has had, and will continue to have a profound influence on our thinking and practices. Thus, this chapter is based on an assumption that readers either serve children with multiple disabilities, or are interested in serving them in general education classrooms. The ideas and information should be useful, however, in other service delivery models.

This chapter is based on several other assumptions, as well:

1. **Every child can learn.** While this statement may appear trivial, it is not. Some educators have developed individualized education programs (IEPs) for certain children as if those children had little or nothing to gain from education. Each child, in spite of possible significant motor, sensory, cognitive, and health care needs, should be assumed to be capable of learning (Orellove, 1991).
2. **A transdisciplinary team is necessary.** This, of course, is a theme running through the entire book (see Chapter 1). The team becomes especially critical in the design and implementation of the student's educational program, particularly when one considers the range of challenges in the learner with multiple disabilities. Implicit in the transdisciplinary approach is the belief that program planning is collaborative.
3. **Families are vital.** Families have an obvious keen interest in the welfare of their family member with a disability, and they should be given every opportunity to be actively involved in decisions about what and how to teach the child. Moreover, families typically know the child better than anyone else and are a rich source of ideas that should be tapped. This is especially important given the large percentage of children

who have not been taught a reliable means of communicating. Parents typically develop a finely tuned ability to "read" their child's needs and feelings.

There is no one correct way to perform educational program planning, and many excellent models are available that describe such processes in detail (e.g., Ferguson, Meyer, & Willis, 1990; Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson 1993; Rainforth, York, and Macdonald, 1992; Snell, 1993). Although every model differs in its sequence, level of detail, and so forth, they all share common components:

- The belief that program planning must be individualized, taking into account the needs, strengths, and dreams of each child, rather than determining content on the basis of categorical labels or test scores
- The understanding that the IEP is the core planning document and that it must reflect the input of the entire team working together and incorporating the ideas and desires of the student's family and other people significant in the student's life
- The recognition that each student (and staff member) needs individually determined supports and resources for maximum educational gains
- The belief that instruction should focus on attaining important outcomes for the learner and that teaching strategies should be effective, inclusive, and humane

The process proposed in this chapter incorporates these elements. It emphasizes, in particular, "up-front" planning to ensure that the child's IEP is not only clear and effective, but that it results from careful and thoughtful planning. Figure 10.1 presents a flowchart of the process. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to describing each step; Figure 10.2 provides a brief summary of the steps involved. Although curriculum and instruction in reality are interrelated, for convenience this chapter is organized into two sections, treating each area separately.

Finally, although this chapter provides examples wherever possible, it does not attempt to deal with the full range of content issues specific to learners with multiple disabilities. Readers are invited to consult the three preceding chapters for more detailed information on communication skills (Chapter 7) mealtime skills (Chapter 8), and self-care skills (Chapter 9). In addition, Chapter 4 should be viewed as an adjunct to this chapter.

Excerpted from **Educating Children with Multiple Disabilities: A Transdisciplinary Approach, Fourth Edition**, edited by Fred P. Orellove, Ph.D., Dick Sobsey, Ed.D., & Rosanne K. Silberman, Ph.D.

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