

FOCUS SECTION

INTRODUCTION

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National educational discussions continue to focus on how to best serve the learning needs of all students including those students who meet the criteria for special education. Even though Catholic educators recognize that students with special needs have always been present within our schools, often Catholic educators are not participants in special education debates. Paradoxically, some visionaries within religious congregations provided service and education for the mentally retarded when most public and private institutions ignored their needs and minimized their value as human beings. The following series of articles moves from the theoretical roots of Catholic special education to the implementation of an undergirding rationale. The depth and breadth of the rationale for Catholic special education resonates with educators who view the inclusion model as the Catholic model.

The conversation on Catholic special education opens with an article that presents the theoretical theological underpinnings for Catholic educational services for individuals with special needs. The Catholic educational tradition offers a powerful rationale for the inclusion model within the Church's educational institutions and programs. We then describe a decision-making model for implementation within Catholic schools. Further discussion considers the importance of seminarian studies that prepare future pastors to implement parish inclusion models. Lastly, the article concludes with suggestions for an expanded role for Catholic higher education as both participant in and research of special education.

DeFiore, as former executive director of the National Catholic Educational Association, provides an insider's perspective on the special education movement within Catholic education. DeFiore traces the history of Catholic education's role in special education as an internal and external policy debate leading to programs for dissemination. DeFiore's familiarity with the topic gives a unique insight into the dilemmas Catholic education confronts.

To complete the picture, Brown and Celeste have identified 89 institutions of Catholic higher education that provide academic preparation in spe-

cial education. Their study illustrates the variation in programs, patterns of offerings, and other information such as relationships with provision sites, including Catholic schools. Recommendations are made to Catholic higher education institutions in order to improve and expand special education personnel preparation programs within Catholic educational institutions and service programs.

The Catholic University of America, as the national university of the Catholic Church, intends to provide leadership in articulating the theoretical rationale for special education, provide advocacy in the implementation of special education models in practice, particularly inclusion, and promote research that leads to future knowledge about special education within multiple settings and populations. A reflective practice model that integrates theory and practice is the hallmark of The Catholic University of America's educational programs. This focus section provides an opportunity to share a sample of the university's endeavors with Catholic special education.