SPECIAL EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES

Map of Latin America, divided by regions.

In Argentina, as in many other countries around the world, special education developed first for children who were deaf or blind. The first school for deaf children was started in 1857 in Buenos Aires and nearly 20 years later, in 1885, the National Institute for the Deaf was established by law. At the same time, programs for blind children were also beginning. The first books in Braille arrived in Argentina in 1884 and the first teacher for the blind was appointed in 1887. In 1901, an independent school for the blind was started. This school become the National Institute for the Blind 8 years later and in 1912, the school gained the first Braille printing press in the country.

Special education in Argentina is now provided to all people with disabilities and is specifically designed for students whose educational needs cannot be met by general education services. Schools are expected to identify the needs of students who have a disability and to provide them

with appropriate interventions. Transportation and necessary resources and materials are also to be provided and schools are to ensure that buildings are accessible to students with physical disabilities. The ultimate goal of special education services is inclusion for students with disabilities.

Chile's experience with special education followed a path similar to that in Argentina. In 1852, a special education school for deaf children was established in Santiago. This school was the first school for the deaf in Latin America. It was also the beginning of special education in Chile. The first special education school for children with intellectual disabilities in Chile was established in 1928. For the next 40 years, special schools continued to be established to address the needs of children with various disabilities. Teacher training programs also began to include elective courses in special education. However, in the mid-1960s, important educational initiatives began which created careers in special education and instituted research into the education of children with disabilities. Following this, the emphasis shifted from separate schools for people with disabilities to more integrated schooling and a greater understanding of educational special needs.

Parents around the world have brought about change as a result of their tireless advocacy for their children. In Costa Rica, the state established the first special education school in 1940 as a result, in part, of the advocacy of parents of children with disabilities. The first special education teachers had to travel to other countries to receive training in this field, with many receiving their teacher training in either the United States or Mexico. The state continued to take an interest in special education and in the 1950s physical rehabilitation centers were established in response to the polio epidemic in Costa Rica. In the 1960s, the Ministry of Public Education took over regulation of special education services. In the 1980s and 90s, there was a push for students with disabilities to be educated in more inclusive settings and many of Costa Rica's segregated programs were phased out.

Parents were also the driving force behind the initiation of special education programming in Ecuador in the 1940s. Initially, these programs focused more on medical care and recreational activities, with very few providing academic teaching to their students. The first special education schools that were established provided care for students with a variety of disabilities within the same school. However, in the larger cities, such as Quito and Guayaquil, schools were

later established to provide education specifically for students with certain disabilities. The first of these schools were for children who were blind or for children who were deaf. Next, schools were created for children with intellectual disabilities, followed by schools for those with physical disabilities. In the 1970s, the approach to special education shifted from a medical care approach to more of a rehabilitative approach. Education became more integrated and it was now envisioned that, with education, persons with disabilities could become productive members of inclusive communities.

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES: SOURCES

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