

REFORMING

Personnel Preparation in Early Intervention

Issues, Models, and Practical Strategies



Pamela J. Winton, Jeanette A. McCollum, and Camille Catlett

Foreword by Don Bailey

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PERSONNEL PREPARATION
IN EARLY INTERVENTION

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Issues, Models,
and Practical Strategies

edited by

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FOREWORD

Anyone associated with early intervention is well aware of the challenges of this dynamic field. The professionals and paraprofessionals who touch the lives of infants and toddlers work in interdisciplinary contexts, in diverse settings, and with children who have widely varying abilities. Early interventionists are expected to be knowledgeable about diverse disabilities, able to identify the learning and therapeutic needs of young children, and highly skilled in designing educational and therapeutic interventions. They must also work collaboratively with parents and other family members to identify and meet the needs of individual children and to support families in achieving family-identified priorities. Furthermore, they must be knowledgeable about the various agencies and programs that serve children with disabilities and their families, and they must be skilled at integrating and coordinating services.

This book frames these and other challenges facing the field of early childhood intervention within the context of ecosystems theory; but what is truly unique and useful about this book is the way that it moves beyond those challenges to thoughtful and sometimes provocative strategies for early intervention preservice preparation, inservice training, and individual interactions. Issues are delineated in interesting vignettes and examples. Activities for promoting personnel development are provided throughout the text. The authors, who have considered and implemented a variety of methods for and models of personnel preparation, share their ideas and perspectives as well as barriers to and facilitators of successful service delivery. In each case, the suggestions reflect an understanding of the complex and multiple early childhood intervention roles and the corresponding responsibility of faculty members, family members, and trainers to help prepare personnel for those roles. This volume emphasizes that learning is a lifelong process and must constantly be tied to real-life issues and challenges such as those encountered daily by practitioners.

This book's title, *Reforming Personnel Preparation in Early Intervention: Issues, Models, and Practical Strategies*, begins with the bold premise that personnel preparation in early intervention needs to be reformed. One definition of reform is to "change for the better." This book is not an attack on existing efforts, but it is an attempt to provide capable personnel with the resources with which to achieve desired changes. For early intervention program directors, it offers ideas for encouraging the development of staff in family-centered directions. For early intervention trainers, it provides ideas for increasing the repertoire of methods and materials and a set of positive examples and suggestions for how personnel preparation efforts can prepare professionals for the reality of the world of work. For new faculty members, it delineates both broad and specific suggestions for

course planning and program development. For experienced faculty members, it provides ideas for revising or modifying existing courses. For family members of children with disabilities, it offers support in advocating for family–professional collaborations in personnel preparation. And, for agency representatives and policy makers, it promotes thoughtful reflection on the challenges inherent in supporting personnel through resource management and allocation.

Ultimately, providers of early intervention services (and, I would argue, all teachers as well) need to be prepared to enter and deal with situations for which they have not been specifically prepared. This challenge requires an understanding of the fundamental goals that should be achieved in the context of any helping relationship. It also requires an ability to engage in productive problem solving with family members and co-workers until an acceptable solution is achieved. This volume provides key insights into what will be required for personnel preparation efforts to be truly effective in preparing, developing, and supporting a work force for the field.

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PREFACE

A book about changes and reforms written in a time of rapid change presents certain inherent challenges. The terminology used in this book was one challenge. It was important to use terms that had shared meanings across diverse groups; however, the broad audience for this book (multiple disciplines, including families and agencies) did not make this an easy task. For example, terms used to define aspects of personnel preparation have different meanings for different audiences. For some the term “training” is inappropriate and offensive, conjuring up images of dogs being trained to do tricks. For others, the term “training” has a specific meaning: staff development activities for practitioners in the work force, as opposed to “education,” which refers to experiences in formal institutions that result in degrees. Furthermore, some individuals make this same distinction by using the terms “inservice” and “preservice.” Our goal in this book is to define personnel preparation in the broadest possible sense. Our definition includes all of these strategies (e.g., mentoring, consultation, self-study, guided decision making) and processes (e.g., personnel standards, licensure, certification, competencies, monitoring) that create a community of learners with the capacity to grow and develop in the face of ongoing changes in the field. We view personnel preparation as a part of the daily work life of practitioners, rather than as a series of events that takes place in particular environments or on particular days. Our approach to the challenge of terminology regarding personnel preparation was to heighten the chapter authors’ awareness of the issue and to encourage them to use terminology that best suited their particular discussion.

A related challenge was how to consider evolving policies and laws. References to a specific component of legislation, such as Part H of IDEA, are soon dated. Policy initiatives such as welfare and health care reform, whose impact at state and local levels is still unfolding, are challenging to discuss when information is changing rapidly. Our approach was to use the term “early intervention legislation” whenever possible and to promote personnel preparation strategies and processes that enable learners and communities to grapple with rapid changes, no matter what they might be, rather than to focus exclusively on early intervention content.

The values that underlie this book are to share information in ways that promote family-centered, interdisciplinary, community-based early intervention services. The definition of what that resembles continues to evolve and must be individualized according to the needs of each community. However, what is constant if that value is to be realized is the need for a diverse, sensitive, flexible, confident, competent cadre of personnel serving young children and families. This book is designed to give those who need them the tools to do the most effective job possible in preparing such a cadre of personnel.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the personnel preparation issues and challenges facing the field, possible solutions to those challenges, and a framework that recognizes and acknowledges the transactions and involvement of multiple systems. The framework provided in Chapter 1 is important in terms of understanding the challenges as well as moving toward solutions to those challenges. Just as problems are interrelated, so are solutions. For example, setting personnel standards as a solution to the problem of not having competent personnel can create a new problem related to shortages of personnel if the standards are difficult to achieve. This means that solutions must be considered within a broad framework to evaluate and anticipate unexpected outcomes that might result from particular approaches designed to address challenges in one part of a system. In the remaining chapters in Part I, issues, strategies, and models related to discrete aspects of the broader ecology—state systems, community systems, and higher education systems—are described in more detail.

The focus of Part II is those critical components that must be included and considered in every personnel preparation effort. Chapter 5 provides a conceptual framework for designing effective personnel preparation. Chapters 6 and 7 provide practical information and strategies related to needs assessment, evaluation, and follow-up strategies. The role that supervision, mentoring, and coaching play in ongoing professional development is the topic of Chapter 8.

Part III (Chapters 9–16) is designed to provide the reader with concrete ideas, instructional activities, frameworks, and resources related to early intervention content areas that have been shown to be of interest to university faculty and staff development specialists. These content areas are sensitivity to cultural variations, family-centered practices, service coordination, child assessment, intervention planning, team collaboration, inclusion, and early intervention legislation and policy. The array of ideas presented in each chapter should appeal to all who address this content in instruction.

Part IV (Chapters 17–21) provides more detailed information and, in some instances, specific models that have been developed to effectively deal with the key issues introduced previously in the book. These include the following: 1) the role of families as instructional resources and partners, 2) designing and implementing interdisciplinary practica, 3) strategies related to distance learning, and 4) linking preservice and inservice efforts through team-based instruction. The information presented in this part not only has application at state, community, program, and university levels and across all disciplines but also promotes linkages among these various entities. The focus is on practical information that will assist individuals and agencies in making changes that affect the way personnel preparation is implemented. Chapter 21 closes the book with practical ideas, strategies, and checklists related to implementing effective instruction. Included at the end of most chapters is an annotated bibliography of exemplary early intervention instructional resources related to the topic of the chapter, including price and ordering information.

Our hope for this edited volume is to promote and inspire continued innovation and creativity in how personnel are prepared and sustained in their early intervention roles. By focusing on practical, concrete strategies that are provided within a well-conceived theoretical framework and research base, we hope that each reader will take from this book new ideas to try that will prove effective and successful.

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We have been privileged to work with talented and generous colleagues (families, faculty, and practitioners) who have shared their ideas, activities, and enthusiasm for personnel preparation with us and with others. Many of these colleagues participated in the regional faculty training institutes funded from 1992 to 1995 by the Office of Special Education Programs in the U.S. Department of Education. These and others have contributed chapters to this book. We thank these colleagues for their generosity, wisdom, and creativity and express our appreciation for their willingness to be partners with us.

*To families (including our own) and colleagues
who teach us every day about the value of partnerships and collaboration
in sustaining and promoting lifelong learning*

