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Selecting a Text for a Course in Family/Professional Partnerships in Special Education: A Comparison of Content and Features

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Introduction

Reviewing texts for the course *Family/Professional Partnerships in Special Education* sounds relatively straightforward, until one considers the broad definitions of family and the large variety of professionals likely to interact with them. The topic can be narrowed to include texts offering prospective teachers the information they need to conduct meetings; collaborate in program planning; communicate in a culturally sensitive, consistent, and as positive a manner as possible; respect the rights and responsibilities of parents; and look to the larger context of what is best for the individual with disabilities. Yet, there is so much more teachers need to know in order to form effective partnerships with families. They need to understand legal and ethical issues; family development as impacted by a child with disabilities; and how to provide extra support, information, resources, and choices during transitions. In short, teachers need to implement best practices as evaluated through research and do so within the framework of the hopes and expectations of family members who are ultimately responsible for advocating for the individual with disabilities.

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Overview of the Individual Texts

Families of students with disabilities: Consultation and Advocacy (329 pages) is written primarily by Sandra K. Alper, Patrick J. Schloss, and Cynthia N. Schloss with contributing authors on a number of chapters. Allyn and Bacon published the book in 1994, with 13 chapters organized into two parts. The first section describes the historical, social and legislative basis for empowerment of families. The second section focuses on advocacy as well as methods and models for consultation with individual families, small groups, and agencies. The importance of interpersonal and problem solving skills is emphasized. Authors' writing styles are concise and clear. Objectives for each chapter are presented on a cover sheet, and chapter summaries are provided. The formatting is consistent across chapters, with quotes in italics, tables in boxes, case study information and numbered bullet points in summaries. The text is faithful to a family systems approach, considering various family struc-

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tures and cultures. The final chapter provides resources for advocates and brief, factual information no parent should be without. Unfortunately this book needs to be updated; particularly, the IDEA 1997 amendments need to be included.

Lifespan perspectives on the family and disability (280 pages), written by J.O. Berry and M.L. Hardman, published by Allyn and Bacon in 1998. The text is organized into ten chapters that begin with topics important to understanding families from an historic perspective, moving to a present then future focus. Chapters One through Five focus on interactions among family members, discussing stress, coping, and support for individual family members from an ecological perspective. Chapter Six addresses effective communication and collaborative partnering. Chapters Seven through Ten address four life stages, focusing on family issues at each. Stages include infant and early childhood, school age, transition to adult life, and the adult years. Each chapter begins with an attractive black and white photo, and a 'window' or pint-sized vignette, usually in the words of a parent. These windows are used to effectively convey the 'voices of real people." Each chapter ends with a summary of highlighted focus areas. The text is well-written and referenced, comprehensive, and interesting.

Strategies for communicating with parents and families of exceptional children, third edition, (332 pages), written by R.L. Kroth and D. Edge was published by Love Publishing Company in 1997. The book is organized into four parts: Chapters One through Four include understanding the child and family, Chapters Five through Nine, discuss strategies for involving parents; Chapters Ten through Thirteen cover problem solving; and Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen present future trends for parent involvement. The highly readable text provides a summary and activities for each chapter, bullets for key information, and a few illustrative case studies. The general focus is on clear communication; however, specific examples of parent training (behavior management techniques) are offered as well. The appendix provides organization and technology resources, case studies for role-playing, various tip sheets to aid parents, and forms (such as interviews and assessment input) that could easily be put to use in daily practice

Family systems within educational contexts: Understanding at-risk and special-needs students, second edition, (473 pages), was written by R. Lambie and published in 2000 by Love. The text consists of 15 chapters divided into 4 parts. Part One describes family systems, the family life cycle, and working within those understandings. The focus in Part Two is on at-risk, nontraditional, and dysfunctional families. Part Three includes information that is multidisciplinary, concentrating on applying the family systems approach to education. Part Four contains a comprehensive case study. The text is well organized and written in an engaging style; most chapters include case studies and extension activities and all provide summaries. Book lists and resources are provided in the appendices. The book addresses all aspects of families with special needs from the beginning to the end of a family life cycle, including topics such as transition planning, issues facing newly married and expectant couples, first-time parents, family involvement, in elementary and secondary programs, and concerns of families in later life.

Ordinary families, special children: A systems approach to childhood disability, second edition, (278 pages), was written by M. Seligman and R. B. Darling and published in 1997 by the Guilford Press. The book consists of ten chapters describing family systems theory, clinical strategies, and efficacy research. Various chapters address siblings, fathers and grandparents, cultural reactions, professional-family partnerships, and therapeutic approaches. The book includes one short case study at the end, and presents a few parent quotes, but is written by professionals for a professional audience. This book, as a whole, offers important resources for clinicians, but only limited relevance to classroom use.

Conducting effective conferences with parents of children with disabilities: A guide for teachers, (276 pages) was written by M.

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Seligman and published by Guilford Press in 2000. The nine chapters of the book are written in a developmental manner, to be read sequentially, with the first two chapters explaining the relationship of families and schools. The text moves on to discuss family dynamics, interviewing, strategies for working with parents, the IEP, and suggestions for working with challenging parents. An overview of legislation and interpretations of the 1997 IDEA amendments is provided. Resources on organizations for specific disabilities and book lists for parents and children are included in the appendices.

Families, Professionals, and Exceptionality: Collaborating for empowerment, fourth edition, (433 pages), written by the Turnbulls and published in 2001 in by Merrill/Prentice Hall. The text is organized into three parts: Part One is "Understanding Empowerment," Part Two is "Understanding Families," and Part Three is "Collaborating for Empowerment." The book relies on a family systems perspective and explains the theory and implementation of mutual empowerment. The text has 15 chapters and an accompanying web site which provides a syllabus manager that appears to be easily personalized by the instructor. The site also presents chapter objectives, interactive self-quizzes, a message board, net searches, and related web destinations for the student. Each chapter begins with a family vignette, and new families have been added to this edition. Chapter summaries and a thorough reference appendix are provided.

Considerations for Selecting a Text on Family/Professional Partnerships in Special Education

In order to effectively address the information needed in a textbook for this course, it is vital that the selected text include the following information: (a) current ethical issues across the life span; (b) up to date legal information which discusses IDEA 1997 and ADA and their applicable regulations as well as vocational rehabilitative services; (c) strategies to promote formation of effective partnerships with parents; (d) research results presenting knowledge about the impacts of disability on family development and dynamics; (e) techniques for providing family members with support, resources, and information on service delivery options, and the development of IFSPs, IEPs, and Individualized Transition Plans (ITPs); and (f)) presentation of clear, positive and constructive methods for communicating with family members and encouraging maximum family involvement. These texts were reviewed from the perspective that a textbook for family and professional partnerships in special education is meant to build on a background of acquired knowledge of general special education. The purpose of a text in this area is to prepare special educators with the understanding that families are the strongest socially mediating factor in a student's life. Furthermore, families, particularly parents, operate from a deep love for their children, and it is somewhat patronizing to suggest that professionals need to empower them. Respect for the privacy and primacy of the family is inherent in natural, moral, legislative, and case law. The role of professionals is to assist families to understand and judiciously exercise their power towards improving the lives of members who have disabilities.

Comparative Overview of Reviewed Texts

This review identified and reviewed seven texts that address family/professional partnerships in special education that were published between 1994 and 2001. Table 1 provides a visual comparison of the topics covered in each text along with a key for interpretation. Although each text can serve as a reference, the selection of one for use as a course text will depend on the purpose of the course (e.g. foundation or advanced); the program's philosophy (e.g. inclusive education versus self-contained programs); and the outcome objectives set for course participants (e.g. classroom teachers, administrators, service providers, or counselors).

The authors and the contributing authors of these texts have provided a comprehensive overview of issues and best practices involved in professional family partnerships. However, the dynamic nature of the

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TABLE 1. Comparative Review of Texts on Family Professional Partnerships in Special Education

CATEGORIES	TEXTBOOKS						
Y = covered well B = covered briefly N = not covered	Families of Students /Disabilities	Lifespan Perspectives on Family	Strategies for Communicating with Parents	Family Systems in Educational Contexts	Ordinary Families, Special Children, Systems Approach	Conducting Effective Conferences	Families, Professionals & Exceptionality
Teacher Education							
Meetings and Conferences	Y	Y	Y	B	B	Y	Y
Collaborative Programs	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Effective Communication	Y	Y	Y	B	Y	Y	Y
Respect for Parents	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	B	Y
Different Family Make-ups	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Family Partnerships	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	B	Y
Lifespan Coverage	Y	Y	Y	B	B	Y	B
Developmental Transitions	Y	Y	Y	B	B	Y	B
Best Practices Research	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Family Systems Approach	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Ethnicity	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Legal							
IDEA 1997	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Americans with Disabilities	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
Vocational Rehabilitation	Y	Y	Y	N	B	B	N
Ethical Issues	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	B	Y
Educational Guarantees	Y	Y	N	B	N	B	B
Parent Rights	Y	Y	B	N	B	B	B
IEP's, IFSP's	Y	Y	B	Y	B	Y	Y
Transition to adult life	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N
Family Dynamics							
Impact of Disability	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Family Development	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Family Expectations	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Advocacy	Y	Y	Y	B	Y	N	Y
Resource Availability							
Resource References	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Community Resources	N	B	B	N	N	B	Y
Textbook Information							
Chapter Summaries	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
Case Studies	Y	Y	Y	Y	B	N	Y
Extension Activities	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
Chapters / Pages	13 / 329	10 / 280	15 / 332	15 / 473	10 / 278	9 / 276	15 / 433

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field of special education makes it difficult for any text to remain current for an extended time period. Consequently, educators will always be required to search for current resources to supplement the selected course text. The authors of these texts are to be commended for their dedication and efforts in providing the field with extensive information about family/professional partnerships in special education.

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