

## Chapter 4

# USER BASED GOALS IN MAINSTREAMING



## USER-BASED GOALS IN PROGRAMMING FOR DESIGN

Unlike traditional facility programming, which is based on a range of factors such as processes and activities to be accommodated, cost, site considerations, etc., this guide is concerned only with user-based goals. All programming discussions are based on issues generated by mainstreaming objectives, in relations to children and their educational environments. These goals are based also in part on developmental and therapeutic needs of handicapped and regular students.

This approach to programming is a product of the philosophy that the facility has to respond primarily to its users and to accommodate their needs -- not an original idea, but one which gets lost too often in practice.

To accommodate partial or selective design intervention, especially in the case of renovation, users of this and similar guides could use the following set of goals to determine their own priorities for design goals in mainstreaming educational facilities. This can be achieved through group discussion and other techniques, reaching a consensus about the range and rank order of the goals appropriate to each specific situation.

## USER-BASED GOALS FOR MAINSTREAMING

The list of the primary user-based goals, identified as the critical issues to be intervened by physical design more responsive to mainstreaming, include:

- Fostering social interaction and cooperation
- Providing for special needs of handicapped children
- Providing variety of learning modes to support cognitive-perceptual development
- Supporting social-emotional development
- Supporting development of self-concept and confidence
- Developing spatial awareness
- Overcoming physical barriers

## FOSTERING SOCIAL INTERACTION AND COOPERATION

One of the primary aims of "mainstreaming" is to get children together, emphasizing their similarities rather than their differences. Even partial contact is preferred to isolation.

Partial interaction can be facilitated by distant and passive contact between one group of children and another, e.g. handicapped children in a resource room which overlooks a locus of activity occupied by regular students.

Even though a school might be considered "mainstreamed", with places for social interaction, the handicapped child may feel out-of-place, uncomfortable, and the subject of stigma. The physical set-up, may be a contributing factor to these negative attitudes. If the environment "says" that certain places are restricted, or different, those using it acquire similar labels. By isolating special instructional areas from the rest of the instructional areas, treating a special area differently - with hard surfaces, and bars on the windows -, the environment begins to indicate and emphasize differences. Such physical areas must be avoided if the mainstreamed setting is to be a place of interaction and understanding. Attitudes towards the handicapped may be the toughest barrier to overcome in mainstreaming. More positive attitudes should be encouraged.

## PROVIDING FOR SPECIAL NEEDS OF HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

One of the stumbling blocks in resolving negative attitudes towards mainstreaming is the "...lack of knowledge and experience most people have regarding handicapped individuals..." (Cook, Morris, 1977). Critical to the success of mainstreaming is information dissemination to "raise the consciousness of the general public regarding the existence and needs of handicapped people." (Cook, Morris 1977). "...several studies reviewed by Harth (1973) indicate that when teachers and

medical personnel learn about handicapped people and their conditions they are more willing to accept the handicapped." (Zand, 1977)

In addition to a structural informational program for adults, exercises in "putting yourself in someone else's shoes" can be very enlightening, particularly for the children. When school programs and facilities are shared, children may better understand each other's needs.

#### PROVIDING VARIETY OF LEARNING MODES TO SUPPORT COGNITIVE-PERCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT.

Within any education setting children will be developing and learning at different rates and different means will be successful. This is particularly true in the mainstreamed setting, where, for example, the blind child will approach a subject differently than the average child. It is important then, that the necessary learning situations and activities are provided for and explored with each child. The physical setting should therefore accommodate a variety of learning spaces (group sizes), and be filled with the whole range of stimuli, so that each child's mode of discovery is satisfied.

#### SUPPORTING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Social-emotional development requires opportunities for emotional release and environment which fosters emotional security.

Children develop emotionally by learning to handle and communicate their feelings. (Moore, Cohen, Oertel, Van Ryzin 1979) The exceptional child is likely to encounter emotional difficulties, particularly related to their handicap. The autistic child, for example, may experience anxieties and fears over entering a new group situation. Another child might experience frustration with tasks that are not easily accomplished. Another might need extra assurance that their environment won't change abruptly.

All these cases pose a hindrance to healthy emotional development. They should be considered when organizing the physical environment. For example, there should be places for groups to interact, with places for others to observe, safe from the confusion of the crowd. Other children, when overcome with fears, or simply exhausted from activities, need a place to retreat to and recharge. The environment should also communicate stability and continuity, and a certain amount of predictability.

#### SUPPORTING DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-CONCEPT AND CONFIDENCE

Children with developmental lags, whatever their type or case, need to develop a positive self-concept - one of the most important developmental goals for exceptional education. (Moore, Cohen, Oertel, Van Ryzin, 1979) Children also need to feel confident and comfortable manipulating their environment. That confidence will develop from successful interactions within the social and physical environment. A positive self-concept stems from a good feeling about themselves in their setting, their growth, and discoveries.

"Any supporting environment...must be designed to provide success..." (Moore, Cohen, Oertel, Van Ryzin, 1979), through grades challenges, providing alternative ways to accomplish a task, and points where successes are made clear.

#### DEVELOPING SPATIAL AWARENESS

Development of spatial awareness is particularly critical for the exceptional child who is limited in a perceptual sense or physical ability. It is important that children understand their environment, that it is easily comprehended. Understanding of where they are in space, their body position, "is developed through repeated experience of moving in space with appropriate labeling of locations and relationships." (Piaget, Inhelder, 1956). A clearer understanding is also supported by "the opportunity to (experience) things from varied perspectives." (Moore, Cohen, Oertel, Van Ryzin 1979). There should be

opportunities to experience spaces from different levels, and to experience different intensities of stimulation.

Because some "exceptional children are easily confused, it is necessary to provide an environment that clearly defines separate activity areas. Environmental cues should also be provided to assist the child in locating himself or herself in space". (Moore, Cohen, Oertel, Van Ryzin, 1979)

Children should be able to affect their environment, to make changes and experience the result. This interaction becomes a very direct learning experience, and can aid in better orientation and appreciation of their space.

#### OVERCOMING PHYSICAL BARRIERS

Naturally, for any of the above to occur adequately the environment must have provisions for the physically disabled. For social interaction to happen in the first place, the children must physically be able to get together. Anything that hinders the child's movement, or sense of orientation, can make the school an awkward, uncomfortable place.