EPILOGUE

A major challenge identified in Chapter 1 was how to connect the reforms happening in the early intervention system to reforms in personnel development systems. Certain assumptions were identified as underlying determinants of how such reforms should take place. Based on the collective wisdom and experience shared by the authors of the chapters in this book, a summary of specific recommendations for next steps and future directions follows.

INCREASE THE RESOURCES ALLOCATED TO PERSONNEL PREPARATION

Whether at the local, state, or federal level, personnel preparation falls into the budget category of discretionary spending. The term *discretionary* reflects the inherent belief that personnel development monies are expendable, fringe, and nonessential. Its importance is consistently underestimated by those who allocate resources. Research indicates that reform efforts are failing because staff development has not been emphasized (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1996) despite evidence that providing meaningful opportunities for professional growth is a key feature shared by successful school reform (Quellmalz, Shields, & Knapp, 1995). Personnel development systems must have the resources to address the needs of personnel who are adapting to reform efforts. As emphasized throughout this book, this does not mean more resources to support more of the same traditional approaches. It means that resources should be allocated for reforming the systems of personnel development so they can better meet the needs of existing and future early intervention personnel in nontraditional ways. This might include stipends for increasing family participation; funds to support collaboration across university departments and state agencies; resources to support community-based, on-site approaches to personnel development; and many of the other innovative approaches described throughout this book.

ADDRESS QUALITY AND EVALUATION ISSUES

Closely connected to the recommendation that more resources should be allocated to personnel preparation is the recommendation that those allocations be made on the basis of some well-defined criteria for quality and effectiveness. Accountability issues must be addressed with creativity and imagination because of the numerous challenges that arise when documenting changes in practices in an ever-changing field. However, personnel preparation will continue to be the "stepchild" in the funding arena unless solid evidence can be presented to funders that money has been well spent.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE SOCIAL AND COLLABORATIVE CONTEXT OF PERSONNEL PREPARATION

The increased emphasis in early intervention on collaborative relationships, coupled with the research that emphasizes the important role of peer and collegial support in sustaining

lifelong learning and making changes, suggests that more attention should be paid to this aspect of professional growth. Creative strategies for supporting collaborative relationships are shared throughout this book. Making collaboration work to ultimately benefit the quality of programs and services provided to families requires more than just putting people together around a table, or in a meeting, or in an event. Rather, strategies for facilitating meaningful interactions and for promoting group decision making and problem solving are necessary. Supporting individual relationships over time, especially when individuals live in different parts of the community or the state, is important if collaboration is to be sustained. Research indicates that sustaining these relationships without administrative support is difficult.

CREATE A PROCESS FOR SPREADING SUCCESS

Effective models and strategies for personnel preparation have been developed, and many of these have been described in this book. However, these successes have not been shared with others systematically or effectively. Although this book addresses this problem, multiple dissemination strategies are needed to get information into the hands of those responsible for planning and implementing personnel preparation. A place to start is with the conferences and conventions sponsored by various professional organizations and agencies, as often faculty and consultants attend these for professional renewal and new information. However, the format used for conveying information in these conferences is exactly the format that this book recommends be deemphasized, that is, short, unrelated sessions that provide a superficial presentation of information or ideas. What is needed are challenging, focused, in-depth, hands-on experiences that model as well as present information about innovative instructional strategies. This is the approach taken by the Southeastern Institute for Faculty Training (SIFT) with positive outcomes in terms of short-term and long-term changes in the instructional practices of those who participated (Winton, 1996). One of the outcomes of SIFT was that some of the participating states are starting to provide comprehensive strands on personnel preparation as part of their statewide conferences. This is a start in the right direction, although more efforts of this type need to be tried and evaluated.

RECOGNIZE THAT THERE ARE NO QUICK FIXES OR SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

Reforming personnel preparation systems may be even more challenging than reforming early intervention systems. There are often more players, if the important role that universities, community colleges, and professional organizations have traditionally played in personnel development is considered. Even when successful models and strategies for personnel development have been identified, the translation to local communities requires time, patience, and effort. Financial and human resources are needed to adapt effective models to local sites, whether it be a college campus or a local community. Providing local communities and local planning or advisory boards with information and resources for personnel development must be a priority. Identifying those responsible for quality community-based personnel development efforts is a challenge associated with this recommendation. Related challenges include developing infrastructures at the state or regional level that can support college and community efforts and taking the time to systematically document progress and changes over time.

    In considering these recommendations, it is clear that they are interconnected. Reforming a system that is not really a system but a collection of individual entities that

share a mission to prepare personnel to serve young children and their families will require much time, creativity, and individual commitment, as well as many resources. These four items—time, resources, creativity, and individual commitment—are key components to the success of moving toward our ultimate goal of better serving young children and their families.

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