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Marie Bauer

# *Learners with Disabilities*

A Social Systems  
Perspective of Special  
Education

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# *Learners* *with Disabilities*

A Social Systems Perspective of Special Education

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A Times Mirror Company

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 92-76203

ISBN 0-697-15370-3

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Printed in the United States of America by Wm. C. Brown Communications, Inc.,  
2460 Kerper Boulevard, Dubuque, IA 52001

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



# *Learners with Disabilities*

*A Social Systems Perspective in Special Education*

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Anne Marie Bauer

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*Free Copy*

***T***his book is dedicated to

Dolores, my best friend and wife, and  
Keith, Kevin, and Jane  
and to Riley and our children,  
Demian, Tarie, Christopher, Sarah, and Mickey

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# Preface

In 1979, Urie Bronfenbrenner posited what he described as an “unorthodox” theoretical perspective of human development. His perception challenged current theory with its concept of the developing person and the environment, and most dramatically with its description of the evolving nature of interactions between the individual and the environment. In the past decade this theoretical perspective has not been refuted as too unorthodox; rather, it has been used to provide a framework to study the impact of divorce (Kurdek, 1981), day care placement (Belsky, 1980a), child abuse (Belsky, 1980b), and family adaptation to learners with disabilities (Bauer & Shea, 1987; Shea and Bauer, 1987).

In this text, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory provides the framework for understanding the vast amount of information we have about learners with disabilities. Through the social systems perspective, learners with disabilities are suggested to be human learners first, who then vary in learning style and developmental rates, interaction styles, and ability to access the environment through communication, mobility, vision, and audition. Using this perspective, it is impossible to understand disabilities without examining the nested contexts (family, classroom, school, community, and society) in which the individual is developing. To fail to do so, to paraphrase Bronfenbrenner’s description of developmental psychology, would be to continue the “study of the strange behavior of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time.”

## Audience and Purpose

This text serves to introduce undergraduate and beginning graduate students in both general and special education to the basic concepts of human diversity and its impact on self, family, education, community, and society. As an introduction to that subsystem we refer to as “special education,” we emphasize information that will assist future professionals in their efforts to facilitate the development of those children, youth, and adults who are perceived as different from their peers. Unlike the authors of other texts, we have dared to espouse a theoretical basis for our discussions; without this theoretical framework we feel that working with individuals with special needs is a series of independent strategies and techniques rather than an integrated effort to enhance an individual’s potential through interactions and relationships with others. We reflect the current emphasis of the Carnegie Report (1986) and the Holmes Group (1986) reforms in assuring that teachers function from a theory base and knowledge of child development and instructional methodologies.

## Organization

The text begins with a discussion of the social systems contexts of learners with disabilities. Chapter 1 discusses the nature of human development from the social systems perspective and the implications of this ecological development perspective for working with learners with disabilities. The following chapters in this section address issues that impact on learners with disabilities regardless of the variations they demonstrate. Chapters are included on societal perceptions of learners with disabilities (Chapter 2), schooling and learners with disabilities (Chapter 3), and families with members with disabilities (Chapter 4). The final chapters in this section address transitions learners with disabilities make between social systems (for example, home and school, or school and work, as in Chapter 5) and family and community issues in contemporary society (Chapter 6).

The next three sections of the text discuss the variations in human development that are usually referred to as “disabilities,” “exceptionalities,” or “handicapping conditions.” Using a social systems perspective, we are able to discuss the full range of each variation, rather than just those learners who are disabled by the variation. We are able to communicate the need for all teachers to recognize and celebrate the diversity among children, youth, and adults.

In Section Two, we discuss learners who vary in their interactions, including learners from diverse cultures and ethnic groups (Chapter 7) and learners identified as behaviorally disordered (Chapter 8). Learners who vary with regard to accessing the environment are discussed in Section Three. Chapters are devoted to learners with communication disorders (Chapter 9), orthopedic disabilities and health impairments (Chapter 10), visual impairments (Chapter 11), and hearing impairments (Chapter 12).

In Section Four, we discuss learners who vary in learning style and rate. Chapters are devoted to learning disabilities (Chapter 13), mild or moderate mental retardation (Chapter 14), mild disabilities (Chapter 15), severe and multiple disabilities (Chapter 16), and learners who are gifted, creative, or talented (Chapter 17). The fifth section and final chapter of the text discusses emerging issues, trends, and directions in special education (Chapter 18).

Within each chapter, we support your learning through the use of objectives, key words and phrases, and figures mapping the information in the learners’ developmental contexts. The reader will find a glossary of terms at the end of the text.

We have chosen our language carefully to communicate our belief system regarding learners who vary from their peers. We will not say “the retarded” or “visually impaired students”; we will refer to learners *with* mental retardation or learners with visual impairments. We especially recognize those students whose variations may be based on clinical judgement or the nature of instruction and schooling: we will refer to learners “identified as behaviorally disordered” and learners “identified as learning disabled.” We will describe ways to mediate the environment to provide equal benefit for these learners, rather than techniques or strategies to make the learner match the system. We fully recognize and apologize for any awkwardness of style this may pose to readers. We hope, however, that such awkwardness results in reader recognition of the learner, rather than the variation that learner presents.

## Teaching Supplements

To help you teach your course, several teaching supplements are available. First we have an Instructor's Manual (IM) written by us and a Test Item File (TIF) written by Annie Hawkins and Michele Roszmann-Millican of the University of Cincinnati.

The Test Item File is also offered on MicroTest III, a powerful but easy-to-use test generating program by Chariot Software Group. MicroTest is available for DOS, Windows, and Macintosh personal computers. With MicroTest, you can easily select the questions from the test item file and print a test and answer key. You can customize questions, heading, and instructions; add or import questions of your own; and print your test in a choice of fonts. You can obtain a copy of MicroTest III by contacting your local Brown & Benchmark sales representative.

We also have a transparency set available to adopters of our text which includes thirty 1-color and full-color transparency acetates.

Finally, qualified adopters can choose from several excellent videotapes that are available. Contact your Brown & Benchmark sales representative for more details about the videotapes.

## Learning Supplement

In order to help your students grasp the material, a Student Study Guide is available. The Study Guide was written by Sheila Dove Jones and Ann Marie Cook, both of Bloomsburg University. Each chapter contains objectives, an outline, guided review (key terms and fill-in-the-blank questions), a self test (multiple choice, true/false, matching, and short answer questions), and critical thinking exercises. All questions are page-referenced to this text and include an answer key at the end of the study guide.

## Acknowledgments

This book is about social systems, and we must acknowledge those individuals in our personal social systems for their support in our efforts. To Dolores and Riley, a thanks for their constant support, and a thanks to our children Keith and Kevin, daughter-in-law Jane, Demian, Tarie, Christopher, Sarah, and Mickey, for their patience and understanding of time at the computer. We must recognize Paul Tavenner and the staff of Brown & Benchmark for their understanding and support, and their willingness to take a chance with an introductory text that is a deviation from the commonplace, as well as the reviewers who provided insights to our work:

Annette R. Clem-Robinson  
Seattle Pacific University

Gail M. Dummer  
Michigan State University

Valerie Owen  
National-Louis University

Jack Joseph Hourcade  
Boise State University



Sally M. Todd  
Brigham Young University

Donald Stauffer  
Slippery Rock University

Robbie Ludy  
Northwest Missouri State University

Ann Cranston-Gingras  
University of South Florida

Iva Dene McCleary  
University of Utah

Curt Dudley-Marling  
York University  
Ontario, Canada

Janet Jamieson  
University of British Columbia  
Vancouver

Ruth Violet  
Vancouver Community College

Finally, we must thank the learners who vary from their peers, and who challenge the educational system, for what they have taught us.

Thomas M. Shea  
Anne M. Bauer

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